

# Brand Image and Consumer Perceived Values on Purchase Intention of Organic Food: A Conceptual Study

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## Abstract

Organic food is quickly developing in China as consumer wealth and consumption levels have grown in recent years; the Chinese government's "Healthy China Action (2019-2030)" promotes a balanced diet and works to raise the standard of agricultural output and food safety. Even though China has Asia's largest organic food market, organic food has a small market share and low consumer expenditure. As a result, decisive steps to boost the growth of China's organic food market are urgently needed. This study aims to explore the factors related to Chinese people's purchase intention of organic food using the S-O-R model. Brand image and consumer perceived values are crucial because they influence customer purchase behavior. This study emphasizes brand image, perceived functional, emotional and social values on consumer purchase intention. Epistemic value and conditional value were excluded because they have detrimental impacts on consumer choice behavior. The contribution of this study is to enrich the existing literature by providing a deeper understanding of organic food consumer purchase intention in China through the application of brand image and consumer perceived values using the S-O-R model. It also provides Chinese policymakers and organic food suppliers with solutions to increase organic food sales to expand the Chinese organic food market.

**Keywords:** Brand image, Perceived functional value, Perceived emotional value, Perceived

social value, Consumer purchase intention, Organic food, S-O-R model

## 1. Introduction

Organic food is quickly developing in China as consumer wealth and consumption levels have grown in recent years. The Chinese government's "Healthy China Action (2019-2030)" promotes a balanced diet and works to raise the standard of agricultural output and food safety. The organic food sector is still in its infancy, and the \$3.4 per capita spending suggests that organic food consumption is still a very niche market (Wei et al., 2022). Even though China has Asia's largest organic food market, organic food has a small market share and low consumer expenditure. Fewer than 1% of all food sales are organic products (Qi and Ploeger, 2021). The growth of organic food in China has undoubtedly slowed due to this small and medium-sized cities have lower organic food consumption, and organic food sales in rural regions are almost non-existent (He et al., 2019). As a result, decisive steps to boost the growth of China's organic food market are urgently needed. Hence, raising consumer awareness and altering consumer attitudes towards organic food, and increasing consumer willingness to buy organic food are all critical steps in encouraging consumers to buy organic food.

Research indicates that a positive brand image plays a crucial role in enabling items to achieve a competitive edge and influence consumers' intention to make a purchase (Tian et al., 2022). Nevertheless, the examination of organic food purchasing intentions has not been conducted thus far (Abdullah et al., 2022). Moreover, the impact of customers' judgements of brand image on the perceived values of organic food remains uncertain. Hence, it is imperative to fill this significant void in knowledge by examining the impact of brand image and perceived value on customers' intentions to purchase organic food. Brand image greatly influences customer trust perception and behavior (Kim et al., 2020). Furthermore, a favorable brand image might influence customer attitudes and decisions. Previous research has demonstrated that brand image directly impacts customers' perceived values and buying propensity (Aitken et al., 2020). According to Sheth (2020), consumer perceived value consists of three aspects: functional value - consumers' perceived utility in making choices that can lead to actual or practical outcomes; social value - with a reference group being socially perceived by the choice's acceptance; and emotional value - the positive emotional aspect of the choices consumers make are the three dimensions of perceived value. These three aspects of perceived value are used in this research to predict consumer purchase intention. Epistemic value and conditional value were excluded because they have detrimental impacts on consumer choice behavior.

The S-O-R paradigm effectively accounted for behavioral variations generated by various marketing cues and cognitive aspects. The S-O-R framework's main strength is that it is adaptable, allowing researchers to look at a wide range of internal and external stimuli, tangible and intangible stimuli, experiential and non-experiential organisms, including attitudes, emotions, perceptions, judgments, beliefs, motivations, and thinking, as well as some response factors like intentions, behaviors, and avoidance. The S-O-R model has been empirically evaluated in a range of consumer behavioral scenarios, consumer behavior in the

smartphone environment, online consumer behavior, and the travel and hospitality research environment, and more recently, in the context of organic food consumption intentions (Kumar et al., 2021). Under the framework of the S-O-R theory, this study intends to investigate the stimulation element (brand image) that raises consumers' perceived values of organic food (organism element), in which subsequently affect the purchase intention of organic food (response element).

## **2. Literature Review and Conceptual Framework**

### *2.1 S-O-R Model*

The SOR model is designed to replicate various stimuli and behaviours associated with human senses, nervous systems, and psychological processes. According to Arif et al. (2020), the application of the S-O-R theory in the examination of consumer behaviour includes classifying external influences on consumers as stimuli (S), internal processes that influence the results as organisms (O), and the resulting behaviours as responses (R). Based on the previous analysis, this study adopts the SOR theory as a theoretical framework, which has also been considered a viable framework for explaining consumer purchase intention in earlier studies. Therefore, this study supports the usefulness of the SOR model in understanding people's internal and behavioural responses to external stimuli.

### *2.2 Consumer Purchase Intention*

Intention can be defined as the promptness with which an individual acts. The notion that intentions determine behavior has been widely used in various studies on consumer behavior, such as those focused on organic food purchasing. According to Singh and Alok (2022), purchase intention is a critical component of genuine buying attitudes and a significant predictor of recent consumer purchase behavior in their study on purchasing intentions and attitudes toward organic food. Intentions encompass stimuli and cognitive planning, serving as antecedents to behavior (Canova et al., 2020). Consumers' impression of organic food can also impact their purchase intention. Purchase intention is a crucial indicator of real-life actions (Nguyen and Truong, 2021). Despite limited research on customers' real-life actions towards organic food, the consensus is that intention plays a significant role in predicting their purchasing behavior. Hence, it is anticipated that those with a greater degree of intention towards buying organic food are more inclined to purchase that food variety. Additionally, it serves as a valuable indicator of consumer buying patterns. Therefore, it is imperative to analyze the intention of purchasing organic food (Abdul Latip et al., 2021).

### *2.3 Brand Image and Perceived Functional Value*

Functional value refers to a product's characteristics that satisfy its functional, practical, or physical objectives. In organic foods, functional value refers to the utilitarian value experienced by customers when making choices that lead to actual results, including quality, availability, environmental and health advantages, and safety (Lin et al., 2020). Because organic food has credit features, customers cannot rate its food safety based on its characteristics. Hence, selecting reputable brand has become a crucial aspect of customers' purchasing organic food (Yu et al., 2021). Moreover, brand image substantially benefits

customer trust and civic behavior (Kim et al., 2020). Yu et al (2021) state that an organic food brand image significantly impacts consumer behaviour, notably perceived value, loyalty, and word-of-mouth. Based on the above study, the following proposition is presented:

P1a: Brand image positively influences perceived functional value.

#### *2.4 Brand Image and Perceived Emotional Value*

Brand image refers to consumers' emotional and rational views of a brand. Brand image is crucial in the business market, mainly when it is challenging to distinguish products or services based on tangible quality attributes. Prior research findings suggest that brand image plays a significant role as a primary factor to consumer perceived emotional value (Gómez-Rico et al., 2023). Brand image is intricately linked to people's perceptions and emotions with a particular brand. Brand image refers to the consumer perception shaped by a company's strategic actions. It comprises the perceptions and opinions that consumers hold on a specific brand. Brand image refers to the perception consumers develop based on all the activities a firm carries out about its brand. A brand image is a brand's perception formed by the associations stored in consumers' memory. While the brand's actions influence it, it ultimately leads to consumers' perceptions, associations, and beliefs about the product (Alvarado-Karste and Guzmán, 2020). Based on the above study, the following proposition is presented:

P1b: Brand image positively influences perceived emotional value.

#### *2.5 Brand Image and Perceived Social Value*

Social value is a product's perceived capacity to give purchasers a social standing inconsistent with their reference group's (Sheth, 2020). Social value in organic food was explored using the characteristics of recommendation, social approbation, reputational concern, and self-identity (Watanabe et al., 2020). According to previous research, social values in the context of organic food are also connected to customers' self-image, product brand image and utilitarian reasons (Truong et al., 2021). According to Li and Cui (2021), consumers' self-image, including self-identification and social identity, is a social value that motivates the purchase of organic food. Consumers are more likely to acquire organic food when their consumption is consistent with their self-image and that of related social groups who also purchase organic food. Based on the above study, the following proposition is presented:

P1c: Brand image positively influences perceived social value.

#### *2.6 Perceived Functional Value and Consumer Purchase Intention*

Functional value, produced by the economic and practical usefulness that customers can gain in the purchase process, is a critical factor in how consumers decide on attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors (Roh et al., 2022). Watanabe et al (2020) examined the relationship between Europeans' purchase intentions and organic food qualities, such as those connected to functional value. The findings illustrated the significance of such products' practical aspects by revealing a substantial positive association between functional value and purchase intention. Under the same area, Ballco and Gracia (2022) emphasized the significance of

health-related qualities and noted that customers' preferences for organic foods are influenced mainly by taste. In addition, Molinillo et al (2020) investigate what motivates millennials in Brazil and Spain to buy organic food. The findings imply that purchase frequency is influenced by health awareness about functional value. Based on the above study, the following proposition is presented:

P2: Perceived functional value positively influences consumer purchase intention.

### *2.7 Perceived Emotional Value and Consumer Purchase Intention*

Emotional value is the utility derived from the emotional state or feeling that a good or service creates (Rasoolimanesh et al., 2020). It is intended to meet a person's psychological or spiritual need for a good or service. The advantage that results from a good or service's capacity to arouse consumers' feelings and emotions is known as emotional value (Sheth, 2020). Organic foods satisfy both requirements. When eating organic food, customers often believe they are helping to protect the environment, which gives them emotional value (Tan et al., 2022). Organic food has little adverse environmental effects (Muhammed et al., 2019). Thus, customers are assumed to feel fulfilment and emotional value from eating organic food (Akbar et al., 2019). The emotional appeal of using organic food has an increased emotional appeal to consumers. This fosters a sense of being an environmentally conscious citizen in the minds of consumers. This result is consistent with other studies' findings (Powell et al., 2019). Based on the above study, the following proposition is presented:

P3: Perceived emotional value positively influences consumer purchase intention.

### *2.8 Perceived Social Value and Consumer Purchase Intention*

Consumers are motivated by social values in that they select a product based on the opinions of a particular social group, such as those of their friends, relatives, or coworkers. For instance, those who consume organic food consider those who purchase it to be more informed and health-conscious (Wang et al., 2023). Social value was tested across a wide range of sectors. Dangi et al (2020) investigated factors that affected Indian consumers' decisions to buy organic food, including societal norms and subjective standards that influenced the intent to purchase. Hence, societal pressure may influence consumers' buying intentions or decisions. Organic food sold in wellness centers is the best option for people who want to enjoy an active and social life (Chakraborty et al., 2022). Also, organic food and social well-being are inextricably intertwined (Kumar et al., 2021). So, the social value that consumers receive from eating organic foods is clearly shown (Tanrikulu, 2021). Based on the above study, the following proposition is presented:

P4: Perceived social value positively influences consumer purchase intention.

### *2.9 Conceptual Framework*

Figure 1 shows the proposed conceptual framework of this study.

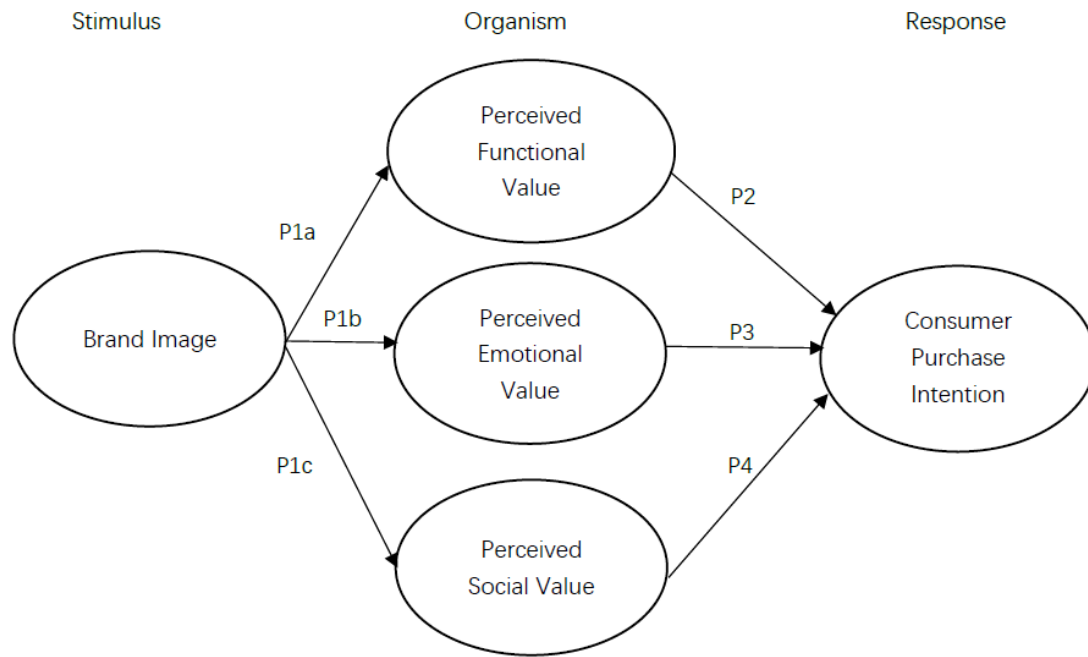


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework

### 3. Research Implications

#### 3.1 Theoretical Implications

This study combines marketing and psychology perspectives to investigate the relationship between consumer perceived value and purchase intention, highlighting the relevance of brand image in organic food purchases. This research examines the current state of organic food purchasing intention, the notion of organic food consumption, and consumer propensity to purchase organic food. As previously stated, extensive discourse has been on the determinants influencing customer purchasing intentions across many situations. Nevertheless, the current body of literature fails to address the gap between brand image, consumer perceived values and purchase intentions (Li and Jaharuddin, 2021). Considering the significant impact of brand image and consumer perceived values on purchase intention, this study aims to investigate the Chinese consumers' purchase intention of organic food using a S-O-R model approach closing the knowledge gaps.

#### 3.2 Practical Implications

The organic food industry's growth and market trends are linked to customers' genuine demands. This is because, in a demand-pull or consumption-driven market, an increase in demand will lead to an increase in supply, increasing product market share. As public consumption of organic food rises, the organic food business will continue to expand, and preserving this development will need a thorough understanding of consumer behavior. As a result, this study has chosen to research the public's organic food consumption habits to give a valuable reference for the government as it formulates and releases laws, regulations, and advice relevant to the organic food industry's development. Although China's organic food



industry is still in its early stages compared to that of other countries, it has the stamina to clarify organic food consumers' purchasing behavior, understand their purchasing preferences, comprehensively analyze customers' purchasing intentions and behaviors, increase their market share, and promote the industry's development. This study has the potential to offer empirical support for governmental policy formulation and enable market suppliers to enhance their organic food marketing strategies. Consumer values play an important role in organic food purchases. Consumer values and brand image can drive their consumption demand for organic food. Therefore, the government should promote positive brand images and enhance consumer values through education and publicity to promote organic food consumption in China.

#### **4. Conclusion**

This study aims to explore the important factors that influence the purchase of organic food by Chinese people. It is expected that this study will provide great scope for the relevant industry players to formulate strategies on how to launch products that can capture the market and attract more consumers. In addition to this, this study also makes a significant contribution to future researchers exploring consumers' preferences in purchasing organic food.

#### **5. Future Research and Recommendations**

Some limitations of this study suggest directions for further research. First, the survey data came from Sichuan, China, and the city was relatively single, which may limit the generalization of the research results in other contexts. Future research can be expanded to other cities in China or other countries, which will help deepen the understanding of organic purchasing behavior and may further improve the generalizability of the research results. Second, this study only examined one stimulus factor, and future research can consider other factors that influence consumers' attitudes and purchases of organic food, such as economic factors, health awareness, and environmental issues.

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### **Data availability statement**

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

### **Data sharing statement**

No additional data are available.

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