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Consumer Buying Behaviour towards Organic Food – A Case of UAE

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to understand UAE consumer behavior towards organic food. Six determinants were chosen to investigate the factors that were identified as potential influencers. These determinants were identified from the current research published on organic food buying behavior patterns. The chosen independent determinants are identified as: health and lifestyle, environmental concern, safety and trust, convenience and price, subjective norms and attitude. Purchase intention was identified as a dependent variable to test. Six hypotheses were formed based on determinants to test their influences on purchase intention. A random sampling of 423 participants was used in collecting the data. Multiple regression analysis tests were used to understand the significant influence of these six variables. The result of the analysis indicated that all six variables have a positive contribution towards consumer purchase intention of organic food. The implications for stakeholders and policy makers point to a need to upgrade the accessibility of organic food to a wider population such that the supply chain for organic foods and organic products extends beyond the big supermarkets to the smaller grocery stores and corner shops.

Keywords: Organic food; Consumer buying behaviour; purchase Intention; Attitud

Introduction

The growth of the popularity of organic food is increasing exponentially around the globe. Consumers are increasingly turning towards organic food or naturally grown food and moving away from food that has been produced using intensive, chemical-laden farming methods. This growth, which initially gained momentum in western countries, has slowly started to attract attention in every corner of the world. Today the organic food market is one of the biggest markets and is estimated to be \$52.5 billion (Gelski, 2019). This growing demand for organic, cleaner food and the huge interest in climate change and environmental issues has triggered academics, business leaders, policymakers and other stakeholders to seek out the factors driving customer interest in organic food. Extant studies over the past four decades

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have shown various factors that influence the consumer choice towards organic food (Basha & Lal, 2019; Maruyama & Trung, 2007; Ajzen, 1991; Arndt, 1986). The majority of the existing research has agreed that the significant factors positively affecting organic food growth are health and lifestyle, environmental concern, safety and trust, subjective norms, and attitude (Clement *et al.*, 2017; Eden, 2011; Schuitema & De Groot, 2014; Basha et al., 2015; Basha, M, B., 2015; Basha et al, 2020; Willer & Yussefi, 2004).

It is important to note that these aforementioned studies mostly focus on the western market or East Asian countries so they do not necessarily present a universal picture. A notable omission exists in data from the Arabian Gulf region, specifically the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The UAE is one of the wealthiest and fastest-growing economies with an average household income of AED 18,246 (Arabianbusiness.com, 2018). The consumer has a high buying power compared with the rest of the GCC and many western and developed countries. Consumers in the UAE generally enjoy a high standard of living with increasingly health-conscious diets and a subsequent demand for natural products (Ligaya, 2009). The market size of the organic food and beverages sector in the UAE in 2017 was US\$38.1million, making it the 34th largest market in the world by value (Global Organic, n.d.). The market for organic food is experiencing strong growth in sales and is expected to grow at an 11.6% CAGR from 2017–2022 (Global Organic, n.d.). Furthermore, greater numbers of consumers are showing an increasing interest in organic food, and are purchasing organic food at least once a month, according to a report commissioned by Arla Foods, the world's largest producer and supplier of organic dairy products (the PRO CHEF, 2020).

All the big UAE supermarkets such as Carrefour, Lulu, Spinneys, Co-operative and Abela now have dedicated aisles for organic food products to meet the growing demand for organic food in this region. In fact, organic foods have become some of the most sought after products in supermarkets (Geranpayeh, Zaatari & Mubarak, 2015). Research in this area, therefore, has thus far lagged behind developments. This study will redress that short fall. It aims to support the stakeholders in understanding this very dynamic shift in consumer behavior focusing specifically on the motivation, perception, and attitude of the customers towards organic food consumption in the UAE.

The paper has the following sections: Introduction; Literature review and hypothesis; Theoretical framework; Research methodology; Analysis and findings; Conclusion; Managerial implications; Limitations of the study.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Health and lifestyle

The genetically modified food processing techniques used today have arguably lessened food shortages in the world, but at what cost to our health? In contrast, organic food products have long been associated with a healthy lifestyle (Ibitoye, Nawi, Man & Kamarulzaman, 2014). 21st century living, with its increasing levels of stress, work demands and busy schedules leaves consumers with little time for physical activities and so they seek organic food as one option to help them maintain a healthy lifestyle. As a result, consumer purchase patterns are changing towards organic food and there are a number of studies that support the hypothesis that health and lifestyle is one of the determinant motives (Bosona & Gebresenbet, 2018; Maruyama & Trung, 2007; Ajzen, 1991; Arndt, 1986). Bosona and Gebresenbet (2018) identify that the



main motivator for consuming organic food in Sweden, for example, is for health reasons. These findings are further supported by [Hyun-Joo Lee](#) (2016). In his U.S.-based study, he found that consumer health-consciousness was a significant factor influencing the purchase of organic food. In fact, there are a wealth of studies that identify health and lifestyle as the prime motivators for the purchase of organic food across Europe and the rest of the world. In contrast, a study by Basha et al. (2015), looking at the market in India, revealed that consumer buying towards organic food is not significantly influenced by health and lifestyle.

As currently very little is known about the dynamic and diverse market in the UAE, this study will investigate UAE consumer perceptions and motivations regarding the purchase of organic food. The following hypothesis has been developed to test the consumer buying pattern in the UAE.

H1: Health and lifestyle concern does not affect the purchase intention towards organic food.

Environmental concern

Global climate change and environmental depletion concerns are spear-heading conferences and summit meetings involving political leaders, policymakers, environmentalists and academics. World leaders are urging all countries to be more responsible for reducing pollution and taking care of their environment. The agreed key major environmental concerns involve the gas and oil sector, industrial pollution, automobile pollution, plastic consumption, and pesticides. The ecological depletion has arguably brought about many man-made disasters such as Tsunamis, water scarcity, unusual weather systems and a rise in temperature, globally (Diaz, 2006).

Consumers today are well-informed and, as such, are generally motivated to make a positive contribution towards the environment. As a result, they are progressively turning towards greater organic food consumption as one way of addressing the issue (Escobar-Lopez *et al.*, 2017; Ibitoye *et al.*, 2014). Experts believe organic food consumption helps to improve flora and fauna and has a positive impact on the environment (Dunlap & Rutherford, 1973). Escobar-Lopez *et al.* (2017) conducted a study in Mexico, and the research focused on the factors that influence local consumers towards organic food. The findings support the notion that consumers who have a positive attitude towards the environment are more willing to purchase organic food. These results were replicated by Ibitoye *et al.* (2014). He studied the behavior of consumers in Malaysia and concluded that consumer preferences towards organic food are based on environmental, safety, and health-related factors. Since the UAE is increasingly focusing on alternative energy, including solar, wind and nuclear power to lead the way in environmental sustainability and move away from the use of fossil fuels, the same shift in consumer behavior towards organic products might be observable (Kalehsar, 2019). Based on the extant research discussed, the following hypothesis was developed.

H2: Environmental concern does not affect the purchase intention towards organic food.

Safety and Trust

Safety is one of the concerns for all the food buyers as food-related manipulation has increased recently. Furthermore, there has been an increasing incidence of food-related health scares across the globe, especially regarding highly processed foods (Rapaport, 2019). Another alarming case involved the presence of poisonous additives from pesticides in food oil causing the deaths of children in Bihar, India (New York Times, 2019). Due to this insecurity and lack of confidence in current food production methods, consumers are increasingly moving towards organic food, which is regarded as being more tightly controlled and transparent (De Oliveira *et al.*, 2014; Sakthirama & Venkatram 2013). The perception is that organic food production goes through strict quality checks and transparent procedures, which is governed by the policymakers, government, and governing bodies. There are a number of governing bodies responsible for checking organic food production such as The National **Organic** Program (NOP) responsible for the issuance of a conformity certificate for organic products, UAE, and USDA, locally and internationally. The regress checking and monitoring reassures the consumers that the product is safe for consumption and in turn it is hoped that they are willing to pay a higher price for safety and trust.

Organic food producers must go through a series of checks and procedures to get organic certification. These checks ensure the products are free from any pesticides and harmful toxins that may be present in the production process. As a result, consumers are able to trust in the efficacy of organic food. Tleis *et al.*'s study (2017), based in Beirut, showed that the consumer is moving from conventional food to organic food as a direct result of food safety concerns. The determinant of safety and trust as an essential motivator is further supported by the findings of Nagy-Pércsi and Fogarassy (2019) in their Hungarian study. The findings reveal that safety is the primary factor through which health and a healthy lifestyle can be achieved. The many extant studies have supported the hypothesis that a move towards organic consumption is due to a concern about safety and trust. Thus, the following hypothesis was developed.

H3: Safety and trust concerns do not affect the purchase intention towards organic food.

Subjective norms

Subjective norms have a critical influencing factor in almost all buying patterns. Humans are always influenced by others. Subjective norms play an important role in purchasing a product or services because it identifies the group members. Subjective norms are particularly important in a country where there was a high social interaction. People tended to follow a specific reference group leader, who influenced the group towards certain behaviors' and actions. Almost, all the organization uses an influencer or reference group to motivate the consumer towards the product and services. Consumers are either directly or indirectly influenced by friends, peers, reference groups, or leaders. Consumers often buy a product to associate with a specific group or to follow the pattern of the reference group and group leader. There have been many studies that have supported the subjective norms that play a significant role in organic food purchasing behavior (Saleki & Saleki, 2012; Kumar, 2012).



Consumers are either influenced by their health-conscious friend or peer who motivates the individuals to consume organic food for its health benefits. According to Essoussi and Zahaf (2009), subjective norms, health and environmental consciousness has proved to be one of the crucial determinants leading consumers towards organic food consumption in Canada. These findings are further supported by Dowd and Burke (2013) in their study in Australia, where consumers are highly motivated towards organic food due to pressure from the subjective norms. Bai's 2019 study, based in China, also supports this claim. Based on the extant research, the following hypothesis was developed.

H4: Subjective norms do not affect the purchase intention towards organic food.

Convenience and price:

Convenience and price are both factors that could hinder consumers accessing the product and services. Consumers are generally very price-aware and so lower priced alternatives have a great pull factor. Similarly, with the popularity of online food orders and increasing use of e-purchase, consumers are looking for ever more convenient ways to avail of product and services. The extant research has shown that convenience and price are major factors that are impacting consumer purchase intention towards organic food (Chakrabarti, 2010; Nielsen, 2006; Hill & Lyncheaun, 2002). Chakrabarti (2010), in his study in India found that consumers are reluctant to purchase organic food due to the price factor and poor accessibility. In contrast, Bharathi *et al.* (2014) investigated the **buying behavior** of urban residents towards organically produced food products in Bangaluru city, India. A total of 200 consumers were surveyed and data was collected using a questionnaire. The results revealed that consumers were well informed about organic food products and the relative easy availability resulted in a positive attitude towards organic food products. Buder *et al.* (2014), looked in to the reasons why otherwise regular buyers of organic food bought non-organic food products. A total of 817 regular consumers of organic food products were interviewed and their responses indicated that the barriers were found to be price, insufficient availability, and quality of the product. In continuance of the existing studies, supporting the notion of price and convenience as significant variables that support/hinder organic food consumption, the following hypothesis was developed.

H5: Price and convenience do not affect the purchase intention towards organic food.

Attitude

Many studies have been carried out to study the attitudes and beliefs about organic food products. They support the argument that consumer buying intention is based on attitude and belief. Research has identified attitude as an important motivation factor influencing purchase intention generally. Positive attitude leads to positive perception and hence it motivates the consumer towards the purchase intention of a product or service. Attitude can be developed based on internal and external stimulations the consumer has observed or experienced. (Muhammad et al. 2019; Voon et al. 2011; Tsarkiridou et al., 2008; Lea & Worsley, (2005). Voon et al's 2011 study investigated the attitude, personal standards and control that influence behavioral intention or desire to pay a higher price for organic food. The results indicate the need for efforts to focus on influencing buyer attitude in order to promote consumption

growth. These findings are further supported by Chakrabarti (2010) and Saleki & Saleki (2012). Based on the extant studies mentioned, the following hypothesis was developed.

H6: Attitude has no impact on organic food purchase.

Methodology

Sampling Procedure and Data Collection

The primary aim of this research is to understand UAE consumer buying behaviour towards organic food and investigate the specific factors affecting purchase intention such as health and lifestyle, environmental concern, safety and security, social norms and convenience and price and attitude. The data collection was carried out in Dubai, Abu Dhabi, and Sharjah. These are the main cities of United Arab Emirates where most of the population resides. Furthermore, the income of these emirates population are relatively higher compare to other emirates. To identify the buying behaviour, the total number of participants was 423. The study used a questionnaire survey that was distributed to participants who were identified as being involved in the purchase of household products and expressed having had some experience of buying or consuming organic food. All participants were asked what they knew about organic food. A complete set of questionnaires was only given to participants who answered these preliminary questions.

Data Collection and measurement instruments.

Data was collected by means of a self-administrated questionnaire. The questionnaire was established for the proposed study and tested by (CFA) confirmatory factor analysis for validity of the test. Following the first section of the questionnaire reserved for the collection of demographic data, the next two sections utilised a Likert scale method (1=strongly agree to 5=strongly disagree) to measure the respondent's attitude towards the six identified factors.

Data Analysis and Findings

The total number of respondents to whom the questionnaire was initially distributed was 550, of which only 490 finally submitted the data set. 47 of the respondents provided incomplete data and so these data sets were removed. A further 20 data sets were removed due to the respondents submitting responses of 'all agree' or 'all disagree'. Therefore, the final data set count of eligible questionnaires was 423.

The table below shows the demographic details of the participating respondents in Abu Dhabi, Dubai, and Sharjah. The demographic variables were divided into gender, education, location, marital status, and age. As seen in the table, male respondents represented 70.2% of the total, female respondents at 29.8%. The educational background of the respondents was varied: 42.5% of respondents were Bachelor degree holders, with 34% holding post-graduate qualifications. Those with professional or technical qualifications made up 14.9% of the total and lastly, 8.98% were secondary school certificate holders. With regards the geographical breakdown, 45% of respondents were from Dubai, 35% from Abu Dhabi, and finally, Sharjah accounted for 20% of the respondents. The largest age group in the cohort were aged 30-39 (42.6%), followed by the 20-29 age group (36.2%). Those less than 20 and those aged 40-49 each made up 10.6% of the total respondent group. There were none in the over 50 age group. See the table 1 below.



Table 1. Demographic:

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Female	126	29.8%
Male	297	70.2%
Education		
Secondary / High School	38	8.98%
Bachelors Degree	180	42.5%
Postgraduate Degree	144	34.0%
Professional / Technical	61	14.42
Location		
Dubai	190	45%
Abu Dhabi	148	35%
Sharjah	85	20%
Marital status		
Single	252	59.6%
Married	171	40.4%
Age		
Less than 20	45	10.6%
20 to 29	153	36.2%
30 to 39	180	42.6%
40 to 49	45	10.6%
50 to 59	0	.0%

Source: Author generated from the data

Reliability test:

Cronbach's alpha is a measurement of the internal consistency of the questionnaire (Cronbach, 1951). The Cronbach alpha helps to measure the set of questionnaires that is consistent within the given collection of data. The value of each set of data for acceptance must be .7 (Nunnally, 1978). The test helps the author to know how close the questionnaire fits the study. Any data sets less than .7 are not compatible and therefore removed. Cronbach's alpha is the initial test used to identify the reliability of the data for internal consistency. As can be seen in the table below, the selected questionnaire fulfils the purpose of the study and the dataset can be further tested for its validity using factor analysis and regression analysis for its interdependency.

Table 2. Reliability Analysis

Variable	No. of Items	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient
HCLS	5	0.757
EC	5	.0775
ST	5	0.853
CP	5	0.788
SN	5	0.896
ATT	5	0.719
Purchase Intention	5	0.759

Source: Author generated from the data

Factor analysis test

A factor analysis set was carried out to ascertain the validity of the data set. A factor analysis test used to check the questionnaire overlap into the other determinants and to help to reduce a large number of data set into few factors. All the thirty questionnaires were tested to validate the data set using data reduction, data summarization using the multivariate factor analysis statistical procedure (Tobias and Carlson (1969). According to Kaiser (1974), the minimum set of values for each data was considered to be 0.5 for validating and checking the overlap of the data set. The findings of the analysis show that all the data sets were 0.761, which is well above the 0.5 cut off as per Kaiser (1947). Therefore, the results indicate that the intent data set was valid, and the test suggestion shows the testing instrument designed for the study was indeed valid for the intended research. After this, the data set was further tested using Pearson correlation, and regression analysis to check the reliability, the interdependency of the variables, and the impact of the determinant on the purchase intention. Factors analysis results are shown below in table 3.

Table 3. Factor Analysis

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.761
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	7041.559
	df	435
	Sig.	.000

Author generated the analysis from the collected data

Pearson co-relation

After analyzing the reliability and validity of the data set, Pearson co-relation test analysis was carried out in order to understand the interdependency and association between the determinants. The Pearson correlation analysis helps in findings the interdependency between the two variables and correlation between the determinants (Pallant, 2001). Almost all the determinants show a high correlation with the independent variable of purchase intention, as they are .01 and above level. Therefore, the majority of the determinants are closely associated and highly co-related within each factor of the independent and dependent variable. Remarkably, the determinant correlation between all the variables: Health and Lifestyle (HLS) and convenience and price (CP); Safety and trust (ST) and convenience and price (CP); Health and Lifestyle (HLS) and subjective norms (SN); Safety and trust (ST) and subjective norms (SN) show a positive relationship. However, some variables interdependency shows a negative relationship such as Health and Lifestyle (HLS) and convenience and price (CP), Safety and trust (SF) and convenience and price (CP), Safety and trust (SF) and Subjective norms (SN). See table 4 below. The data set will further analyse using the multiple regression to check the impact of each determinant on purchase intention.



Table 4. Pearson correlation analysis

Correlations								
		HCLS	EC	ST	CP	SN	ATT	PI
HCLS	Pearson Correlation	1						
	Sig. (2-tailed)							
EC	Pearson Correlation	.525**	1					
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000						
ST	Pearson Correlation	.439**	.472**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000					
CP	Pearson Correlation	-.130**	-.068	-.123**	1			
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.050	.000				
SN	Pearson Correlation	-.103**	-.033	-.162**	.244**	1		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.003	.337	.000	.000			
ATT	Pearson Correlation	.325**	.193**	.163**	.088*	.070*	1	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.010	.042		
PI	Pearson Correlation	.442**	.456**	.342**	.171**	.165**	.411**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	.000	
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).								
*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).								

Source: Author generated the findings from the data set.

Multi Regression and ANOVA Analysis

Multiple regression analysis was used to check the dependency of one variable on another. Multi regression analysis is the sophisticated correlation test that helps to predict which variable has a high and low impact on the dependent variable of purchase intention. This test is the extension of the Pearson correlation and helps to predict the independent variable and its impact on the dependent variable (Pallant, 2001). The analysis is commonly used to test the hypotheses. Therefore, this test was adopted to assess the impact of the variables on the dependent variables. The rest of the test outlined below in table 5

Table 5. Regression Analysis

Model Summary								
R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
				R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
.641	.411	.407	.31263	.411	96.721	6	832	.000
Predictors: (Constant), ATT, SN, EC, CP, ST, HCLS								

Source: Author generated the findings from the data set.

The results from Table 5 summarize the testing of the six determinants

In summary, the analysis of the multiple regression shows that the determinant of ATT, SN, EC, CP, ST, and HCLS, and the dependent variable PI had an impact of 41.1%. The result of R square shows that all the factors ATT, SN, EC, CP, ST, and HCLS played a significant role in consumer purchase intention. The result outlines that these factors indeed plays an important role in determining the consumer purchase intention towards organic food purchase intention. Therefore, the author maintains that consumers are most likely to purchase organic food or develop a positive attitude with these determinants.

A further test was carried out to check how well these determinants were fit for the intended study. For this purpose, the ANOVA test was conducted. The result of the ANOVA test should be less than 0.5 in cases where the model is deemed fit for the study. In this case the result are clearly well below the accepted level of 0.5 (actual level was 0.00), which was a good fit for the intended study.

Table. 6 ANOVA – Determinant and purchase intention.

ANOVA						
Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	
1	Regression	56.721	6	9.454	96.721	.000 ^a
	Residual	81.320	832	.098		
	Total	138.041	838			
Predictors: (Constant), ATT, SN, EC, CP, ST, HCLS						
Dependent Variable: PI						

Source: Author generated the findings from the data set.

Analyses of Coefficients on Determinants

In continuation of the ANOVA test to check the model fit, Coefficient check is conducted. The Standardized β Coefficients are used to check the determinant impact on the intended variables. The higher the value of Standardized β Coefficients, the higher the impact of determinant on the independent variable (Purchase Intention – PI). The result of the Standardized β Coefficients are shown in the below table 7

Table 7. Regression Coefficient

Coefficients ^a					
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	.773	.135		5.719	.000
HCLS	.137	.022	.208	6.154	.000
EC	.164	.022	.251	7.603	.000
ST	.096	.022	.139	4.398	.000
CP	.126	.020	.172	6.182	.000
SN	.123	.022	.158	5.683	.000
ATT	.154	.018	.246	8.630	.000
Dependent Variable: PI					

Source: Author generated the findings from the data set.

Note: The Dependent Variable used for Tests is Purchase Intention (PI)



Discussion of the result

The analysis reveals that all the determinants significantly contributed to the independent variables of purchase intention. The results indicate that all the determinants have a positive impact on consumer purchasing intention factors. The outcome of the analysis is as follows: Health and lifestyle ($\beta = 0.137$, $p=0.000$); Environment Concern ($\beta = 0.164$, $p=0.000$); Safety and trust ($\beta = 0.096$, $p=0.000$); convenience and price ($\beta = 0.126$, $p=0.000$); Subjective Norms ($\beta = 0.123$, $p=0.000$); and Attitude ($\beta = 0.123$, $p=0.154$)

Results of Hypothesis One

From the analyses of Table 7, the hypothesis on health and lifestyle **is rejected**. The results are in perfect symmetry with the extant findings: consumers in the UAE show health and lifestyle as important factors that motivate them towards the purchase of organic food.

Results of Hypothesis two

From the analyses of Table 7, the hypothesis on environmental concern **is rejected**. The results of the study support existing research that present environmental concern as a positive factor motivating consumers towards organic food. Consumers in the UAE show environmental concern is an important factor that motivates them towards the purchase of organic food.

Results of Hypothesis three

From the analyses of Table 7, the hypothesis on safety and trust **is rejected**. The results of the study are synchronous with existing research findings that show the concern for safety and trust is a positive factor that motivates the consumer towards organic food. Consumers in the UAE feel that safety and trust in food purchases motivates them towards the purchase of organic food.

Results of Hypothesis four

From the analyses of Table 7, the hypothesis on convenience and price **is rejected**. This result is reflected in other similar studies. Consumers in the UAE feel that convenience and price are important factors that motivate them towards the purchase of organic food.

Results of Hypothesis five

From the analyses of Table 7, the hypothesis on subjective norms **is rejected**. As with other studies, this study shows that subjective norms are a positive factor that motivates the consumer towards the organic food. Consumers in the UAE show the subjective norms is an important factor that motivates them towards the purchase of organic food.

Results of Hypothesis six

From the analyses of Table 7, the hypothesis on attitude **is rejected**. In line with other research findings, the result of the study shows that attitude is a positive factor that motivates the consumer towards the organic food. Consumers in the UAE show that attitude is an important factor that motivates them towards the purchase of organic food.

Conclusion

To conclude, the stated primary purpose of the study is to understand the determinants that influence the consumer's buying behavior towards organic food in the UAE market. Analysis of the findings suggest that all of the six determinants positively influence consumer behaviour towards organic food. As this is the first study that has concentrated on the UAE context, it is of great value to the concerned stakeholders wishing to promote a move towards organic, sustainable food production in the region. The data generated reflects the growing number of organic coffee shops, farm outlets and organic food availability seen in the UAE and points to a very healthy market share in the future for those who are seeking to invest in a strong business opportunity: Organic Foods & Café (2020), Dubai and Kibson's Farm, Dubai (Kibsons, 2018) are just two examples.

In fact, the UAE government fully endorses the prospect of locally grown organic food being easily available and attractively priced. To this end, the UAE government has launched many incentives and training opportunities for local farmers to support the move towards organic food production within the UAE (Al Wasmi, 2017). This research is influential in its pioneering efforts to draw attention to academic research regarding organic food. The study's outcome will help shape the UAE government's policies and aid it in implementing strategies and directives designed to bolster organic food production, distribution, and marketing thereby strengthening the UAE's position in the global markets.

Managerial implication:

The implications for stakeholders and policy makers point to a need to upgrade the accessibility of organic food to a wider population such that the supply chain for organic foods and organic products extends beyond the big supermarkets to the smaller grocery stores and corner shops. Clearly, as the research data indicates, there is a strong demand for sustainable and 'clean' products. As already mentioned, the UAE government has supported local organic food farmers to sell organic food directly to buyers at the weekend in specific areas, such as Business Bay, Dubai. Our recommendation is that, in the light of the data generated in this study, this very successful venture should now be replicated and expanded. Aside from making clear economic sense, a move to a more sustainable, cleaner method of food production pays dividends in terms of human well-being but also that of the ecosystem upon which we all ultimately depend. The expansion of organic food production should not come at the expense of food security and therefore we would recommend that stakeholders operate with transparency and integrity with the government bodies enforcing strict monitoring guidelines. A strong partnership between, government, business and producers with help to engender long-term trust and loyalty from the customer. This, in turn, will result in a stronger market outlook for local producers.

Future research directions

This study provides an insight into the consumer buying patterns and motives towards organic food consumption within a UAE context. Major determinants were tested with a large scale data to understand the purchase intentions. However, whilst generalizations can be made regarding similarities in neighboring Gulf States, the study only involves three out of seven Emirates and therefore is limited in its scope. Further research should be carried out using the same determinants to understand the dynamics at work in the other emirates, and indeed



across the GCC, to shed light on what is the fastest growing market opportunity in recent years.

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