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Determinants of Organic Product Purchase Behavior: Literature Review and Critical Analysis

Les déterminants du comportement d'achat des produits biologiques : Revue de littérature et analyse critique

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Abstract

The consumption of organic food products has experienced significant growth in recent years, reflecting increasing awareness of environmental and health issues. This article examines the main theoretical frameworks used to explain consumer behavior regarding organic products, namely the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the Means-End Chain Theory (MEC), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Based on a corpus of 63 references including 58 articles published in scientific journals. This literature review analyzes how these models have been applied in the context of organic, sustainable, and green consumption. Each theory is examined in terms of its conceptual foundations, key explanatory variables, and empirical validation. A critical and comparative analysis highlights the theoretical contributions and limitations of each approach, as well as their contextual relevance in studying organic product purchasing behavior, while also underscoring their potential complementarities. Finally, research directions are proposed to further investigate the determinants of organic product consumption.

Keywords: Consumer behavior; Theoretical frameworks; Organic products; Sustainable consumption; Literature review.

Résumé

La consommation de produits alimentaires biologiques a connu une croissance significative ces dernières années, reflétant une prise de conscience croissante des enjeux environnementaux et sanitaires. Cet article examine les principaux cadres théoriques mobilisés pour expliquer le comportement des consommateurs à l'égard des produits biologiques, notamment la Théorie de l'Action Raisonnée (TAR), la Théorie du Comportement Planifié (TCP), la théorie de la Chaîne Moyens-Fins (MEC) et la Théorie de l'Autodétermination (TAD). Fondée sur un corpus de 63 références dont 58 articles publiés dans des revues scientifiques, cette revue de littérature analyse la manière dont ces modèles ont été appliqués dans le contexte de la consommation biologique, durable et verte. Chaque théorie est examinée en fonction de ses fondements conceptuels, de ses variables explicatives clés et de sa validation empirique. Une analyse critique et comparative met en évidence les apports théoriques et les limites de chaque approche, ainsi que leur pertinence contextuelle dans l'étude du comportement d'achat de produits biologiques, tout en soulignant leurs complémentarités potentielles. Enfin, des pistes de recherche sont proposées afin d'approfondir l'étude des déterminants de la consommation de produits biologiques.

Mots-clés : Comportement du consommateur ; Cadres théoriques ; Produits biologiques ; Consommation durable ; Revue de littérature.

Introduction

In a global context marked by climate change, environmental degradation, and growing health concerns, sustainable consumption has emerged as a crucial response to current challenges. Among the various forms of responsible consumer behavior, the consumption of organic products stands out as an accessible approach that enables individuals to protect their health while acting in favor of the environment. This trend reflects a broader shift in dietary choices, social values, and cultural norms.

Sustainable consumption, and more specifically the consumption of organic products, has experienced significant growth in recent years, reflecting increased awareness of environmental and health issues. Consumers are increasingly concerned about the impact of their diet on both their health and the environment. In response to these concerns, organic products are perceived as a sustainable and beneficial alternative, particularly due to anxieties about the use of pesticides and chemical fertilizers, whose long-term effects remain a matter of public concern (Brito et al., 2022; Huo et al., 2024).

Although sustainable consumption encompasses a wide range of responsible practices and eco-friendly products, this article focuses specifically on organic food consumption, considered a major alternative to conventional products due to its health and environmental benefits. In this context, demand for organic products has increased substantially over the past decades, driven by rising concerns related to health, environmental protection, and sustainability. This dynamic has been further reinforced by the COVID-19 pandemic, which intensified consumer interest in healthier eating habits (Smiglak-Krajewska & Wojciechowska-Solis, 2021), while also exposing the vulnerabilities of industrial food systems.

In 2022, the global organic market reached nearly €135 billion, illustrating sustained growth in the sector despite recent health, economic, and geopolitical crises (FiBL, 2024). Europe represents the second-largest organic market in the world after the United States, driven by countries with a dominant presence such as Germany, France, and Italy. Countries like France, which has seen consistent growth in the organic sector since 2010, recorded a 10.4% increase in 2020, reaching €13.2 billion, making it the second-largest organic market in Europe (Agence Bio, 2021).

However, this expansion has experienced some setbacks. In 2022, sales of organic products in France declined by 4.6% compared to 2021 (Agence Bio, 2023). These shifts highlight the need to better understand what motivates or hinders the purchase of organic products, especially during periods of economic uncertainty.

Numerous studies have identified personal factors (such as health and ethical values) and social factors (such as peer influence and cultural norms) as key determinants of organic purchase intentions (Rana & Paul, 2020; Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005), while others emphasize the role of economic factors such as price, income, or accessibility (Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2017). Additional research has also highlighted the importance of geographic and cultural contexts, as illustrated by the study of Yadav and Pathak (2016).

This disparity becomes even more pronounced in developing countries, where economic constraints and limited access to information frequently hinder consumer engagement. In Morocco, for example, the organic products market remains modest, with approximately 14,000 hectares certified organic in 2020. According to Slim Kabbaj, president of the interprofessional association Maroc Bio, this production is primarily intended for export to Europe. Furthermore, around 83% of the organically cultivated land is concentrated in five main regions: Fès-Meknès, Marrakech-Safi, Souss-Massa, Casablanca-Settat, and Rabat-Salé-Kénitra (Afrique Agriculture, 2023).

Although many studies have been conducted in developed countries (France, the United Kingdom, the United States, Finland, Portugal, Germany, Greece, the Netherlands, Slovenia, New Zealand) as well as in emerging or developing economies (Brazil, Tunisia, India, China, South Korea, Taiwan, Iran, Fiji), the case of Morocco remains insufficiently explored in terms of consumer behavior. Yet the country exhibits a particular dynamic, with production geared toward export and limited domestic consumption. This context underscores the relevance of a theoretical analysis of the determinants of organic purchasing across various countries, including those where empirical research is still limited.

In light of these observations, an in-depth analysis of the factors influencing purchasing behavior is essential.

In this context, it becomes crucial to better understand the determinants of organic product purchase behavior. This literature review aims to analyze the main behavioral theories mobilized in the study of organic and sustainable consumption specifically, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), the Means-End Chain Theory (MEC) (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The goal is to examine their respective contributions, limitations, and their ability to explain behavior across different sociocultural contexts.

Despite the diversity of research on sustainable consumption, the specific determinants of organic purchasing behavior remain complex to fully grasp. A theoretical analysis is therefore necessary to better understand this behavior.

It is within this perspective that the central question of this study is formulated: How do behavioral theories contribute to understanding the determinants of organic product purchasing?

To answer this question, the article begins with a review of the main theories applied to sustainable and organic consumption, highlighting their key variables, contributions, and limitations. t then offers a critical and comparative analysis of these theoretical frameworks, aiming to highlight their contributions, limitations, and potential complementarities. Finally, the article discusses the theoretical and managerial implications of these models and proposes future research directions to further explore consumer behavior in the field of organic products.

1. Literature Review: Literature Review: Theoretical Framework of Determinants of Organic Purchase Behavior

The consumption of organic products has attracted growing interest in recent decades, driven by environmental, health, and societal concerns. To understand consumer behavior in this context, several theories have been mobilized, shedding light on the determinants of food choices, attitudes, and purchase intentions. These theories, well-established in the field of consumer behavior, provide powerful analytical frameworks for exploring the factors influencing the consumption of organic and sustainable products.

Dominant theories include the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), Self-Determination Theory (SDT), and the Means-End Chain Theory. Each of these approaches offers a unique perspective on how individuals make decisions, considering cognitive, social, emotional, and contextual factors.

In this section, we will examine these theories and theoretical models to better understand their role in predicting organic purchasing behavior. We will explore their foundations, the key concepts they mobilize, and their applications in previous research on organic consumption. After

defining these theories and their key variables, we will review the results of empirical studies that have tested and validated these models in contexts related to the consumption of organic, sustainable, and health products. Finally, a critical analysis will be provided to identify the strengths and limitations of each theory in the study of organic consumption.

1.1. The Theory of Reasoned Action

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), developed by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975), is a psychological model designed to explain and predict the adoption of individual behaviors. This model was originally developed to predict the intention to adopt a reasoned behavior in everyday life situations. Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) postulated that intention is the major determining factor of human behavior. This behavior, voluntary and under the control of the individual, is directly influenced by their intention. In turn, intention mainly depends on two concepts: attitude toward the behavior and subjective norm.

Attitude: This refers to the favorable or unfavorable evaluation an individual has toward a specific behavior, which influences their intention to adopt this behavior.

Subjective norms: This concept refers to the perceived social pressure to adopt or reject a particular behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). These elements are based on behavioral and normative beliefs, which concern the evaluation of the consequences of the behavior and the social pressure exerted by a reference group.

The predictive utility of the TRA has been widely demonstrated in various situations(Sheppard et al., 1988) . Its accuracy in forecasting human behaviors and its effectiveness in explaining psychological processes related to decision-making have been verified by several researchers. Sheppard et al (1988) thus confirmed the predictive ability of the TRA, demonstrating that it can predict decisions and behaviors in various situations.

Due to its strong predictive ability, the TRA has been particularly useful for predicting intentions and behaviors in marketing and consumer behavior domains. Numerous empirical studies have

validated the causal relationships of the Theory of Reasoned Action, particularly in the context of the consumption of organic, sustainable, and green products. Among these studies, the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) has been used and tested to predict intentions in the area of green product purchasing behaviors. (Ha & Janda, 2012) .

Among these studies, Thøgersen et al. (2015) highlighted a significant relationship between attitudes toward organic products and purchase intentions, thus confirming the relevance of this model in this domain. This theory has also been applied in other research to explain behaviors related to the purchase of green products, such as the study by Vazifehdoust et al. (2013) which showed that attitude is the best predictor of the intention to buy green products. Moreover, this intention directly influences the purchase behavior. In their study, Žibret and Kline (2016)

tested and validated the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) in the context of purchasing organic products, between the concepts suggested by the TRA.

However, although the TRA is effective in predicting behavioral intention, it is not always reliable in predicting actual behavior. Several studies have shown a gap between intention and actual behavior, raising questions about the validity of the theory in explaining behaviors in real-life contexts.

Other researchers have highlighted the model's inadequacy for explaining complex behaviors (Liksa, 1984). Sheppard et al. (1988) observed that behavioral intention does not always predict actual behavior, particularly due to contextual factors and external obstacles. Another limitation of this theory lies in the assumption that behavior is always under voluntary control. This model is also criticized for its lack of consideration of irrational factors and temporal factors that influence human behavior. This model is also criticized for its lack of consideration of irrational factors and temporal factors that influence human behavior. Bagozzi (1992) and Ajzen (1991) emphasized that the model could be enriched by social and environmental factors to better explain behaviors. These limitations led to the emergence of the Theory of Planned Behavior Ajzen (1991) , which introduces a more practical dimension in predicting behaviors, namely perceived behavioral control. To address this limitation, Ajzen (1985) introduced the concept of perceived behavioral control, which reflects the perception that an individual has of their ability to adopt a given behavior. This control depends on both internal factors (skills, beliefs) and external factors (resources, obstacles), which influence both intention and the ability to act. Thus, the TPB relies

on three fundamental elements influencing the intention to act : attitudes toward the behavior (favorable or unfavorable perception), subjective norms (social influence), and perceived behavioral control (perception of feasibility). These three dimensions form the direct determinants of intention, which in turn predicts actual behavior. Both the TRA and the TPB consider intention as a central factor in adopting a behavior. However, the TPB proves useful for understanding complex behaviors, where external factors such as available resources or encountered obstacles influence not only intention but also actual action.

Owing to its strong explanatory power, the TPB has been widely applied in various fields, particularly in the study of organic product consumption.

The original Ajzen's model (1991) is often considered a robust description of decision - making processes in organic food choice (Scalco et al., 2017). It has been widely used to analyze consumption behaviors, as evidenced by several studies exploring consumer purchase

intentions (Chen, 2007; Dean et al., 2008; Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005). Although robust, this model has evolved over time with the addition of new variables aimed at refining the understanding of purchasing behaviors. Several studies have proposed extensions incorporating additional dimensions, such as involvement, trust, or environmental awareness, to improve the model's ability to explain variations in individuals' behavioral intentions (Bazhan et al., 2024; Dangi et al., 2020; Devi et al., 2023; Gundala & Singh, 2021; Nedra et al., 2015; Singh & Verma, 2017; Wang et al., 2019).

1.2. The Theory of Planned Behavior

(Ajzen, 1985, 1991) is an extension of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) (Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980). Developed by Ajzen, it aims to address the limitations of the TRA, particularly its inability to account for behaviors where individuals do not have complete voluntary control. This theory extends the TRA by introducing a third factor: **perceived behavioral control**, which refers to an individual's perception of their ability to perform a given behavior, considering both internal factors (skills, beliefs) and external factors (resources, obstacles) that can facilitate or hinder this behavior. This model aims to predict and explain human behaviors based on three key components: attitudes toward behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1985). These three components constitute the antecedents of behavioral intention, which acts as a mediator in the relationship between these components and actual behavior.

Both the TRA and TPB theories consider intention as a central factor in adopting a behavior. However, the TPB has become particularly useful for understanding complex behaviors, where external factors, such as resources or obstacles, influence both intention and actual action (Ajzen, 1991). Since its initial development, it has been applied to a wide range of specific behaviors across various domains (Armitage & Conner, 2001; Hagger et al., 2002; Hausenblas et al., 1997;

Godin & Kok, 1996; Cooke & French, 2008). Ajzen's (1991) original model is often considered a robust description of decision-making processes in the choice of organic food (Scalco et al., 2017). The theory has been widely used to analyze organic consumption behavior, as shown by several studies exploring consumer purchase intentions (Chen, 2007; Dean et al., 2008; Saba & Messina, 2003; Tarkiainen & Sundqvist, 2005).

However, some researchers have criticized the ability of the TPB to effectively predict behavior based solely on its core components, pointing out the gap between the theory and empirical data.

In response to these criticisms, other works have proposed extending this theory by incorporating additional predictors to improve its explanatory power (Armitage & Conner, 1999; Bentler & Speckart, 1981; Giger, 2008; Paisley & Sparks, 1998; Courneya et al., 1999; Parker et al., 1995).

Over time, Ajzen's TPB model has been enriched by integrating new variables to improve the model's ability to explain variations in individuals' behavioral intentions and deepen the understanding of the determinants of behavior (Nedra et al., 2015; Singh et al., 2017; Redempta, 2019; Dangi et al., 2020; Gundala et al., 2021; Devi et al., 2023; Bazhan et al., 2024).

1.3. Means-End Chain Theory

Means-End Chain (MEC) theory, developed by Reynolds and Gutman (1988) is a value-centered cognitive model that helps to understand behavior and decision-making. It links the tangible attributes of a product (the means) to abstract, intangible personal and emotional values (the ends) (Reynolds & Olson, 2001). Reynolds and Gutman introduced this approach to the field of marketing and the study of consumer behavior. Means-End Chain analysis (MEC), also known as LCA chains Reynolds and Whitlark (1995)), explores the complex links between product attributes, the consequences of consumption, and consumers' personal values. This method is used to better understand how purchasing decisions are influenced by specific values and objectives.

From this perspective, Means-End Chain theory establishes a hierarchical relationship between product attributes, the consequences they entail, and the values they help achieve (Gutman, 1982; (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988). While widely used in marketing to explain the complex relationships between these elements, it has also been applied to contexts such as sustainable consumption, to deepen understanding of consumer motivations (Jackson, 2005).

The Means-End Chain (MEC) theory explains how product characteristics enable consumers to achieve end goals. It is based on three levels:

- **Attributes**: These are the observable or perceived characteristics of a product, whether concrete (physical properties) or subjective (perceived quality).
- **Consequences**: These correspond to the benefits or costs linked to these attributes, which can be functional (tangible results) or psycho-social (personal and social effects), such as satisfaction or perception.
- **Values**: These are deep-seated, stable beliefs that guide behavior and enable the achievement of ultimate goals.

In this sense, consumers look for products whose attributes and consequences meet their core values. The relationships between these three elements are frequently illustrated through hierarchical value maps, tree diagrams that visualize their connections, offering a better understanding of consumer motivations (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988).

MEC theory has several advantages, not least its flexibility and ability to analyze consumer behavior at different levels (micro and macro), while highlighting the factors that influence their decisions (Borgardt, 2020) . It has proven to be an effective tool for predicting these behaviors. By linking product attributes to perceived consequences and core values, Means-End Chain theory provides a powerful analytical framework for understanding consumer choices. Thanks to a variety of approaches, such as a global view of the consumer, the relationship between products and values, and analytical methods, this theory finds broader application in marketing and provides a better understanding of purchasing behavior. It thus opens up new prospects for development within a dynamic, large-scale framework, applicable to marketing research and consumer behavior. However, this theory has its limitations, particularly at the macro level. It could be made more dynamic by integrating elements such as context, personal experience, and motivational factors. Additionally, its predominantly cognitive approach could be enriched by taking into account deeper motivations and situational influences, as part of the evolution of MEC theory (Borgardt, 2018). Moreover, Means-End Chain (MEC) theory has traditionally been applied to analyze the consumption of conventional and organic food products, enabling the exploration of relationships between product attributes, perceived consequences, and underlying values (Baker et al., 2004).

Some studies, such as (Fotopoulos et al., 2003) , confirm the relevance of MEC by highlighting the direct relationships between product attributes (e.g., organic labeling or ethical production), perceived consequences (such as health and authenticity), and underlying values (like safety and pleasure), thereby providing a better understanding of consumer motivations in their choices of organic products. Other research, such as that of(Oliveira et al., 2024), supports this theory by showing how the relationship between attributes, consequences, and values directly influences consumer purchase intentions. The results of this study confirm that product attributes, such as organic labeling, have a direct and positive impact on perceived consequences, which in turn influences purchase intentions.

1.4. Self-determination theory

Self-determination theory (SDT), developed by (Deci & Ryan, 1985), is a theory of human motivation that was developed as a response to the behaviorist approach. It centers around the

concept of autonomy and distinguishes intrinsic motivation, which is related to the satisfaction of fundamental psychological needs, from extrinsic motivation, which is influenced by external factors. Considered one of the major motivation theories, it highlights the role of psychological needs in regulating behaviors and specific motivational styles. Its application extends to various fields, including the analysis of consumer behavior, by identifying the conditions that promote personal growth, well-being, and optimal performance. In this context, self-determination theory identifies three fundamental psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It emphasizes the complementary nature of these needs, showing that their joint satisfaction is essential for optimal psychological functioning and persistence in goal-directed behaviors, which requires a supportive social context.

According to (Deci & Ryan, 2002, 2008), three categories of motivation form the continuum of self-determination: intrinsic motivation (IM), extrinsic motivation (EM), and amotivation (AM). The highest level of self-determination is found in IM, while the lowest level is in AM. The authors also propose the existence of four types of extrinsic motivation regulation, ranging from less to more self-determined. These are external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. The threshold of self-determination, between introjected regulation and identified regulation, allows for the distinction between controlled motivation and autonomous motivation. This theory is a motivational model that highlights the distinction between intrinsic and extrinsic motivations and has been widely used to analyze consumer behavior.

The theory distinguishes three main types of motivation: intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, and amotivation.

-Intrinsic motivation: refers to engaging in an activity for its own sake, as well as for the pleasure and satisfaction derived from it. An intrinsically motivated person engages in activities voluntarily and out of personal interest. According to Deci and Ryan (1985)), IM stems from three fundamental psychological needs: competence, autonomy, and self-determination. Thus, activities that fulfill these needs allow individuals to engage freely and repeatedly through this motivation.

- Extrinsic motivation: refers to behaviors driven by external reasons, meaning with the goal of obtaining a reward or avoiding a negative consequence after completing the activity. Initially, EM was seen as a form of motivation controlled by external factors, without personal involvement

in the activity. However, Deci and Ryan (1985, 1987) as well as Connell and Ryan (1986) further developed this approach by suggesting that there are four types of EM regulation, classified according to their level of self-determination :external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation.

- Integrated regulation occurs when the individual feels self-determined in the regulation of their behavior, and the self-regulation aligns consistently with other aspects of their identity. At this stage, the individual reaches the highest level of self-determination in adopting extrinsically motivated behaviors.
- External regulation corresponds to EM as defined in the literature. In this context, behavior is regulated by external control factors, such as material rewards or constraints imposed by another person.
- Introjected regulation occurs when the individual begins to internalize the reasons for their actions. However, although this form of internalization is internal to the person, it is not truly self-determined as it is limited to the internalization of previous external constraints.
- Identified regulation refers to the process through which an individual assigns value to a behavior and considers it important, thus perceiving it as a personal choice. While the activity is motivated by external factors, it is experienced in a self-determined manner.

– **Amotivation:** constitutes a third type of motivational construct suggested by Deci and Ryan, in addition to intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, to understand human behavior. An amotivated individual perceives no connection between their actions and the results achieved, and is neither intrinsically nor extrinsically motivated. In this state, they feel a sense of incompetence and expect a lack of control over their actions.

Self-determination theory (SDT) has been widely applied in various fields, such as education, health, sport, organizations, technology, as well as in psychopathology and psychotherapy. Developed by Deci and Ryan, SDT provides a robust theoretical framework for explaining and predicting human behavior. It is also recognized for its strong predictive accuracy, particularly in analyzing consumer attitudes and behavioral intentions (Cassia & Magno, 2024 ; Gilal et al., 2019 ; Tandon et al., 2020).The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) was designed to explain and predict human behavior. However, marketing studies have mainly focused on its explanatory role, neglecting its predictive potential.

Previous research in the literature review has shown that the different forms of motivation defined by Self-Determination Theory provide a relevant framework for analyzing consumer behavior, particularly in the context of sustainable and organic food products. This theoretical

approach proves useful for understanding how motivations, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, influence consumption choices. Indeed, other studies, including of Schösler et al. (2014), have highlighted the importance of this theory in understanding consumers' motivations to adopt more sustainable food choices. According to this theory, each type of motivation has a particular impact on consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior. Thus, studies have shown that consumer motivations, whether intrinsic (such as health awareness and ethical consumerism) or extrinsic (such as environmental concerns, external regulation (ER), as well as integrated (IR) and introjected (INR) , regulation), positively influence their attitude toward organic products (Sumathy et al., 2021). Predicting consumer intentions to purchase energy-efficient products. However, introjected regulation (INR) has no significant effect on consumer purchasing behavior. Recently, Self-Determination Theory has been widely applied in contexts related to sustainable and organic consumption. For example, Chiu et al (2019) found that self-determination has a positive effect on consumer perception of relevance, as well as their civic behavior in favor of organic food. Similarly, Schösler et al. (2014) identified internalized motivation and intrinsic enjoyment as key drivers of sustainable consumption choices. Furthermore, Shamsi et al (2020) demonstrated that highly self-determined motivations significantly favor the intention to purchase organic food. These works, supported by those of Lazzarini et al. (2018)), unequivocally confirm the central role of motivation in decisions to consume organic products.

To complement this literature review, the table below presents a summary of the main empirical studies that have applied behavioral theories in the context of sustainable and organic product purchasing.

Table 1: Summary table of empirical studies on Consumer Behavior Toward Organic and Sustainable Products based on behavioral theories

Authors	Context and Objective	Methodology	Theory	Key Findings
Bakear et al. (2004)	Organic food purchasing behavior in Germany and the UK – Explore the factors explaining differences in purchasing behavior.	Qualitative study using the laddering technique	Means-End Chain Theory (MEC)	Similar values, but differences in organic product attributes and their link to the environment.
Chen (2007)	Organic food purchasing behavior in Taiwan – Identify the motives influencing	Quantitative methodology based on moderated regression analysis	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	Food neophobia and involvement moderate the link between motives

	attitudes toward organic food and their effect on purchase intention.			and attitude; only involvement moderates the effect of antecedents on intention.
Dean et al. (2008)	Organic food purchasing behavior in the UK – Study the role of affective attitudes and moral norms in predicting the intention to buy fresh and processed organic foods.	Quantitative study combining exploratory factor analysis and hierarchical regressions	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	General beliefs, price, appearance, and moral norms significantly influence attitude, which in turn predicts purchase intention. Moral norms positively influence intention.
Devi et al. (2023)	Organic food purchasing behavior in New Zealand and Fiji – Understand the effect of personal risk perception and health awareness on purchase intention, and the impact of external factors on attitude and behavior.	Quantitative survey analyzed by PLS-PM modeling	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	Perceived risk positively affects purchase intention; health awareness significantly impacts the relationship with risk and social networks.
Fotopoulos et al. (2003)	Organic food purchasing behavior in Greece – Study the influence of values and motivations on organic product purchasing.	Laddering technique based on semi-structured interviews	Means-End Chain Theory (MEC)	Values and motivations influence organic purchasing, with clear differences between buyers and non-buyers.
Gilal et al. (2019)	Consumer behavior in marketing across 16 countries – Explore the application of SDT in marketing studies to understand motivated consumer behaviors.	Systematic literature review on SDT in marketing	Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	SDT, still underused in marketing, shows strong explanatory potential and adds value in several research areas.

Gundala & Singh (2021)	Organic food purchasing behavior in the USA – Identify factors influencing consumers' behavior toward organic food.	Quantitative survey analyzed via ANOVA, multiple regressions, EFA, and t-tests	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	Health, knowledge, subjective norms, and perceived price positively influence attitude toward organic food. Availability influences intention, and sociodemographic variables impact behavior.
Ha & Janda (2012)	Sustainable product purchasing behavior in South Korea – Analyze the intention to buy energy-efficient products.	Quantitative study analyzed by structural equation modeling (SEM)	Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)	Attitude has a stronger effect than subjective norms on the intention to buy energy-efficient products.
Nedra et al. (2015)	Organic food purchasing behavior in Tunisia – Study the determinants of consumers' organic purchasing behavior.	Quantitative method based on exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis, validated by SEM	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	Behavior is positively influenced by motivation, involvement, and intention; attitude has no significant effect.
Oliveira et al. (2024)	Organic food purchasing behavior in Brazil – Study the link between A-C-V, purchase predisposition, and purchase intention.	Quantitative study analyzed by PLS-SEM	Means-End Chain Theory (MEC)	Purchase predisposition plays a strong mediating role between personal values and purchase intention.
Scalco et al. (2017)	Organic food purchasing behavior in various contexts – Assess the relationship between attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, intention, and behavior.	Quantitative meta-analysis using SEM and combined correlation matrix	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	Attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control influence intention, which in turn determines behavior; TPB is confirmed as robust in the context of organic purchasing.

Schösler et al. (2014)	Sustainable food purchasing behavior in the Netherlands – Analyze the effect of motivation types on meat consumption and sustainable food choices.	Online quantitative survey with multivariate analyses	Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Motivation types influence meat consumption; internalized motivation and enjoyment of cooking play an important role.
Sumathy et al. (2021)	Organic food purchasing behavior in India – Study the link between motivation, attitude, and purchasing behavior toward organic foods.	Quantitative survey analyzed by SEM	Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Introjected and identified regulation significantly influence organic purchasing behavior.
Tandon et al. (2020)	Organic food purchasing behavior in India – Analyze relationships between intrinsic and extrinsic motivation, attitude, and purchasing behavior.	Quantitative study with SEM among organic product consumers	Self-Determination Theory (SDT)	Motivations significantly influence attitude and purchasing behavior, but attitude has no direct effect; organic consumption is encouraged by health, ethics, and environmental values.
Tarkiainen & Sundqvist (2005)	Organic food purchasing behavior in Finland – Test an extended version of the TPB in the context of organic food purchasing.	Quantitative method: structural equation modeling (SEM)	Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB)	Subjective norms positively influence purchasing behavior through attitude and intention.
Thøgersen et al. (2015)	Organic food purchasing behavior in emerging economies (China and Brazil) – Analyze the influence of behavioral beliefs on attitudes toward buying organic.	Quantitative questionnaire analyzed by SEM	Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)	Beliefs about the benefits of organic products (health, taste, environment) significantly influence attitude.

Vazifehdoust et al. (2013)	Green product purchasing behavior – Analyze attitudinal and behavioral determinants using an integrated model based on TRA.	Quantitative study with SEM among 374 consumers in Iran	Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)	Attitude is significantly influenced by environmental concern, perceived product quality, green advertising, and labeling. Attitude positively influences purchase intention, which in turn influences green product purchasing behavior.
Žibret & Kline (2016)	Organic food purchasing behavior in Slovenia – Study purchasing behavior based on TRA variables.	Quantitative study using structural equation modeling	Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA)	Attitude and subjective norms positively influence purchase intention, which in turn significantly affects organic product purchasing behavior.

Source : Author's compilation based on literature review.

2. Methodology

This literature review is based on a corpus of 63 references, including 58 peer-reviewed scientific articles, addressing both the theoretical and empirical foundations of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the Means-End Chain Theory (MEC), and Self- Determination Theory (SDT). These models were examined in the context of sustainable, green, and organic consumer behavior. The methodology adopted was structured around three main stages.

The first stage focused on identifying the relevant theoretical frameworks. An in-depth bibliographic search was conducted using major academic databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, ScienceDirect, SpringerLink, Emerald Insight, and Google Scholar. The search strategy was based on combinations of keywords such as "organic products," "organic consumption," "purchase behavior," "consumer behavior," along with the acronyms of the selected models (TRA, TPB, MEC, SDT) and "sustainable consumption." This approach enabled the identification of a wide range of theoretical and empirical studies employing these

models to analyze the determinants of consumer behavior in the context of responsible and organic consumption. The second stage focused on the selection of empirical studies. To ensure scientific rigor and relevance, several strict inclusion criteria were applied. Regarding the publication period, only studies published between 2000 and 2024 were retained, with a few foundational works published earlier included for their theoretical contributions. Only articles written in English were selected, due to their broad academic dissemination. Particular attention was paid to articles published in peer-reviewed scientific journals, which constitute the majority of the corpus. Other recognized academic sources, such as books, book chapters, and institutional reports, were also included when they offered theoretical or methodological relevance. Selected studies had to explicitly apply at least one of the four behavioral models within the context of sustainable, green, or organic consumption. Furthermore, the selected studies cover a wide range of geographical contexts, including developed countries, emerging economies, and developing countries. This diversity enables a comparative understanding of how consumer behavior varies across different socio-economic and cultural settings.

Finally, methodological robustness was assessed based on the clarity of the research design, the strength of data collection, and the appropriateness of the analytical methods used, whether quantitative or qualitative. This selection process made it possible to build a coherent and diverse sample of studies, enabling an in-depth analysis of how these theoretical models have been operationalized and tested. The third stage involved analysis and critical synthesis. Each theoretical framework was examined in detail to identify its conceptual foundations, key explanatory variables, and specific applications in the field of sustainable consumption. A critical and comparative synthesis was then conducted, highlighting the strengths and limitations of each model, their complementarities and points of convergence, as well as their potential for integration to deepen the understanding of consumer behavior regarding organic and sustainable products.

3. Critical Analysis of Theories: Insights and Directions for Future Research

Understanding consumer behavior toward organic products requires a multidimensional theoretical lens. This section critically examines four prominent models TRA, TPB, MEC, and SDT highlighting their complementarities, limitations, and the value of integrating their insights.

3.1. Interaction and Complementarity of Theories

The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) share a common conceptual base: behavioral intention. However, TPB goes further by introducing the

crucial concept of perceived behavioral control, which helps explain the gap between intentions and actual behaviors, especially in contexts where external factors come into play, such as available resources or purchasing constraints. This extension allows for better alignment with complex behaviors. For instance, Scalco et al. (2017) confirmed the robustness of TPB in the context of organic food purchasing, showing that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived control significantly predict intention and behavior. Gundala & Singh (2021) further highlighted that external barriers such as perceived price and availability significantly influence intention. However, as shown by Nedra et al. (2015), TPB may still fail to fully account for nuanced motivational contexts, where attitude might not significantly predict behavior despite other influencing variables. In contrast, the Means-End Chain (MEC) theory provides a hierarchical framework that connects product attributes to perceived consequences and personal values. This is particularly relevant in the context of organic consumption, where consumers perceive attributes like organic labeling or ethical production as symbols of psychosocial benefits such as health, safety, or environmental respect. The studies of Baker et al. (2004) and Fotopoulos et al. (2003) illustrate how these attributes are linked to individual values and motivations for organic purchasing. More recently, Oliveira et al. (2024) demonstrated that purchase predisposition—driven by these underlying values—plays a mediating role in forming purchase intentions. The Self-Determination Theory (SDT) offers yet another complementary perspective by focusing on intrinsic and extrinsic motivations. It explains how food choices respond to fundamental psychological needs such as autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Tandon et al. (2020) showed that intrinsic motivations (e.g., concern for health or the environment) enhance the effect of attitude (from TPB) on purchase intention. Sumathy et al. (2021) and Schösler et al. (2014) also highlighted the role of internalized motivations and personal fulfillment in sustainable food consumption, while Gilal et al. (2019) emphasized the untapped potential of SDT in marketing, underscoring its explanatory power across multiple consumer behavior contexts. Although each theory provides a distinct lens for understanding organic food purchasing, integrating these approaches can offer a more comprehensive and nuanced framework. TRA and TPB emphasize cognitive mechanisms underlying intention, SDT introduces a motivational and emotional dimension, while MEC links symbolic product attributes to deeply held consumer values. Together, these models incorporate cognitive, affective, motivational, and symbolic dimensions of behavior, offering a more holistic understanding of consumer decisions. A reasoned integration of these theories is thus essential

to fully grasp the complexity of organic food consumption, especially in contexts marked by psychological needs, emotional drivers, and external constraints.

The table below presents a comparative synthesis of the main behavioral theories applied in the context of sustainable and organic consumption, highlighting their key concepts, strengths, limitations, and theoretical contributions.

Table 2: Comparative Summary of Key Behavioral Theories Applied to Organic and Sustainable Product Purchasing

Theory	Key Variables	Main Strengths	Main Limitations	Key Contributions
TRA (Theory of Reasoned Action)	Attitude, subjective norms, intention	Simple and effective in predicting purchase intention; Well-validated model	Does not consider perceived control or contextual factors; Does not always predict actual behavior	Useful for integrating social norms and attitudes into a predictive framework
TPB (Theory of Planned Behavior)	Attitude, subjective norm, perceived behavioral control, intention	Robust model integrating perceived barriers; Accounts for perceived control; Broad predictive validity across contexts	May not capture personal values or deep motivations; Overlooks emotional or irrational factors	Explains the gap between intention and actual behavior
MEC (Means-End Chain Theory)	Product attributes, perceived consequences, personal values	Links product attributes to deep consumer motivations; Strong tool for motivational analysis	Too cognitively oriented; Little consideration for social or emotional context	Gives meaning to purchasing by linking products to consumer values
SDT (Self-Determination Theory)	Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations, psychological needs	Excellent for understanding long-term motivations; Accounts for psychological needs; Used to explain loyalty and engagement	Less predictive of immediate behavior; Limited focus on social norms	Offers a refined understanding of internal drivers of eco-responsible behavior

Source: Author's compilation.

3.2. Critical Analysis of Behavioral Theories in Consumer Behavior

TRA and TPB stand out for their ability to predict behavior based on intention, but TPB offers a more robust approach by taking into account external obstacles and contextual factors, where TRA, which focuses on attitude and social norms, lacks this nuance. However, purchase intention does not always translate into actual behavior, which is a challenge shared by both theories—as shown, for example, in Nedra et al. (2015), where motivational variables were present but attitude had no significant effect. This same gap between intention and action was discussed in Scalco et al. (2017), who confirmed the robustness of TPB but acknowledged its limitations in certain contexts. Similarly, Gundala & Singh (2021) emphasized the influence of perceived price and availability as key external constraints impacting intention.

TPB is most relevant in contexts where the individual is constrained by external factors (such as the prices of organic products or their availability), while TRA—as observed in Ha & Janda (2012) and Tarkiainen & Sundqvist (2005)—remains effective in predicting behavior via attitudes and norms, though with less contextual depth. In contrast, MEC does not integrate such contextual elements as well, even though it stands out for its ability to link product attributes to perceived consequences. This is evident in Fotopoulos et al. (2003) and Baker et al. (2004), who demonstrated how organic labeling and ethical claims are tied to values such as health and safety. Oliveira et al. (2024) extended this logic, showing that personal values shape predisposition, which strongly mediates purchase intention.

For its part, SDT, with its three types of motivation, can better capture the complexity of consumer choices in a context where social norms, personal autonomy, and deep values interact. It helps explain the role of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations in choosing organic products, especially how they influence consumer attitudes and behavior. This is well illustrated in Tandon et al. (2020), who found that intrinsic motivations linked to health and environmental values encourage organic consumption, even in the absence of strong attitudes. Similarly, Sumathy et al. (2021) identified introjected and identified regulation as significant predictors of organic purchasing. However, SDT does not capture the importance of social norms in the same way as TRA or TPB. Indeed, social pressure and normative influence, central in studies like Chen (2007) and Dean et al. (2008), remain less central in SDT, where autonomy and internalization dominate the motivational process.

Empirical evidence underscores these complementarities. In the study by Schösler et al. (2014), consumers with a high level of self-determination (SDT) and a strong sense of perceived behavioral control (TPB) were more likely to engage in sustainable purchasing behaviors,

highlighting the benefit of combining motivational and cognitive frameworks. Moreover, Gilal et al. (2019), through a systematic review, emphasized the explanatory richness of SDT in marketing, even though its practical use remains underdeveloped.

3.3. Theoretical and managerial implications

From a theoretical standpoint, this research contributes to enhancing the understanding of organic product purchase behavior by utilizing several complementary theoretical frameworks. Theoretically, it highlights the relevance of the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) and the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in predicting the intention to purchase organic products, while also pointing out their limitations in explaining the transition from intention to action. However, these theories tend to underestimate the influence of deep motivational dimensions and personal values, which are addressed by SDT and MEC. Additionally, the Means-End Chain Theory (MEC) (Reynolds & Gutman, 1988) emphasizes the hierarchical links between product attributes, perceived benefits, and core values, while the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1985) provides essential insights into the impact of intrinsic and extrinsic motivations on the adoption of sustainable purchasing behaviors.

From a managerial perspective, this study offers strategic implications to promote the consumption of organic products. It highlights that companies must develop marketing strategies tailored to the psychological and contextual determinants of consumer purchase behavior.

Integrating the principles of the Means-End Chain Theory (MEC) allows companies to design communication strategies focused on the core values of consumers (e.g., well-being, health, environmental respect) by highlighting specific attributes such as organic certification, traceability, or the absence of pesticides. Furthermore, the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) underscores that emphasizing consumer autonomy and engagement is a more effective approach than purely economic incentives, thus fostering long-term customer loyalty.

Additionally, the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) highlights the impact of perceived barriers, such as price, accessibility, or lack of information, on intention and purchase behavior. To overcome these obstacles, businesses and policymakers could implement several strategies. On one hand, subsidy policies, targeted promotions, and loyalty programs could be considered to mitigate the perception of high prices. On the other hand, improving distribution is crucial, particularly by increasing the presence of organic products in major retail chains, developing short supply chains, and promoting e-commerce. Finally, consumer information and awareness

play a key role: campaigns based on scientific studies would help better explain the benefits of organic products and strengthen trust in them.

3.4. Future Research Directions

Although this study has provided valuable insights into the determinants of organic product purchase behavior, several research avenues deserve to be explored to refine these findings. First, integrating other theoretical models, such as the Value Theory (Schwartz, 1992) or the Cognitive Dissonance Theory (Festinger, 1957), could enhance the understanding of the factors influencing sustainable consumption. Cognitive Dissonance Theory would allow for the exploration of the gaps between intentions and actual purchase behaviors by analyzing how consumers justify or

adjust their choices in the face of external constraints (price, accessibility). Value Theory would help better understand the impact of personal values on the adoption of organic products and identify consumer segments most sensitive to these dimensions. Next, a longitudinal study would allow for examining the evolution of motivations and barriers to purchasing organic products over time, particularly in response to awareness campaigns or regulatory changes. Furthermore, with the rise of e-commerce and digitalization, it would be relevant to explore how these trends influence consumer purchasing behaviors and their engagement with organic products.

Finally, an analysis of cultural and socio-economic differences in the adoption of organic products could help tailor marketing strategies to more diverse consumer profiles. Integrating these new theoretical and methodological approaches would provide a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the mechanisms influencing sustainable consumption.

Conclusion

This theoretical review examined the main frameworks used to understand organic product purchase behavior, namely the Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA), the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), the Means-End Chain Theory (MEC), and Self-Determination Theory (SDT). Each of these models offers a complementary perspective on the psychological, social, and motivational factors influencing consumer decisions. However, their predictive capacity varies depending on context and consumer profiles.

One of the key contributions of this article lies in the critical and comparative analysis of these models, highlighting their complementarities, specific limitations, and potential for integration. The findings suggest that organic purchasing behavior cannot be fully explained by a single theoretical lens. An integrated approach that combines the predictive power of intention-based

models (TRA/TPB), the motivational depth of SDT, and the cognitive structure of MEC can provide a more nuanced and comprehensive understanding.

Moreover, this study opens several avenues for future research. On the one hand, incorporating additional theoretical frameworks, such as Schwartz's Value Theory or Cognitive Dissonance Theory, could enrich the understanding of the emotional, cultural, and social dimensions of consumer behavior. On the other hand, longitudinal studies could examine how purchasing behaviors evolve over time, particularly under the influence of awareness campaigns, shifts in consumption habits, and new regulations. In addition, with the growing importance of e-commerce and digitalization, it is relevant to explore how these trends impact purchasing behavior and consumer engagement with organic products.

From a methodological perspective, a key limitation of this review lies in its exclusive reliance on published academic sources, which may introduce selection bias. Furthermore, the absence of primary data prevents empirical validation of the proposed theoretical integrations. Therefore, future research should consider adopting mixed methods both qualitative and quantitative to empirically test the robustness of the integrated models presented here.

In summary, this article makes an original contribution to the literature on sustainable consumption by providing a critical synthesis of major consumer behavior theories and proposing an integrated framework that can enrich both academic research and practical strategies to promote the consumption of organic products.

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