

Ecological awareness influence on organic products consumption behavior

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Introduction

In the last few decades, ecological sustainability, ecologically conscious and ecological attitude have become increasingly popular topics in the scientific literature (Štraupaitė, 2023; Çuhadar and Rudnak, 2022; Brochado et al., 2017; Dobson, 2010). As society faces ecological challenges and searches for solutions to the problem, environmental friendliness and ecologically conscious consumers are increasingly emphasized (Judson, 2015; Goncalves et al., 2015; MacLeod, 2021; Ferdig, 2004). Consumers are encouraged to change their attitude towards organic products and to change their purchasing behaviour (Pinto, et al., 2017). However, it is noticeable that emphasizing ecological problems and increasing the assortment of organic products does not encourage consumers to change their consumption habits and purchasing behaviour, therefore, in order to understand what motivates consumers to use organic products, researchers began to analyse the factors that determine the consumption of organic products (Onel, 2017; Chawla and Cushing, 2007). Research has shown that factors determining organic consumption shape consumer attitudes towards organic products (Bittar, 2017; Wei et al., 2018; Pata and Caglar, 2021) and the attitudes of environmentally conscious consumers influence purchase intention (Robinson, 2006; Trivedi et al., 2017; Cameron, 2022), which can directly influence purchase behaviour (Martins et al., 2017, Pata and Caglar, 2021). In order to reveal what has a greater impact on the purchasing behaviour of an ecologically conscious consumer, a study was conducted to analyse the relationships between factors that may influence the formation of consumer attitudes, purchase intention and purchasing behaviour.

Literature review

Bigoin et al. (2018) in a scientific study conducted that the attitudes and purchasing behaviour of ecologically conscious consumers are stimulated by different factors, but one of the most important factors that can determine the choice of ecological products is ecological packaging. Product packaging designers must educate consumers about their benefits and thus change consumer behaviour, in the case of green packaging (Mudacumura et al., 2006). Eco-friendly packaging encourages consumers to behave green and choose green products and creates the attitude that green-conscious consumer behaviour and green products can be common everyday goods (Goncalves et al., 2015; Naz, 2019).

Tan et al. (2016) examined the factors that can form a positive attitude of consumers towards organic products, organic consumption and purchasing behaviour. The study showed that consumers' positive attitude towards organic products is shaped by consumers' personal motivation and available ecological knowledge. According to the authors (Kennedy, 2011; Gareiou et al., 2021; Drimili et al., 2020), the consumer's motivation comes from his connection with nature, ethical norms and beliefs that his behaviour can improve the ecological problems that have arisen. Consumers' ecological knowledge is also considered to be one of the essential factors in shaping the positive attitude of ecologically conscious consumers towards organic products (Drimili et al., 2020). Paul et al. (2015) in a research study reached similar conclusions as Tan et al. (2016). According to the authors, if consumers have formed a positive attitude towards organic products, it is likely that their intention to buy and purchasing behaviour will also be positive towards organic products.

To determine the relationship between purchase intention and purchase behaviour, researchers (Paul et al., 2015; Lorenz et al., 2018) explain using Fishbein and Ajzen's (Kotchen and Reiling, 2000) theory of Planned Behaviour. According to the authors (Lorenz et al., 2018; Dadvand et al., 2015), consumers who do not act impulsively and are guided by their positive subjective notions, knowledge and attitude will behave ecologically. The theory of planned behaviour shows that an individual's attitude, subjective norms and behavioural control influence primarily not the behaviour, but the intention to be-have.

Dewberry and Jackson's (2017) research results confirmed that the Theory of Planned Behaviour shows an individual's interest and potential future behaviour influenced by an individual's positive or negative attitude toward an object, which primarily affects the purchase intention of environmentally conscious consumers. In summary, it can be stated that the analysis of scientific literature sources has highlighted the following problematic area of research: although there is a lot of research on the attitude, intention to buy and purchasing behaviour of environmentally conscious consumers, there is a lack of in depth study of the consumer attitude, how it is formed, what factors determine the formation of a positive consumer attitude, how it determines the intention to buy organic products and purchasing behaviour (Colding and Barthel, 2017; Wilson, 2018). Research results also show different determinants of the consumption of organic products. It should be noted that it does not take into account at which stage of the organic consumption or purchasing behaviour the consumer loses interest in the organic product (Commoner, 2020; Ahmed et al., 2022). Previous studies have limitations including specific product categories, cultures, limited types of users were examined, which limits the use of the results. Hence this study seeks to clearly reveal what

ecological factors, like awareness, determines the older adolescences' behaviour of purchasing organic products, by determining the attitude of environmentally conscious consumers.

Research Objectives and Hypotheses

Based on the literature review discussion as above, this research formulates the following objectives and hypotheses for empirical analysis.

1. To assess the effect of older adolescents' ecological awareness and ecological concerns in determining their consumption of organic products.
2. To determine the effect of older adolescents' personal norms in determining their consumption of organic products.

Hypothesis of the research

H1: Ecological awareness has positive association with consumption of organic products.

H2: Ecological concerns has positive association with consumption of organic products.

H3: Personal norms has positive association with consumption of organic products.

Methodology

The purpose of the study is to determine the ecological traits of older adolescents in Lithuania and its association to the intention to purchase organic/ecological products. The links between attitude towards organic products and purchase behaviour are mostly emphasized, although it is believed that there are cases where a positive attitude towards organic products can have a greater effect on intention to buy organic products than on purchase behaviour. In order to determine the effect of the attitude of ecologically conscious consumers on the intention to purchase behaviour, a quantitative research method using a survey, was chosen. The survey method was chosen as the most widely used research method, which is more structured compared to the qualitative research method and has stricter sample calculation requirements that can ensure more accurate results. Via the survey 421 older adolescents participated in the study as respondents from all over the Lithuania. The finalized data was analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 for descriptive analysis and hypotheses testing.

The result analysis showed that the first factor consists of ecological awareness measurement items and social norms. The second factor consists of ecological concerns measurement items and one item on ecological awareness. The third factor consists of personality traits, personal values and personal norms.

The data analysis show that the respondents did not distinguish between ecological awareness and social norms from the given statements, and it can be said that the social norms introduced in the Lithuanian population are equivalent to ecological awareness. Personality traits and values were equated by respondents with personal norms. Only one item of ecological awareness was identified by the respondents and was not mixed with other items, and only one item of ecological awareness was included in this group, which was identified as a variable of ecological concern. According to the MLR analysis, both Ecological Awareness and Ecological Concerns of respondents are found to be highly significant in predicting their purchase behaviour, while personal norm is not substantiated in this study as a determinant of purchase intention.

Results

An analysis of the concepts of ecologically aware consumers presented in the scientific literature suggests that the concept of eco-conscious consumers is not homogeneous and consists of several key factors influencing eco-conscious consumer behaviour (Agienko et al. 2017; Karatas, 2015). First of all, the concept of ecologically conscious adolescents consists of the consumer's ecological awareness, whereby the consumer evaluates his/her needs, behaviour and its impact on the environment when purchasing products. The concept of ecologically aware adolescents is also based on the consumer's intrinsic motivation, which explains the consumer's tendency to switch from conventional behaviour to eco-conscious purchasing behaviour. Thus, it can be argued that the concept of ecologically aware adolescents is not homogeneous but consists of the characteristics of an eco-conscious consumer, eco-awareness, intrinsic motivation and the theory of planned behaviour.

The attitudes of ecologically aware adolescents are influenced by personal factors (eco-concerns, eco-consciousness, social and personal norms, personal values, personality traits) and functional factors (influence of social groups, price of eco-products, packaging of eco-products, eco-awareness) (Mayer and Frantz, 2014). It also reveals that the attitudes of environmentally conscious consumers influence purchasing behaviour and that intention to buy influences purchasing behaviour. This empirical study shows that functional factors have a greater impact on the attitudes of environmentally conscious adolescents towards organic food products than personal factors. Based on the findings of the study, it is recommended to develop deeper understanding of what constitutes ecological awareness and ecological concerns of the society, which could stimulate the consumption of organic products.