

RESEARCH BRIEF

# Organic Food Purchase Motives of Southeast Asian Young Consumers

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In recent years, organic food has become more popular globally (Chen, 2007; Hjelmar, 2011; Nie & Zepeda, 2011; Thøgersen, 2010), thus, sales have grown significantly (Willer & Lernoud, 2017). The Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) and the International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) reported that the global sales of organic food and drink reached US\$90 billion in 2016. Although the market shares of organic foods are increasing, they still remain low (Aertsens, Mondelaers, Verbeke, Buysse, & Van Huylenbroeck, 2011). Therefore, it has become critically imperative to understand the motivations behind consumer purchases of organic foods, so that manufacturers, marketing organizers, and governments can determine the most successful marketing policies to use to increase organic consumption. Compared to Europe and America, fewer studies have focused on consumers' motives for buying organic food in Asian countries. Consumers in different countries have different motives for buying organic foods because their motives are generally based on cultural background (Craig & Douglas, 2006; De Mooij, 2010).

This research aims to investigate the perceived motives for buying organic foods of Asian consumers from three countries: Cambodia, Indonesia, and Thailand. Findings from this study can provide implications for identifying the most effective management strategies for developing organic food

consumption patterns suitable for Southeast Asian countries.

## Literature Review

FiBL and IFOAM (Research institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), 2017) reported that in 2016, organic production occupied more than 9,718 hectares, or about 0.18%, of the total agricultural land in Cambodia. These producers total 6,753 families. The total area of organic agricultural land in Indonesia was 126,014.39 hectares, which is equal to 0.22% with respect to the total area of agricultural land in Indonesia. The total area of organic agricultural land in Thailand was 57,188.57 hectares in 2016, which is equivalent to 0.21% of the total agricultural land in Thailand.

Numerous past studies have overwhelmingly shown that consumers around the world, whether in Asia (Misra & Singh, 2016; Paul & Rana, 2012; Roitner-Schobesberger, Darnhofer, Somsook & Vogl, 2008; Truong, Yap, & Ineson, 2012; Xie, Wang, Yang, Wang, & Zhang, 2015), North America (Essoussi & Zahaf, 2009), Europe (First & Brozina, 2009; Bryła, 2016; Hjelmar, 2011; Zagata, 2012), or Australia (Lea & Worsley, 2005) identify health as the most prominent motive for their organic food consumption. Many consumers believe that organic foods are richer in vitamins and nutrients than non-organic foods (Hill

& Lynchehaun, 2002; Zagata, 2012). In addition to nutrient benefits, consumers often assert that organic food products are healthier than conventional products due to their lack of chemical residues and pesticides (Hjelmar, 2011; Wier, Jensen, Andersen, & Millock, 2008; Zanolli, Gambelli, & Vairo, 2012). Past studies have demonstrated that consumers who are concerned about food safety are more willing to buy or have more positive purchase intentions toward organic foods (Hsu, Chang, & Lin, 2016; Tleis, Callieris, & Roma, 2017).

Consumers believe that organic foods are better for the environment and the animals and their welfare (Hjelmar, 2011; Padel & Foster, 2005; Roitner-Schobesberger, et al, 2008) while also supporting the local economy (Essoussi & Zahaf, 2009). These ideas are also motives for greater organic food consumption. Consumers who perceive the significance of environmental protection and animal welfare tend to be strongly involved with organic foods (Chen, 2007; Hjelmar, 2011; Teng & Lu, 2016).

Social influence is also a vital factor affecting organic purchasing choices. Past studies found that subjective norms, which Ajzen (1991) defined as the social pressure that influences a person to behave in a certain manner—here, the intent to buy or consume organic foods, have a direct and significant impact on buying intentions (Al-Swidi, Huque, Hafeez, & Shariff, 2014; Chen, 2007; Teng & Wang, 2015; Zagata, 2012).

In addition, previous studies have shown that product attributes, including appearance (Brečić, Mesić, & Cerjak, 2017; Lee & Yun, 2015), taste (Brečić et al., 2017; Bryła, 2016; Lee & Yun, 2015), freshness (Xie et al., 2015), and long shelf life (Hjelmar, 2011; Zanolli & Naspetti, 2002) are important influencers of consumer attitudes and purchase intentions regarding organic foods.

Organic products are also perceived to be rather expensive, and high prices are often identified as a barrier that restrains the purchase of organic food products (Aertsens et al., 2009; Bryła, 2016; Lim, Yong, & Suryadi, 2014; Marian, Chrysochou, Krystallis, & Thøgersen, 2014; Padel & Foster, 2005; Tleis et al., 2017; Xie et al., 2015). However, Tarkiainen and Sundqvist (2005) did not find a significant effect of price on purchase intent of organic produce among Finnish consumers, supporting the similar results of Truong et al. (2012) who found that

Vietnamese consumers were not price-sensitive toward organic foods, and Escobar-López, Espinoza-Ortega, Vizcarra-Bordi, and Thomé-Ortiz (2017) who found that price did not determine the frequency of organic food consumption.

One of the most critical factors encouraging a consumer to buy organic food is its availability/convenience—that is, whether it is sold in the places close to the residences (Dimitri & Dettman, 2012; Paul & Rana, 2012; Zakowska-Biesman, 2011). Another dimension of availability is the range of organic products (Dimitri & Dettman, 2012; Lim et al., 2014). Xie et al. (2015) found that the opportunity exists to increase the turnover from a variety of organic products because there is not a large assortment of organic foods that can cause limited visibility. Low visibility in the shop is a vital obstacle that the organic food market must overcome (Bryła, 2016). Lack of availability was found to be a strong barrier to the purchase of organic foods in India, Australia, and Poland (Chakrabarti, 2010; Lee & Worsley, 2005; Żakowska-Biemans, 2011). In addition to the motives discussed thus far, previous research has pointed out that consumers' motives for purchasing organic food include wanting to be fashionable (Bryła, 2016; Hill & Lynchehaun, 2002) and curiosity (Bryła, 2016).

The foremost obstacle to enhancing the market share of organic food products is consumer's lack of knowledge (Teng & Wang, 2015; Xie et al., 2015). Most consumers do not really comprehend the meaning of organic (Hughner, McDonagh, Prothero, Shultz, & Stanton, 2007). In the organic food market, trust in organic foods, its farming practices, and vendors, as well as organized certification have a crucial influence on consumers' attitudes and subsequent behaviors (Teng & Wang, 2015). Previous research (Husic-Mehmedovic, Arslanagic-Kalajdzic, Kadic-Maglajlic, & Vajnberger et al., 2017) revealed that a certified organic label of a brand is an evaluation attribute for organic food. Labeling facilitates consumers with limited organic knowledge to attain official and reliable information about the organic food market (Teng & Wang, 2015).

## Methods

The target population is comprised of young Cambodians, Indonesians, and Thais. The sample includes 340 students from universities in Phnom

Penh, Cambodia, 340 students from universities in Bangkok, Thailand, and 340 students from universities in Jakarta, Indonesia.

Questionnaires used in Cambodia and Indonesia were translated from the Thai language into Cambodian and Indonesian by a professional language translator. To ensure that the Cambodian, Indonesian, and Thai questionnaires had the same meanings, both Cambodian and Indonesian language questionnaires were translated back into Thai by another bilingual translator.

To measure the Asian consumer's level of perceived motive for purchasing organic foods, self-administered questionnaire was developed from the literature review were used. The questionnaire consisted of three segments. The first section asked questions related to the socio-demographic characteristics of the participants. The second part included 27 statements related to perceived motives for buying organic foods (Cerjak, Mesiu, Kopyu, Kovajiu, & Markovina, 2010; Truong et al., 2012; Xie et al., 2015). The third part consists of three statements used to determine the level of purchase intention (Teng & Wang, 2015; Yazdanpanah & Forouzani, 2015). Respondents were asked to specify the level of agreement for all statements, which was measured using a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 = certainly disagree and 5 = certainly agree.

This research used descriptive statistics to analyze the profile of the participants. One-way ANOVA tests were utilized to determine whether significant differences in perceived organic purchase motives exist across gender, nationality, and level of purchase intention. To further identify significant differences, least significant difference (LSD) post-hoc comparisons were performed.

## Results

Table 1 shows that 61.1% of the total respondents were female. Cross-tabulations were performed to provide socio-demographic profiles of the three Asian nation consumer groups. Statistically significant differences among the groups were found in gender ( $\chi^2 = 17.55$ ,  $p < 0.00$ )

### Underlying Dimensions of Organic Food Purchase Motives of Young Asian Consumers

A principal component analysis (PCA) using varimax rotation was performed to pinpoint the core dimensions of the Asian consumers' purchase motives for buying organic foods. The factorability assumption was also investigated. Barlett's test of sphericity revealed that the correlation matrix was generally significant ( $\chi^2 = 12788.43$ ,  $p = .000$ ). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin matrix was .919, which is higher than the acceptable value of .60 (Hair, Black, Tatham, & Anderson, 2010). To avoid cross-loadings, only the factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 were included. The results of the PCA converged after six iterations, retaining 25 of the 27 variables. The reliability of each variable was investigated utilizing Cronbach's coefficient alpha, thereby approximating the internal consistency of the subscales (Field, 2013).

Table 2 shows that the factor analyses led to a 6-factor solution that explained 65.60% of the total variance. Each factor was then identified as follows: (1) environment, (2) trust and organic knowledge, (3) social influence, (4) quality of organic foods, (5) health, and (6) affordability. The reliability of the six organic purchase motives ranged from .784 to .848, a satisfactory outcome (Field, 2013). Of the

**Table 1**

*Demographic Characteristics of Respondents*

Variable	Cambodia (N =340)		Indonesia		Thailand		Total	
	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%	Frequency	%
Sex								
Male	163	47.9	115	33.8	119	35.0	397	38.9
Female	177	52.1	225	66.2	221	65.0	623	61.1

**Table 2***PCA of Asian Consumers' Purchase Motives Related to Organic Foods*

Motive Categories	Factor Loadings	Eigenvalue	Explained Variance (%)	Mean Value ( $\bar{X}$ )	Cronbach's Alpha
1. <i>Environment</i>		9.14	36.58 %	<b>3.11</b>	.844
Organic foods have no pesticide residue.	.557			2.77	
Organic foods are environmentally friendly.	.688			3.19	
Organic foods can contribute to improving animal welfare.	.704			3.14	
Organic foods help support small farms.	.791			2.67	
Organic foods are better for society.	.725			3.19	
2. <i>Trust and Organic Knowledge</i>		2.14	8.57%	<b>2.71</b>	.813
I know organic food labels better.	.703			2.86	
I can trust it is really organic.	.643			2.81	
I receive more advertisements about organic foods.	.817			2.93	
Food stores or supermarkets provide more information about organic foods.	.720			2.51	
I am curious about organic foods.	.563			2.42	
3. <i>Social Influence</i>		1.58	6.3%	2.97	.846
My family thinks I should eat organic foods.	.634			3.05	
People important to me think I should eat organic foods.	.740			3.16	
I see my friends/cousins eating organic foods.	.786			3.06	
People I know eat organic foods.	.694			2.59	
4. <i>Health</i>		1.29	5.14%	<b>3.51</b>	.848
Organic foods are better for my family's health.	.859			3.87	
Organic foods are better for my health.	.850			3.85	
Organic foods have lots of minerals.	.715			3.01	
5. <i>Quality of Organic Food</i>		1.17	4.69%	2.68	.784
Organic foods taste good.	.617			2.55	
Organic foods have a long shelf life.	.784			2.61	
Organic foods look pleasing.	.795			2.80	
Organic foods offer a variety of selections.	.624			2.77	
6. <i>Affordability</i>		1.04	4.15%	<b>2.82</b>	.789
Organic foods are inexpensive.	.641			2.69	
Organic foods are worth the money.	.667			2.82	
Organic foods can be bought in food shops.	.733			2.81	
Organic foods can be bought near my home or workplace.	.702			2.96	
Total			65.60 %		

six perceived organic purchase motives, health and environment emerged as the two most significant motivators, as shown by the mean scores of 3.51 and 3.11, respectively. In particular, “organic foods are better for my family” ( $\bar{X} = 3.87$ ) was the most important perceived organic purchase motive item, followed by “organic foods are better for my health” ( $\bar{X} = 3.85$ ), “organic foods are environmentally friendly” ( $\bar{X} = 3.19$ ), and “organic foods are better for society” ( $\bar{X} = 3.19$ ), respectively.

Results in Table 3 show that different gender groups were not found to vary significantly on any perceived motives toward purchasing organic foods. With regard to nationality, the results showed that consumers with different nationalities rate organic food purchase motives differently in environmental motive, trust and organic knowledge motive, social influence motive, health motive, and quality of organic food motive. Further analysis using LSD revealed that Indonesian consumers perceived environmental motive, trust and organic knowledge motive, and social influence

motive as lower motivations than Cambodian and Thai consumers. Both Cambodian and Indonesian consumers perceived health motive as more important than Thai consumers.

According to purchase intention in this study, respondents were classified into three groups. The first group has an average mean purchase intention score of  $\geq 4.0$ , the second group has a mean purchase intention score of  $>2 < 4$ , and the third group has an average mean purchase intention scores of  $\leq 2$ . The results showed that respondents who have purchase intention score  $> 4$  were more concerned with all six organic purchase motives than the other two groups. When going from the highest purchase intention group to the lowest purchase intention group, the higher the purchase intention score, the more motivated they are by these factors. The low purchase intention group disagreed more with different motivation factors, indicating that they were less motivated by these factors to buy organic foods (Table 3).

**Table 3**

*Mean differences in Asian Consumers' Purchase Motives Related to Organic Foods*

Variables	Environment	Trust & Organic knowledge	Social Influence	Health	Quality of Organic Food	Affordability
Gender	F = .99	F = .71	F = .66	F = .31	F = .033*	
Male (N=397)	3.11	2.71	2.95	3.49	2.62	2.81
female (N=623)	3.11	2.70	2.98	3.51	2.69	2.82
Nation	F = 4.05*	F = 19.56**	F = 5.42**	F = 5.29**	F = 4.29*	F = 1.00
Cambodia (N=340)	3.14 <sup>ab</sup>	2.78 <sup>ab</sup>	2.99 <sup>ab</sup>	3.54 <sup>ac</sup>	2.61	2.85
Indonesia (N=340)	3.04 <sup>abc</sup>	2.56 <sup>abc</sup>	2.88 <sup>abc</sup>	3.56 <sup>bc</sup>	2.69	2.80
Thailand (N=340)	3.15 <sup>bc</sup>	2.78 <sup>bc</sup>	3.03 <sup>bc</sup>	3.42 <sup>abc</sup>	2.74 <sup>ac</sup>	2.81
Intention to buy organic foods	F = 55.68*	F = 81.55**	F = 92.86**	F = 44.15**	F = 52.40**	F = 43.77**
high (N=259)	3.37 <sup>def</sup>	2.99 <sup>def</sup>	3.32 <sup>def</sup>	3.76 <sup>def</sup>	2.94 <sup>def</sup>	3.06 <sup>def</sup>
middle (N=554)	3.07 <sup>def</sup>	2.69 <sup>def</sup>	2.94 <sup>def</sup>	3.47 <sup>def</sup>	2.65 <sup>def</sup>	2.79 <sup>def</sup>
low (N=207)	2.90 <sup>def</sup>	2.40 <sup>def</sup>	2.60 <sup>def</sup>	3.28 <sup>def</sup>	2.44 <sup>def</sup>	2.60 <sup>def</sup>

\* significant at 5% , \*\* significant at 1%

Least significant test: Mean value in the same column followed by the same superscript were significantly different at  $p < .05$ .

## Discussion

Results demonstrate that there are a number of perceived motives which lead young Southeast Asian consumers to buy organic foods: health, environment, social influence, affordability, trust and organic knowledge, and quality of organic foods.

The results of the study revealed that consumers' perceived health and environmental factors are the top two important motivations for purchasing organic foods. This finding is in line with previous studies indicating that health is among the most influential reasons for purchasing organic foods (e.g., Aschemann-Witzel, Maroscheck, & Hamm, 2013; Bryła, 2016; Chakrabarti, 2010; Roitner-Schobesberger, et al, 2008; Xie et al., 2015). The finding that consumers choose organic foods because they are better for their families' health also concurs with previous research (Grubor & Djokic, 2016) that found that consumers with sick family members buy organic foods because they think that a good diet can prevent disease. Therefore, highlighting these nutritional aspects to consumers offers them health reassurance (Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2013).

This finding is in line with the view of Mexican consumers who ranked the environment first in importance (Escobar-Lopez et al., 2017). The results also confirmed the notion that consumers consider animal welfare (Hjelmar, 2011) and support for local farmers (Essoussi & Zahaf, 2009) as important motives for organic consumption.

In terms of the social influence factor, Asian customers perceived it as an important factor that does encourage their organic purchase decisions. These results agree with the views of Taiwanese, Pakistan, Australian, and Czech individuals in that social influence factor will influence organic purchase intention (Alswidi et al., 2014; Smith & Paladino, 2010; Teng & Wang, 2015; Zagata, 2012). This finding supports the study by Chang and Chang (2017) who found that when consuming organic foods, consumers in emerging markets do rely on or accept information from family members/close friends; thus, sellers should comprehend the highly crucial role of word-of-mouth

effects and interpersonal powers on organic food consumption.

All respondents from the three nations perceived that affordability was an important motive for purchasing organic foods. This concurs with previous studies' (Thøgersen & Ölander, 2006; Briz & Ward, 2009; Van Loo et al., 2010) findings that high price is an obstacle that inhibits the buying of organic food products. This finding is also consistent with Paul and Rana (2012), who mentioned that product availability positively influences the consumers' attitude towards buying organic food in India.

All Southeast Asian consumers also considered trust and organic knowledge factors to be significant determinants of organic food choice. This finding is consistent with past research, which suggested that increasing organic knowledge is crucial for enhancing organic food consumption (Diaz, Pleite, Paz, & Garcia, 2012; Magistris & Gracia, 2008). Therefore, there is a need to create awareness and improve advertising related to organic products (Chakrabarti, 2010; Xie et al., 2015).

In terms of the quality of organic foods, respondents from the three countries perceived that this factor did influence their purchase decisions. Therefore, reinforcing potential consumers' acknowledgment of organic attributes, such as taste, is important. Providers should allow consumers to experience direct consumption for the most accurate evaluations and to reduce buyers' risk (Lee & Hwang, 2016). In addition, the finding supports the need to increase the varieties of organic products being sold (Buder, Feldmann, & Hamm, 2014; Xie et al., 2015).

## Implications

The findings found that factors of health, environment, social influence, affordability, trust and organic knowledge, and quality of organic foods lead to the purchase decision for the respondents from the three countries. Therefore, the governments, organic food manufacturers, and distributors should provide relevant knowledge to increase the public's acceptance of organic foods by emphasizing the health benefits due to no pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and so forth. The relevant information that should be provided to the public should include the meaning of "organic," organic production methods, organic nutrients, organic labels, and organic certifications.

Given the strong power of social influence, a word-of-mouth (WOM) strategy should be used. Marketers and policymakers should set up workshops or events at schools and community venues with free tasting samples, run competitions to provide organic knowledge to students, and so forth. Students or young adults can disseminate this knowledge to their families.

In addition, marketers should identify, target, and convince opinion leaders as part of the marketing campaign. For example, well-known health experts, movie stars, models, and other celebrities can represent qualified opinion leaders if they state that organic food is good for them and they look healthy; this will influence many people.

Along with mass media like television and radio, advertising may be conducted through posters, brochures, and magazines. Also, interactive discussions about organic foods on social media would have a real-time impact that provides information and alleviates doubts and concerns about consuming organic foods, as mentioned by Sondhi (2014). Additional possibilities for communicating the value of organic food are point-of-purchase displays and organic farm tours.

Furthermore, organic retailers should provide a greater variety of organic products to make them more visible and better match consumers' demand. Organic retailers should promote other qualities of organic foods as well, such as taste, appearance, and freshness. They can do so by providing free samples to reduce consumers' perceived risk when deciding to buy these foods.

Additionally, government and policymakers should strengthen supervision of production and certification of organic foods to increase consumer trust.

Due to time, financial, and logistical constraints, the sample in this study was restricted to the capital cities in Cambodia, Jakarta, and Bangkok. It focused only on university students as young consumers. This practice may not reflect the general consumer population. Therefore, future research should focus on other demographic profiles to better discriminate between different consumer groups and determine which segments are most appropriate for focused organic product marketing.

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## Declaration of ownership

This report is my original work.

## Conflict of interest

None.

## Ethical clearance

The study was approved by the institution.

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