

CONSUMER PURCHASE INTENTION TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD; WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO UNDERGRADUATES IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract - Sri Lanka is a country rich with full of natural resources which can cater a considerable portion of ever-growing market demand for organic products in the World. Identifying this fact is important for the Sri Lankan food and beverage industry to focus on organic farming and supplying various products grown under ecological systems. Based on this the study was conducted to investigate the factors influencing on consumer purchase intention towards organic food in Sri Lanka with reference to Undergraduates. Based on extensive literature review, the study adopted factors such as attitude, health consciousness, consumer knowledge, environmental concern, perceived behavior control and subjective norms to assess the purchase intention of organic food products. The primary data were gathered using a structured questionnaire from a sample size of 111 and SPSS software with version 21.0 had been used to analyze the data collected. The results show that attitude is the most influential factor that influence on purchase intention of organic food in Sri Lanka. Insights from this study can be used to further expand the organic food producing markets as it contributes marketers to target and retain health conscious customers more effectively. Further research can use the same model to investigate the factors and to facilitate full understanding of the consumer-decision making process regarding organic produce while considering the tradeoffs that consumers make between values and product as well as consumer segmentation.

Keywords- Organic food, Attitudes, Purchase intention

I. INTRODUCTION

The growing global population has resulted in ever increasing the pressure to produce more food. This has ultimately resulted in the heavy use of chemicals to produce more output to satisfy the market demand. However, in today's world the human concern towards natural environment is rapidly increasing and the consumers are tending to seek for green aspect of the food and beverage items not only to satisfy their physical needs but also to fulfill their social needs along with being more concerned about their health. According to Yin et al., (2010) these factors have led to creating a tremendous market opportunity for organically grown food.

Organic food is considered as products which are produced with the support of adopted environmentally joined techniques, by the means of following production methods which is grown without the use of chemicals and where animals are raised in more natural conditions with ensuring the harmless impact to human (Chinnici, et al., 2002). According to Thøgersen, (2010), organic food is viewed as being a more sustainable alternative to conventional food as it provides many advantages to both consumers and producers in terms of healthy lifestyle, social benefits, animal welfare, environmental preservation and environmental friendliness.

There is a growing global interest in organic food than conventional food even though the sales are relatively low

than conventional food. As a result, the global organic market has shown a continuous growth in accordance to the increase of its agricultural cultivation area. According to the Organic Trade Association's (OTA's) 2017 Organic Industry Survey there is an increase of \$3.7 billion in organic food sales in the U.S. from the previous year and it presented that now it accounts for more than five percent 5.3 percent to be exact of total food sales in this country. In addition, Europe and North America are the two largest markets of organic food in which organic food are consumed by a clear majority of population. However, today Asia is also considered as a potentially growing market for organic food (Sheng, et al., 2009).

Several studies in the western world have concluded that there are many frequent buyers of organic food across several countries (Aertsens, et al., 2009; Mhlophe, 2016; Latacz-Lohmann & Foster, 1997). When it comes to Asian region many researches have been concluded that there is a growing trend for organic farming and a potential market with the highest growth rate per annum (Hossain & Lim, 2016; Kouya, et al., 2016; Chen & Hsu, 2014; Yang, et al., 2014). In general, all these results show that people in all around the world start to pay more attention and be more aware of the benefits of consuming organic food (Bo, et al., 2012; Parichand, 2012).

Besides, the rapid growth of organic food industry in Sri Lanka the Export Development Board showed that it is more oriented towards exporting rather than domestic market. As a result, the domestic consumption of organic food has become limited in Sri Lanka than other countries. According to Ranaweera, (2008) the term organic has been widely misused in Sri Lanka without having very clear understanding about it. This is due to defining all the ecological farming systems, applying compost on crops, natural home garden practices, neglecting lands without applying natural and artificial inputs as organic which is not actually can be defined as organic farming. Organic is a kind of labelling system that is granted for ecological production when the whole process is certified by an accredited third-party organization whereas without a third-party guarantee on the compliance of set international standards on organic production methods, a product cannot be labelled, termed or called as organic (Ranaweera, 2008).

Regarding Sri Lanka, a few studies have been carried out based on different factors affecting on organic food consumption (Weerasiri, 2016; Narmilan & Amuthenie, 2016; Gunawardana & Perera, 2014). Most of these

previous studies highlighted that majority of the Sri Lankan consumers are health conscious and are aware of places where organic food is available (Weerasiri & Cooray, 2016; Gunawardana & Perera, 2014). However, the fact that organic food is expensive than conventional food, insufficient supply on the market, lack of information reach to the consumers regarding the availability and market place and mistrust of the product have led to less consumption (Narmilan & Amuthenie, 2016).

Based on the influential factors which have been discussed by past studies as mentioned above, the research gap is created to conduct this research. In particular, it is in demand to investigate which factors and in which way they could specifically influence the purchase intention of organic food in Sri Lanka. It is important for a marketer to examine how the purchase intention of organic food will be influenced by different factors such as attitudes, beliefs and norms (Ajzen, 1991). Following this gap, it is essential to identify the relationship between each factor and purchase intention towards organic as there are not many researches this fact from the perspective of consumers in Sri Lanka. Weerasiri & Cooray, (2016) suggested that only few studies about this subject have been done in Sri Lanka and suggested that further studies should focus on this area due to the rapid expansion of Sri lankan economy in recent decades, especially in the area of organic food.

A. Objectives of the study

Main objective

To discover the most influential factor affecting on the purchase intention of organic food in Sri Lanka. More specifically the key objective of this study is to study the factors influencing consumer purchasing decision regarding organic food while identifying the most influential factor among them.

Secondary objective

To identify the relationship between pre-purchase related factors such as attitudes, behavior control and norms and consumer purchase intention of organic food

B. Research Questions

- I. What is the most influential factor influencing on the purchase intention of organic food in Sri Lanka?

II. What is the relationship between pre-purchase related factors and purchase intention of organic food?

Sri Lanka is a country, rich with full of natural resources which can cater a considerable portion of ever-growing market demand for organic products in the World. Identifying this fact is important for the Sri Lankan food and beverage industry to focus on organic farming and supplying various products grown under ecological systems. For instance, from the year 1998 to 2001 organic labelling has created a value addition to tea industry resulted in additional production of about one million kilo grams of conventional teas (Ranaweera, 2008). The encouragement of the government to support organic sector provides a significant value to the organic agriculture in Sri Lanka. Recently some of the government institutes launched programs to identify the potential areas and producer groups for organic agriculture and the Export Development Board of Sri Lanka has immensely assisted to promote organic sector in Sri Lanka by assisting the private sector to seek new markets for organic products. However, changes of the government and the fiscal policy changes directly affects to this industry as it consists large part of the economy as price is considered as an important factor which can negatively affecting on purchase decision of organic food (Narmilan & Amuthenie, 2016). Hence, analyzing deeply on this topic seems to be much more important.

Through reviewing the literature, only a few research papers were found based on the exact nature of the research topic being studied. Therefore, it can show the significance of this research in such a way that it aims to fill a knowledge gap that already exists while contributing academics, researchers, scientist and other professionals in the respective fields to educate manufactures and consumers of organic food. Even though some studies have clearly identified the relevance factors affecting buying decision of organic products the root cause of the behind the decision was not found, thus not been treated. Deeming all above mentioned, this research is undertaken with the intention of identifying the key factors influencing the consumer purchasing decision regarding organic foods of undergraduates in western province; Sri Lanka.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

This study employed the Theory of Planned Behavior (Ajzen, 1988) which is designed to predict and explain

human behavior in specific contexts in related with the behavior specific factors such as broad attitudes and personality traits to address the research objectives. This theory is an extension of the original Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980; Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975) which deals with understanding and predicting motivational influences on behavior. According to Ajzen, (1991) the model developed for the Theory of Planned Behavior incorporates to capture the motivational factors that influence on intentions to perform different kinds of consumer behaviors. These intentions can be predicted with high accuracy from attitudes toward the behavior, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control together with perceptions of behavioral control, account for considerable variance in actual behavior. Ajzen, (1991) stated that each of these factors reveals a different aspect of the behavior, and each can serve as a point of attack in attempts to change one's behavior.

Holst & Iversen, (2011) demonstrated that this model can be applicable in many studies on consumer purchase intentions and those that seek to determine consumers' actual behavior. Likewise, many previous studies have been stated that the Theory of planned behavior (TPB) is one of the most widely applied expectancy-value models used to predict and explain the consumer food choice behavior convincingly and the consumption of organic food (Dean, et al., 2008; Tarkiainen and Sundqvist, 2005; Aertsens et al., 2009).

The current study intended to examine how the antecedents of trust influencing organic purchase intentions based on related theories such as attitudes, perceived behavioral control and norms. Moreover, this study mainly focuses on consumer decision processes to buy organic foods by selecting the above factors as the main variables in the proposed conceptual model. This review function as a main part of the study by providing a valuable foundation for the formulation of the appropriate conceptual model and hypotheses that will ultimately direct the way the subsequent survey will be conducted.

According to Ajzen (1991) consumer purchase intentions can be viewed as the immediate determinant of action and the predictor for future buying decisions. It is being argued that the consumer behavior which is defined as the process of receiving information of goods, the circumstance to purchase, and depositing of goods or services is backed by these purchase intentions (Blackwell, et al., 2007). The construct of intention is fundamental to the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB), as this variable is intended to

pull together all the motivational influences or antecedent determinants of attitude, subjective norm and perceived behavioral control, typified in the three key constructs that are prior to it (Ajzen, 1991).

According to the soil association organic food can be defined as foods prepared under a strict set of standards by the farmers and manufacturers under more environmentally sustainable management of the land and natural environment with a certificate awarded by an industrial body. Organic foods encompass of lower level of pesticides, free of artificial colors and preservatives, high standards of animal welfare and Generally Modified free. Generally, many studies have confirmed the view that consumption of organics is an increasingly mainstream activity (Stewart, et al., 2004). Aertsens, et al., (2009) stated that organic food is perceived to have better taste than conventional food and it is also perceived to be more environmental-friendly. This fact was aligned with the

study by Thøgersen, (2007) confirming that consumers perceive organic food as more environmental-friendly can be connected to the value of universalism and it is said to be the dominant value when consumers purchase organic food.

However, with reference to Shepherd, Magnusson & Per-Olow (2005) there are differences between behaviors regarding organic foods as some consumers may have positive views on organic foods but may not have an intention to purchase the items. This conclusion was aligned with the study by Tarkiainen and Sundqvist (2009) stating that there are low purchasing trends among the respondents towards organic food. In contrast number of researchers found that there is a growing number of consumers claim to pay attention to buy organic food after considering different factors like health (Newsom, et al., 2005), environment (Saleki & Seyedsaleki, 2012) and so on. Studies have found that health is strongly connected to the notion of organic food and that it is the strongest purchasing motive when purchasing organic food (Yang, et al., 2014). In addition, many studies have investigated that factors like perceived beliefs and attitudes, consumer knowledge, availability, price, government support and policy are influencing the purchase intentions towards organic food (Yang, et al., 2014; Dean, et al., 2012; Mhlophe, 2016; Kouy S, et al., 2016).

III. METHODOLOGY

The study is based on reviewing previous researches and the Theory of Planned behavior (TPB) involved in the

review of literature. As a result, seven hypotheses were developed. Therefore, the deductive approach which is generally applied within a positivist research paradigm was more suitable to apply in this circumstance. In deductive approach, the researcher continues to collect data to test the hypotheses in the light of existing theories and principles. Furthermore, the study collected empirical data by conducting questionnaire to test the existing theory and adapted model instead of generalizing a new theory. From this perspective, deductive approach was supported and fulfilled requirement.

Besides, the study also adopted the quantitative approach because of quantification in the collection and analysis of the data and the purpose to make a generalization of the data. In specific, the researcher attempts to reach a large amount of Sri Lankan undergraduates by online questionnaire. Thus, the quantitative approach was selected for this study as it acts as a strategy that emphasizes quantification in gathering and analyzing of data which entails a deductive approach. With reference to Bryman and Bell (2007) a quantitative approach allows the researchers to collect numerical data from large sample sizes, then to be measured in a statistical manner where a large sample size ensures the possibility and credibility to make generalization of the chosen population regarding the corresponded theory.

This study focuses on investigating the relationship between different potential factors that might affect consumer purchase intention towards organic food and identify the proper influence between individual factors on consumer purchase intention, if it was positively or negatively affected. Based on these measurements constructs were developed to measure each theoretical concept and a population is also specified. As a result, this study was categorized under descriptive design which attempted to investigate the relationship between different variables. According to Saunders et al., (2009) a descriptive research design aims at formulating an understanding of situations, individuals or events. In general, a quantitative research with a descriptive research design the researcher mainly focuses on investigating the relationships between different variables.

In this study, primary data was collected by the researcher originally with the purpose of solving research questions with the use in demand of up-to-date and tailored information. According to Yin (2009) collecting primary data is claimed to be a time consuming and costly process with the risk of limited responses. However, as this study

follows a deductive approach the first-hand data would expected to be applied to increase the credibility of research findings since all the data were lately collected and specifically tailored the research questions. With reference to Ghauri and Grønhaug, (2005) primary data can be collected from experiments, interviews, focus groups, surveys, etc. Since the researcher has adopted a descriptive research design the most suitable research strategy to use is survey. Survey is a strategy which can be used in choosing many individuals from a population as a sample to gather data to make statistical generalization on a certain issue (Yin , 2009). The study adopted a cross sectional survey design as it collects data on a wide range of variables at a given time using structured questionnaires. The sample was chosen among the undergraduates of the private and government universities in Sri Lanka.

A. Target Population and Sample

According to Bryman & Bell (2007), the population refers to the all entities or the individuals who share the similar characteristics in a country, region, organization or in a group of people. In this study, the population comprises of all the consumers of organic food in Sri Lanka. As the researcher aims to analyze the purchase intention towards organic food, the target population was identified as consumers. To get an understanding on the perceptions of most of the consumers towards organic food consumption a population consisting of people aged over 18 years who purchase and consume organic food was considered for the study as it covered a considerable proportion of consumers.

A relatively small subset derived from a population with the purpose of investigating can be defined as a sample (Bryman & Bell, 2007). Based on accessibility and limited resources a sample was chosen from the above population representing the undergraduates aged over 18 years and below 28 years who consume organic food in the western province. According to statistics of 2014 Western province shows the highest contribution for the food and beverage expenses compared to other parts in the country as it has the highest population density which is around 5.6 million (Report, 2014). By considering the demographic figures across Sri Lanka, it shows that young adults aged between 15-30 years consisting about 3.5 million strong and their expenditures on food products keeps growing. (The Nielsen Company, 2014)

B. Hypotheses

- H1:** There is a positive relationship between attitudes and purchase intention towards organic foods.
- H2:** There is a positive relationship between health consciousness and purchase intention towards organic foods.
- H3:** There is a positive relationship between consumer knowledge and purchase intention towards organic foods.
- H4:** There is a positive relationship between environmental concern and purchase intention towards organic foods.
- H5:** There is a positive relationship between perceived behavior control and consumer purchase intention towards organic foods.
- H6:** There is a positive relationship between subjective norms and consumer purchase intentions consumers have towards organic food.

The following conceptual model, depicted in figure 2 was developed based on the arguments of the literature review and research objectives, to investigate the influential factors on consumer purchase behavior in the context of organic food consumption. Briefly stated, the model hypothesized the impact of attitudes, health consciousness, environmental concern, consumer knowledge, perceived behavioral control and subjective norms which eventually lead to take decision to purchase organic food.

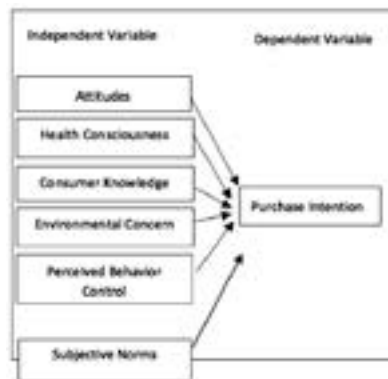


Figure 3.1: Conceptual Model
Source: Author

IV. DATA ANALYSIS

Simple descriptive statistics were used to summarize the respondent's basic features of the data collected. The demographic factors are analyzed based on the consumers' gender, age, residence, the outlets they visit mostly and monthly household income. This study adopts different types of methods to describe data such as tables, graphical descriptions and statistical commentary. The demographic factors are explained as follows.

Regarding gender, majority of the respondents were females (62%) as well as around 38% of the male contributed in this survey, with much responsibility. As the researcher has selected undergraduates as the sample all the respondents were considered as having equal educational qualifications.

The 111 respondents were categorized into three groups under different age levels of 18-21, 22-25 and 26-28. Among them age group between 22-25 accounted for the majority (52%) of the respondents who are willingly consuming organic food. Second highest rate forms at age between 18-22 which is 31% as many of the respondents in this age group are more dependent of parental influence. Finally, the last group of respondents with age between 26-28 accounts for 17%.

Among the respondents 44% of undergraduates are from urban areas and 49% from suburban and 7% from rural areas respectively. From this perspective, it is evident that the organic products are mostly consumed by people from suburban areas.

Further the highest percentage of people are in the group of income level over Rs. 100,000 with a 37%. However, there is no a large difference between the respondents with the household income of Rs. 75,000 – Rs. 100,000 and over Rs. 100,000 as it stands for 36%. There are 27% of respondents with the monthly household income between Rs. 50,000 – Rs. 75,000.

According to Hair et al., (1995) regression analysis is an analytical method which is generally used for service quality studies that involve the attitudes and perceptions of consumers or the decisions that consumers make about products. Several studies regarding organic food consumption have adopted regression analysis to assess the relationship between consumer purchase intention and the overall factors affecting on consumer purchase

intention (Yang, et al., 2014; Aryal, et al., 2009; Tshuma, et al., 2010). In this study Multiple regression analysis was used to determine the effects or impacts of several independent variables which are the factors influencing on organic food consumption on a dependent variable namely the purchase intention. Summary of Regression Analysis treating purchase intention dimensions which were accepted by the results of correlation analysis as predictors and consumer purchase intention as criterion variable was shown in Table 4.1, Table 4.2 and Table 4.3.

When considering on the R square value it indicates a positive linear relationship with the dependent variable. R square (R²) indicated the proportion of explained variance between 0 and 1, it can be interpreted as a percentage. The higher the value is, association is better proved. In multiple regression analysis adjusted R square is considered as the modified version of R squared that has be adjusted for several predictors in the model.

Table 4.1: Model summary

Model	R	R square	Adjusted R square	Standard error of estimate
1	.595	.354	.323	.478

Source – Sample survey, 2017

In terms of the relationship between factors influencing on purchase intention and consumer purchase intention towards organic food, the adjusted R² = 0.323 was statistically significant. It was suggested that the selected factors effecting on purchase intention explained 32.3 per cent of the variance in the customers 'purchase intention' towards organic food. The overall standard error of the estimate in the above table indicates how far the sample mean deviates from the population mean. According to Nolan and Heinzen, (2011) the smaller number in std. error of the estimate represent the more sample of the overall population. Reflecting to the table 4.7 value of standard error is .478 which indicates that the sample (n= 111) could be representative of the overall Sri Lankan population.

Based on the results of the ANOVA table (table 4.8), it was observed that the overall regression model was significant (F=11.515, p<0.05) under 95% of confidence level. It is parallel to the findings of Yang, et al., (2014) that the relationship between Attitude and factors

affecting on consumer purchase intention of organic food was significant and strong. With reference to the significance level in previous analysis it was found that except subjective norms the other factors including attitude, health consciousness, consumer knowledge, environmental concern and perceived behavior control indicates a high level of significance which impacts on purchase intention. The lower its value is, the higher the significance level is. Therefore, by looking at the overall significance level given in the ANOVA table which is .000 under 95% of confidence level it can be concluded that THE MODEL IS statistically significant.

Table 4.2: ANOVA

Model	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	13.157	6	2.631	11.515	.000b
Residual	23.995	105	.229		
Total	37.152	110			

a. Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention

b. Predictors: (Constant), Perceived behavior control, Environmental concern, Health consciousness, Attitude, Consumer Knowledge

Source – Sample survey, 2017

The standardized beta coefficients provided the relative importance (Table 4.9). In here, the dimension with the largest coefficient represents the most important dimension in terms of its influence on consumer purchase intention. The next largest coefficient represents the second most influential dimension and so forth. The higher the beta co-efficient, more is the contribution of factors in explaining the consumer purchase intention towards organic food.

As shown in the Table 4.9, the consumer purchase intention was influenced by all the six factors with “Attitude” as the most important factor, which achieved the strongest association with consumer purchase intention towards organic food (beta coefficient .328). It could be explained by the fact that most of the Sri Lankans are now much interested on consuming organically produced products than conventional products. With the rapid increase of non-communicable diseases mainly, in the western province people have become more conscious on choosing food outlets and they are willing to purchase organic food in the future than now. In addition, consumer knowledge also shows a beta value of .313 which is the next highest

value with a high significant value. Among all the variables in the regression, ‘perceived behavior control’ appeared to have least association (with beta coefficient = -.056) with consumer purchase intention. This shows that the perceived availability and price instills confidence in customers as the least important for influencing their purchase intention towards organic food.

When considering the significant values of individual parameters only attitudes (sig-.001) and consumer knowledge (sig. - .002) indicates significant values less than .050 under 95% of confidence level therefore the final result of regression analysis can be interpreted by using these two variables which are influencing on purchase intention of organic food in Sri Lanka.

Table 4.3: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta			
1	(Constant)	.601	.508		1.184	.239
	Attitude	.376	.112	.328	3.353	.001
	Health consciousness	.088	.099	.086	.892	.374
	Consumer Knowledge	.306	.097	.313	3.149	.002
	Environmental concern	.067	.115	.054	.588	.557
	Perceived behavior control	-.058	.096	-.056	-.602	.548

*Dependent Variable: Purchase Intention
Source – Sample survey, 2017*

The results of the above coefficient table 4.9 can be summarized as regression equation given below.

$$\text{Purchase intention} = .369 + .328 (\text{Attitude}) + .313 (\text{Consumer knowledge})$$

In conclusion, with reference to the above table we can predict the variation of the purchase intention regarding each individual factor. For instance, if attitude increase by one unit while holding all the other factors constant, purchase intention will increase by .328 units on average. Likewise, when consumer knowledge increases by one unit while holding the other factors constant, purchase intention will increase by .313 units on average.

V. CONCLUSION

Based on the results, Attitude is found as the most significant factor that influence on purchase intention of organic food products of Sri Lankan consumers. In general, it can be concluded that Sri Lankan consumers hold a positive attitude in purchasing organic food and they think it is a wise and important decision to make regarding food choice.

This study mainly adopted six factors which generally influence on purchase intention towards organic food. Based on the results, in addition to attitude, health consciousness, consumer knowledge, environmental concern, perceived behavior control proved to have apposite influence on purchase decision of organic food in Sri Lanka. This result represents that Sri Lankan consumers are more conscious about their health and most of their purchase decisions are based on the previous positive experience regarding organic food consumption. Moreover, it has been proved that the consumers have a knowledge on organic food based on their environmental friendly labelling and they are more concerned on following actions to reduce the harm to the environment. As consumer knowledge indicates a significant influential result on purchase intention it can be said that most probably the purchase intention towards organic food depends on the previous experience of purchasing, consuming, hearing from others or reading about it. Price and the availability of organic products are also proved to have positive impact on purchase intention as most food outlets in Sri Lanka have now focused on organic farming and most of the organic products are available in the local market same as the price of conventional food. In contrast, subjective norms do not show a positive influence on purchase intention towards organic food. This is mainly due to the people who are consuming organic food do not depend on the social pressure to influence themselves towards consuming or purchasing organically grown products.

The result of this study could be served as a foundation for further research about organic food in the future while exploring the effects of these antecedent variables on consumers' purchase intentions in a wider context. For instance, further studies should be pay more attention on deeply explaining each factor by using qualitative analysis methods such as interviews or focus groups. Further research can use the same model to investigate the factors and to facilitate full understanding of the consumer-

decision making process regarding organic produce while considering the tradeoffs that consumers make between values and product as well as consumer segmentation.

In terms of the sample size, a small sample of 111 respondents is not adequate in most of the instance. Since organic food products are used by most of the people regardless of the gender, age and region a considerable sample size should be used for an effective representative of the entire study population chosen from different cities rather than choosing one city only. In addition, demographic factors could be further investigated such as specifying into different ranges to observe the impact of these factors on purchase intention more clearly. Lastly, in terms of the influence of factors on consumer purchase intention, future studies could replicate it in another context such as different geographical location and cultures.

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