

## **Factors Affecting Purchase Intention of Organic Food in Malaysia's Kedah State**

### **FACTEURS INFLUANT SUR L'INTENTION D'ACHAT D'ALIMENTS BIOLOGIQUES DANS LA RÉGION DE KEDAH EN MALAISIE**

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**Abstract:** This study is about the discoveries on the factors affecting purchase intention of organic food in Malaysia. Nowadays, in today's modern world a new consumer lifestyle has emerged especially in the attitude of consuming organic food. This phenomenon has occurred because people are beginning to be aware of the importance of consuming healthy food in their daily lives. A natural, clean and good healthy food is important as there are a lot of ordinary foods that are mostly prepared with the use of unsafe additives, preservatives, flavor and coloring. The research aims to identify factors such as health consciousness, perceived value, food safety concern and religious factors and its impact towards the customer purchase intention. The findings of the study indicated that out of four factors, only perceived value and health consciousness influenced the customer purchase intention. However, food safety concern and religious factors were found to have less impact on customer purchase intention. People perceived that organic food has more nutritional value because the breeding and growth of organic food such as chicken is being done naturally without involving the use of any hormones and chemical. Furthermore, health consciousness factors are now becoming the national issues to combat the increasing obesities that are known to bring of diabetes and hypertension among people. Through the national and NGO's campaigns, people start to be aware of their responsibility to ensure good health and protect themselves from those diseases by taking healthy food and appropriate diet in their daily lives. The result has shown some differences with the

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previous literature where all factors (health consciousness, perceived value, food safety concern and religious) were found to have significant impact towards the customers' satisfaction. Future research should focus on a similar study of factors affecting customer purchase intention towards organic food products with the extended scope to all states in Malaysia. Additional variables such as freshness, presentation, taste and innovativeness of organic food products can be further examined to increase the accuracies and effectiveness of the study findings.

**Key words:** Organic Food; Health Consciousness; Perceived Value; Food Safety; Religious

**Résumé:** Cette étude porte sur les découvertes sur les facteurs affectant l'intention d'achat d'aliments biologiques en Malaisie. Aujourd'hui, dans le monde moderne, un nouveau mode de vie des consommateurs a émergé en particulier dans l'attitude de consommation d'aliments biologiques. Ce phénomène se produit parce que les gens commencent à être conscients de l'importance de consommer des aliments sains dans leur vie quotidienne. Par rapport à une alimentation saine, les aliments ordinaires sont le plus souvent préparés avec des additifs dangereux, des conservateurs, des arômes et des colorants. La recherche vise à identifier les facteurs, tels que la conscience de la santé, la valeur perçue, la préoccupation de sécurité alimentaire et les facteurs religieux et leur impact sur l'intention d'achat des consommateurs. Les résultats de l'étude ont indiqué que parmi ces quatre facteurs, seulement la valeur perçue et la conscience de la santé ont influencé l'intention d'achat des consommateurs. Toutefois, la préoccupation de sécurité alimentaire et les facteurs religieux ont été trouvés d'avoir moins d'impact sur l'intention d'achat des consommateurs. Les gens se sont rendus compte que les aliments biologiques ont plus de valeur nutritionnelle, parce que la reproduction et la croissance des produits biologiques tel que le poulet se font naturellement sans impliquer l'utilisation de hormones et de produits chimiques. En outre, les facteurs de conscience de la santé sont en train de devenir un sujet national de lutter contre l'augmentation de l'obésité qui peut produire le diabète et l'hypertension chez les gens. Grâce aux campagnes nationales et aux celles des ONG, les gens commencent à être conscients de leur responsabilité de garder une bonne santé et de se protéger contre ces maladies en prenant des aliments sains et un régime alimentaire approprié dans leur vie quotidienne. Le résultat a montré quelques différences avec les paragraphes précédents où tous les facteurs (la conscience de la santé, la valeur perçue, la préoccupation de la sécurité alimentaire et les facteurs religieux) ont été trouvés d'avoir un impact significatif sur la satisfaction des consommateurs. Les recherches futures devraient se concentrer sur l'étude similaire de facteurs qui influent sur l'intention d'achat de produits alimentaires biologiques à la portée étendue à tous les États de la Malaisie. D'autres variables comme la fraîcheur, la présentation, le goût et l'innovation de produits alimentaires biologiques peuvent être examinés davantage pour augmenter la précision et l'efficacité des résultats de l'étude.

**Mots-Clés:** aliments biologiques; la conscience de la santé; la valeur perçue; la sécurité alimentaire; religieux

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Malaysia, being a predominately Muslim country is known for its biggest Halal-hub in the world. This has increased the effort by the government in putting more attention in the preparation, processing and sourcing of the food products. One of the ways is to ensure the success of Halal-hub project is to pave way for the idea of organic food. According to National Organic Standards Board of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), organic food emphasizes the use of renewable resources and the conservation of soil and water to enhance environmental quality for future generations. Organic meat, poultry, eggs, and dairy products come from animals that are given no antibiotics or growth hormones. Organic food is produced without using most conventional pesticides; fertilizers made with synthetic ingredients or sewage sludge; bioengineering; or ionizing radiation.

Nowadays, the demand for organic food is dramatically increasing in Malaysia. The habit comes from the changes in lifestyle of the fast faced world which has seen some lack in the conventional food safety. Organic chicken for instance is different from the ordinary chicken as the breeding and growth require 'natural way' technique rather than the use of substance, vaccine and chemical to reduce the chicken maturity age. The conventional chicken growth and breeding is vulnerable to the use of unsafe and non-halal vaccine that is unhygienic and unsafe to consume. The meats of organic chicken are high in protein rather than non organic chicken which promotes antioxidant and anticancer to those who consume it. This phenomenon has evidence through the several suggestions that have been proposed for the move towards purchasing organic food especially from studies done in United Kingdom, Australia, United States and Europe as well. These include the studies of the concern for health (Magnusson et al., 2003; Lockie et al., 2002; Grankvist & Biel, 2001; Magnusson et al., 2001; Wendel and Bugge, 1997; Tregear et al., 1994), ethical, moral, political or religious motives (Honkanen et al., 2005; McEachern and McClean, 2002), the quality or safety of conventional food produces (Baker et al., 2004; Williams & Hammit, 2001), environmental consideration (Lockie et al., 2004; Schifferstein & Oude Ophuis, 1998; Grunert & Juhl, 1995) and personal values (Lea & Worsley, 2005).

Hence, the main objective of the study is to clarify the roles of four factors (health consciousness, perceived value, food safety concern and religious) in predicting the consumer purchase intention of organic foods. Several study factors were discovered from literatures such as; consumers perceive organic as a healthier alternative to conventional foods in that they contain more nutrients (Lea & Worsley, 2005; Padel & Foster, 2005; Baker et al., 2004; Lockie et al., 2004; Magnusson et al., 2001; Tregear et al., 1994) which enhance personal well being (Williams and Hammit, 2001), organic produce is also considered safer (Padel & Foster, 2005; Schifferstein & Oude Ophuis, 1998) and better in taste and more enjoyable than conventional products (Baker et al., 2004; Fotopoulos et al., 2003). Meanwhile, the whole concept of this study was based on the theory of reasoned action (TRA). TRA suggests that a person's behavior is determined by his/her intention to perform the behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). But what constitutes to predict the influence of behavior has become the main interest of the study. Previous researches had indicated that there were relationships existing between the study factors with the consumer purchase intention of organic products.

### **1.1 Relationship between health consciousness and purchase intention**

According to Davies et al., 1995, the most frequent motive to purchase organic food is because of consumers' perception that organic food is healthy to them. Health concern appears as the most important reason for purchasing and consuming organic food (Tregear et al., 1994; Wandel and Bugge, 1997; Magnusson et al., 2003; Padel and Foster, 2005). Previous researches done by Lockie et al, 2002; Grankvist & Biel, 2001; has identified interest in health as a primary motive for the purchase of organic food. In addition health consciousness has been found to predict attitudes, intention and purchase of organic food (Magnusson et al, 2003; Magnusson et al, 2001). Fotopoulos and Krystallis (2002) have their own opinion towards health consciousness that has given impact in purchase intention of organic food. The matter of increased health care through proper nutrition is a key factor influencing consumption choice.

## **1.2 Relationship between perceived value and purchase intention**

Price premiums, the excess prices paid over and above the “fair” price that is justified by the “true” value of the product (Rao and Burgen, 1992; cited in Vlosky et al., 1999), may be indicators of consumers' demand for that product (Tse, 2001). However, the premium values were greatly dependent on the food itself, different cultivation methods, way of handling that guarantees risk minimization and etc (Gil et al., 2000). The consumer perceived that organic food has the value and benefits and that's why they are willing to pay more for the price. Hutchins and Greenhalgh, 1997 noted that approximately half of the consumers of their sample were willing to pay more for organic foods, the majority of them reaching levels of 10-20 percent. Meier-Ploeger and Woodward, 1999 claimed that 52 percent of the German consumers of their sample were willing to pay more for organic fruits and vegetables, 34 percent for animal products and 39 percent for grain products. Canavari et al., 2003 mentioned that the proposed premium price for organic peaches and apples was accepted by 65.8 percent of the Italian respondents of their survey. On the other hand, Gil et al., 2000 concluded that in Spain only likely and actual Spanish organic consumers were willing to pay a premium of 15-25 percent for organic food.

## **1.3 Relationship between food safety concern and purchase intention**

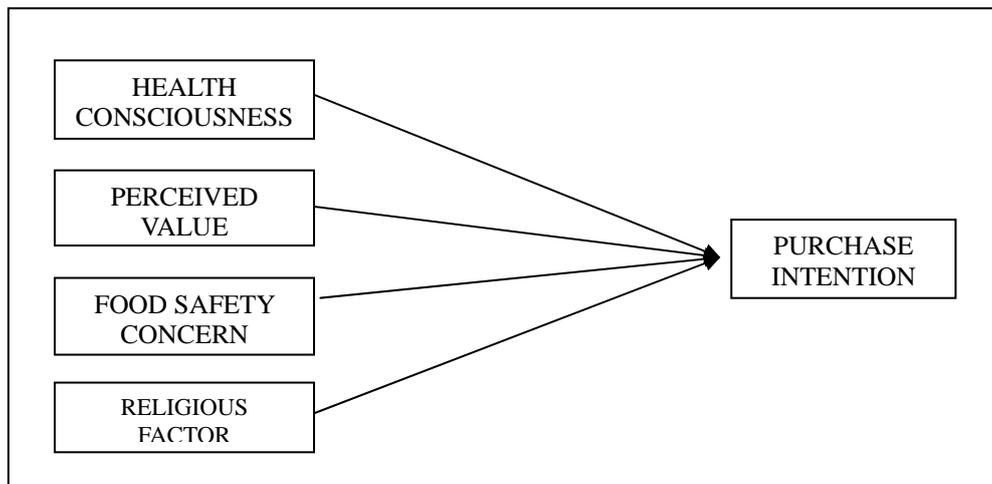
Henson, 1996 gives his opinion that customers are willing to pay for a value attached to the improvements of food safety. The author described that females and younger consumers are most willing to pay for reductions in the risk of food poisoning. The author also explained on the factors that affect willingness to pay for reductions in the risk of food poisoning are personal experiences of food poisoning, their attitudes towards food poisoning, perceived control over the risk of food poisoning and the individual customer characteristic itself. Food safety being highlighted as a motive for purchasing organic food (Padel and Foster, 2005; Schifferstein & Oude Ophuis, 1998) its relationship with attitudes and intention towards organic foods is yet to be formally modeled. Furthermore, Angulo et al., 2003 found that the Spanish consumers were concerned with the issue of food safety.

## **1.4 Relationship between religious and purchase intention**

Religiously, Muslims are asserted to only consume halal-product. According to Lada S, et al, 2009, based on a study of consumer behaviour in Malaysia, it is vital when it comes to marketing of halal products. The fact of the matter is, Muslim consumers are very similar to any other consumer segments, demanding healthy and quality products, which must also conform to Shariah requirements (Al-Harran and Low, 2008). According to Delener, 1994 and Pettinger et al., 2004, religion can influence consumers' attitude and behaviour as well as food purchasing decision and eating habits (Mullen et al., 2000; Mennel et al., 1992). In many societies, religion plays one of the most influential roles shaping food choice (Musaiger, 1993; Dindyal, 2003). Consumers would turn their attention to a well-marketed product that does not have a halal mark but they would read its ingredients, in contrast to purchasing one that has less credibility but sports a halal logo (Al-Harran and Low, 2008). It is therefore worthwhile that we take a closer look at consumer intention to choose halal-products that can be used to predict and satisfy customers and company objectives.

Therefore, this outcome has created the interest to study the possibilities of the effects in Malaysian market environment especially to the unexplored organic food industry. With such findings, it is hoped that important factors that leads to customer purchase intention towards organic food products could be explored and discovered to provide a real understanding to the phenomena that are always changing in the consumer market environment.

From the review of literature, Figure 1 depicted the proposed theoretical framework of the study:



## **2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Hypothesis Development**

Given the preceding discussion, the following hypotheses are proposed :

H1: There is no significant difference between health consciousnesses towards purchase intention of the organic food.

H2: There is no significant difference between perceived values towards purchase intention of the organic food.

H3: There is no significant difference between food safety concerns towards purchase intention of the organic food.

H4: There is no significant difference between religious factor towards purchase intention of the organic food.

### **2.2 Research Design**

This research is a quantitative research where sources of information are gathered from questionnaire. Instrument utilized was through the self-administered questionnaire containing closed-ended and scales to matrix questions. This study is interested in describing the characteristics of a population or phenomenon, thus the study is a descriptive study. This study also used hypotheses testing to determine the influence of health consciousness, perceived value, food safety concern and religious factor towards customer purchase intention of organic products. The type of sampling is probability sampling. Data collected were based on cluster sampling since the respondents were selected mainly from two big towns in the state of Kedah such as Sungai Petani and Alor Setar. These two towns are places where most of organic food restaurants and shops are located. The population estimated was 500 organic food customers. Out of the total population, 150 respondents have responded to the research survey. Pre-testing of the questionnaire was made during the pilot study. The scale was piloted amongst a sample of twenty (20) private workers and university students.

### **2.3 Data Analysis Method**

For the purpose of this study, the researcher used the Statistical Software Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 17 to compute all the data gathered from the questionnaire. The techniques of analysis used in this study were descriptive (mean, standard deviation) and inferential analysis (regression) to sum up the data collected. The questionnaires used are adopted from the questionnaires developed from past researches. In order to describe the sample characteristics in the data analysis report, demographic data (Section A) such as age, gender, ethnicity, religious, place of living and education level are included in the questionnaire. These data are structured in a range of response option, rather than seeking exact figures. In the subsequent sections, all the study variable scales are measured using Likert scale rated varying from 1 to 7 (highly disagree to highly agree). Health consciousness was constructed in seven measurement items, perceived value was constructed in six measurement items, food safety concern in six measurement items, religious factor in seven measurement items and purchase intention in five measurement items respectively. Pre-Testing of the questionnaire was made during the pilot study.

## **3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

This section presents the findings of this study. The data are interpreted using the mean, factor analysis and regression methods of SPSS.

### **3.1. Pilot Study**

Improvement has been made based from the feedback by reducing the questionnaire Likert scale rating from 1-7 to 1-5 in order to ease respondents' understanding and interpretation of each question.

### **3.2 Reliability Analysis**

From the reliability analysis, all factors including independent and dependent variables were found to be good reliability with all the Cronbach's Alpha result are of above 0.6.

### **3.3 Demographic Profile**

The result of the demographic profile shows that majority of the respondents are male (54.7%), age from 21 until 30 years old (36%), Malay in race (82.7%), Muslim in religion (83.3%), working in private sector (38%) and low to medium income group (40%).

### **3.4 Factor Analysis**

Based on KMO measure of sampling adequacy test in table 2, it was found that the factor analysis data was appropriate with the value of 0.817, which falls between the ranges of being great and appropriate of factor analysis data. Bartlett's Test was utilized with the result which indicates a highly significant result with  $p=0.000$  ( $p<0.05$ ) and therefore factor analysis is appropriate. From the results obtained in rotated matrix table 3, all five factors can be accepted with attributes required for re-shufflement and reduction. 5 items with the result of less than 0.5 were omitted and disregarded from data analysis. This reduction is possible because the attributes are related. The rating given to any one attribute is partially the result of the influence of other attributes.

### **3.5 Regression Analysis**

Table 4 shows the R-Square and Durbin-Watson test. R-Square test result of 0.503 can be accepted for the regression analysis. The Durbin-Watson test result of 1.811, an indicator that the autocorrelation is almost reaching to zero or there is a significant difference which exist between the dependent and independent variables (no autocorrelation). From the ANOVA in table 5, it appears that the three predictor variables are not all equal to each other and could be used to predict the dependent variable, brand loyalty as is indicated by F value of 15.794 and strong significance level of 0.000 ( $p < 0.05$ ). Further as shows in table 6, the results show that out of four factors, only health consciousness and perceived value are significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) influence towards purchase intention with high Beta 0.205 and 0.433 respectively. However, food safety concern and religious are less significant impact ( $p > 0.05$ ) with low Beta of -.007 and .096 respectively. The VIF value of less than 10 for all variables show that the problem of multi-collinearly have not existed and all data are mutually exclusive. As for the interpretation, the test indicates that health consciousness and perceived value have significant influence towards customer purchase intention of organic food. By examining the t statistic for all the independent variables it has apparently confirmed that health consciousness and perceived value have significant relationship due to strong significant level ( $p < 0.05$ ) with purchase intention, indicating that the null hypotheses for H1 and H2 are wrong and can be rejected. On the other hand, the null hypotheses for H3 and H4 which representing food safety concern and religious are correct and can be accepted.

### **3.6 Discussion**

The statistical results show that Malaysian consumers place relatively high level of importance on health consciousness and perceived value whereas low level of importance on food safety concern and religious factor in their intention to purchase organic food products.

For health consciousness, the results are consistent with earlier studies, which show that concerns for one's health is commonly stated factors in forming a positive attitude toward organic foods (Beharrel and MacFie, 1991; Schifferstein and Oude Ophuis, 1998; Wandel and Bugge, 1997; Williams and Hammit, 2001; Chen M.F., 2009). In recent years, lifestyle factors have become important and are applied widely in describing how consumers make food decisions (Senauer et al., 1991) Consumers in the modern society are well informed about the health issues through their own initiative and reading from newspapers, books, magazines and etc. With the recent explosion of information technologies, consumers have ready access to plenty of information. The relative influence of these information sources (personal sources, commercial sources, public sources and experiential sources) varies with the product and the buyer. As more information is obtained, the consumer's awareness and knowledge of the available brands and features increase (Kotler, 2010). All of these information sources have created the demand for organic food products due to its benefit of more nutritional value. This is true to everyone who works to earn a living where there is a need to always take care of their health. Healthy living means consuming a good food and practicing an appropriate dietary habit in one's daily life. Bad eating habit like taking more sugar, salt, and trans-fat will lead to diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes, heart attack and etc. Trans-fats and saturated fats significantly increase the risk of coronary heart disease (Mozaffarian D, 2006). With the increase of physical fitness products in the market is another indication of the emerging health consciousness among customers. Medical check-up businesses also are growing nowadays as a result from the demand changes due to this phenomenon. Public concern about health maintenance or health improvement is the main reason for buying organic foods (Schifferstein and Oude Ophuis, 1998; Tregear et al., 1994). Many consumers believe that organically grown foods are safer and provide greater health benefits than conventional alternatives and have positive attitudes toward organic products (Beharrel and MacFie, 1991; Jolly et al., 1989).

Another factor that was found to have significant impact towards the customer purchase intention of organic product is perceived value. Perceived value is not all about price alone. It is also about the benefits of having, using or consuming a product. Customers form expectations about the value and satisfaction that various market offerings will deliver and buy accordingly (Kotler, 2010). As such, if a person perceives that the outcome from performing a behavior is positive, he/she will have a positive

attitude toward performing that behavior. People consider the implications of their actions before they decide to engage or not to engage in a given behavior (Ajzen I., 1980). These perceptions are not fixed and can be changed if the product has high level of awareness, good image from marketing activities such as advertising, sales promotion and etc. Organic food products are always being portrayed in the mass media or through national and NGO's advertising efforts (health campaigns) that organic food has more nutritional value because the breeding and growth of organic food (for instance chicken) is being done naturally without involving any use of hormones and chemical. Besides that, organic food products are known for their superior quality and more freshness than conventional food. For instance, organic fruit and vegetables appeared to have more freshness as they were produced from the farms that are free from chemicals and pesticides. This natural growth product also can provide more nutrients and vitamins that are good for health. When these values have been communicated effectively, the consumers will develop positive impression which eventually could turn into the purchase, satisfaction and loyalty towards the product.

#### **4. CONCLUSION**

Based on the study, it can be concluded that the two significant factors that influence the purchase intention of organic food products are health consciousness and perceived value. In this fast moving society, one's has to always take care of his/her health. Consuming the right food (organic food) and take appropriate dietary may always bring a healthy and happy life. Through health consciousness, consumers will be more prudent in choosing the right food. Price is not a prime factor as long as the organic food can deliver more nutritional value as compared to the ordinary food in the market. All of this can happen if the benefits of organic foods can be communicated to the consumer. The more information given the more the customer will perceive organic food products as something that has value and worth buying. In contrast, less importance is being placed on the factors of food safety concern and religion. This is because the consumers could be leaving the responsibility to the respective government enforcement agencies/local authorities to look on food safety and 'halal' matters. How the matter is being carried out by the authorities are not the main concern for them. To them, as long as the sellers are certified to operate and receive 'halal' logo, it will be enough to convince them to purchase a particular organic food product in the market.

As for recommendation, it is important to increase the awareness of organic food product value and benefits in order to develop health consciousness among the consumers. This can be done by carrying out effective product awareness program in trade shows, road tours, exhibitions and advertisements on a regular basis. Secondly, there is a need to carry out effective campaigns to introduce organic food products in the market. Frequent campaigns can help to establish the positive perception of consumers towards the organic food products. Thirdly, more efforts should be placed in innovating more organic products. Certain budget for funds should be allocated on R&D of organic food to find the best way to produce more organic foods in bigger quantity at a minimum cost. Lastly, there is a need to increase the government's involvement in the development of organic food product by providing incentives and tax exemption to the organic food supply across the whole supply chain network. Private sectors also should play a role in helping the government by increasing the use of more organic raw materials in the production of food. This will increase the supply of organic food products which will indirectly create more suppliers and entrepreneurs in the organic food industry. Eventually, a cheaper cost can be passed to consumers in the form of lower and competitive prices as compared to the conventional food products in the market.

Future research should focus on a similar study of factors affecting customer purchase intention towards organic food products with the extended scope to all states in Malaysia. Additional variables such as freshness, presentation, taste and innovativeness of organic food products can be further examined to increase the accuracies and effectiveness of the study findings.

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## TABLES

**Table 1: Reliability Statistics**

Factor	Status	Cronbach's Alpha Result
Health consciousness	Independent Variable	.655
Perceived value	Independent Variable	.854
Food safety concern	Independent Variable	.732
Religious	Independent Variable	.957
Purchase intention	Dependent Variable	.938

**Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test**

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.817
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	3.049E3
	df	465
	Sig.	.000

**Table 3: Rotated Component Matrix(a)**

	Component				
	1	2	3	4	5
My family members prefer halal products	.945	.002	.029	-.006	.010
I like to choose halal products anywhere I go to get a meal	.938	-.036	.030	.002	.025
Preparation of organic food is forbidden in my religion	.906	.039	.059	.104	-.068
I do not bother to drive far in order to buy halal meal	.890	.038	.000	-.048	.092
Preparation of organic food is in harmony with my religious values	.875	.139	.112	.119	-.095
My friends would think that I should choose halal product	.856	.094	.063	-.022	.290
I expect to consume organic food	.084	.885	.257	.008	.077
I would buy organic food products	.147	.862	.207	.044	.105
I plan to consume organic food	.089	.851	.207	.076	.113
I try to consume organic food for my long term health benefits	.145	.779	.197	-.034	.292
I intend to purchase organic food produce within the next fortnight	-.043	.779	.272	.094	.258
Organic products have more freshness	.052	.208	.791	-.015	.030
Organic products have superior quality	-.069	.077	.782	.095	.131
Organic food are natural food products	.069	.161	.767	.107	.075
Organic products are tastier	.089	.278	.717	-.064	.170
Organic food has more nutritional value than conventional food	.032	.317	.670	.231	-.018
I'm really worried about food safety because of my concerns with animal diseases such as bird flu, influenza H1N1	.117	-.014	.144	.768	-.092
Quality and safety of meat nowadays concern me	.084	.243	.238	.734	-.106
I have the impression that sacrifice a lot for my health	.020	-.069	.076	.639	.330
I think it is important to know well how to eat healthily	.138	-.061	.077	.615	.232
I think that I take health into account a lot in my life	.106	.070	-.145	.584	.292
I am prepared to leave a lot to eat as healthily as possible	-.007	-.041	.063	.531	.499
I reflect a lot about my health	.024	.267	.026	.041	.739
I'm alert to changes in my health	.001	-.003	.264	.072	.739
I take responsibility for the state of my health	.032	.157	.073	.102	.686
I consider myself very health conscious	.039	.115	.011	.168	.586

**Table 4: Result of R Square and Durbin-Watson Test**

Model	R Square	Dutbin-Watson
1	0.503	1.811

**Table 5: Result of Annova Test**

Model	F	Sig.
1	15.794	0.000

**Table 6: Result of Coefficients**

Variable	Standardized Coefficients			Collinearity Statistics	
	Beta	t	Sig.	Tolerance	VIF
1 (Constant)		.299	.766		
Health Consciousness	.205	2.419	.017	.671	1.491
Perceived Value	.433	5.906	.000	.894	1.119
Food Safety Concern	-.007	-.080	.937	.690	1.449
Religious	.096	1.372	.172	.973	1.028