An Evaluation of the Influence of Social Factors on Organic Foods Buyer Behavior in Kenya

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Abstract: *The consumption of organic foods in Kenya remains low despite the country's high potential for production and consumption of organic foods. This appears inconsistent with the global trends of organic foods consumption. The purpose of this study therefore, was to examine the influence of social factors influencing organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya. The specific objectives of the study was to explore the influence of social factors on organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya. The study adopted a positivism research philosophy and a cross-sectional descriptive research design. A proportionate sample of 376 respondents was selected from the target population of 6,130 organic foods buyers from outlets selling certified organic foods in Kenya. A closed ended questionnaire was used to collect primary data for the predictor and response variables. The IBM's Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 was employed in the data analysis. The IBM's Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21.0 was employed in the data analysis. To test the reliability and validity of the research instrument, a pilot study was conducted in Nyeri and Nakuru Counties in Kenya, and a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.908 was attained which depicted a high reliability for the research instrument. Content validity was ascertained through a judgmental approach by the experts in the subject matter, while construct validity was established by use of Kaiser-Meyer Olkin (KMO) test. The study established social factors are statistically significant in evaluating organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya at 95% degrees of confidence. The study recommend that marketers should consider utilizing social factors as a key tool to stimulate progressively higher consumption of organic foods in Kenya. These factors can also be used to profile and segment the organic foods market for higher market penetration and market share.*

Keywords: Social factors, organic foods, buyer behavior

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

Globally, the interest in organically produced food products is rising as a consequence of consumer's interest in food safety, health considerations, conventional agriculture practices, animal welfare and the rising awareness in environmental protection (Wee, Ishmael, & Ishak, 2014). Over the last twenty years, a significant growth in interest for organically produced foods across the globe has been documented. The global organic food sales in monetary value have expanded from 15.2 billion US Dollars in 1999 to 132.74 billion US Dollars in 2021 (Shahbandeh, 2023). The organic food sector has evolved to become one of the world's food market sectors that has been registering the swiftest growth in the globe's food commerce. The significant growth in health awareness, changing lifestyles and global environmental concerns has initiated an increase in awareness of organic foods in several developed and developing countries. Initially considered as targeting a distinct market, organic foods have developed to be considered as conventional foods, more so in the developed economies (Chen, 2012). The organic food sector has created interest from scholars and government policy makers resulting in a significant number of studies being undertaken in the developed economies. Kenya is one of the developing economies in Africa with a growing disposable income among its population, which has led to the adaptation of western consumption trends and lifestyles. Locally, a few

dedicated organic outlets are coming up in major cities and urban centers and organic food sales are increasing as a result of the creation of awareness and buyer's perceived value of the healthy benefits of organic food consumption (Kamau, 2014). Organic standards have also been developed in the major East African economies of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania (UNEP-UNCTAD, 2006). Despite organics emerging as an important food source and experiencing exponential growth in many developed countries, its consumption is relatively low in Kenya. Further, only a few studies associated with the drivers of buyer behavior of organic foods have been conducted in the Kenya. The rationale for this study therefore, was to explore the antecedents of organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya.

1.2 Problem Statement

The global consumption of organic foods has been growing exponentially. However, this positive trajectory is more pronounced in the developed economies of North America, the European Union and some Asian countries such as Japan. In contrast, organic food consumption in the developing countries, like Kenya remains low. For instance, 85% of the organic food produce in Kenya is exported as the potential for the local market has not yet been fully optimized and remains rudimentary (Wangari, 2022). This is despite Kenya having an estimated human population 55 million in the year 2023 with an estimated annual population growth rate of 2%, coupled with a growing middle class with a higher disposable income (National Council for

Population and Development, 2020). In order to attain sustainable growth in the Kenyan organic foods industry, expanding the knowledge on the drivers of organic foods buyer behavior then becomes plausible for the organic foods stakeholders. In light of the aforesaid, this research aimed at exploring if and the extent of social factors influence on organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya in the wider theoretical and contextual gaps.

1.3 Study Objective

The objective of the study was to examine the influence of social factors on organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya with a view to inform the practitioners on the consideration of the social factors in the market for organic foods.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Theory of Buyer Behavior

The Theory of Buyer Behavior was proposed by John Howard and Jagdish Sheth in the year 1969. This model makes three assumptions; first, that buying behavior is rational, secondly, that the model is a positive theory, (objective and testable) not normative (subjective) and it further avers that product choice is systematic and can be observed in standardized ways (Howard & Sheth, 1969). The proponents of the theory advanced the initial elements of buyer behavior to include social class. Social and organizational setting encompass the group which include the family and reference groups. These are significant when it comes to consumer behavior. Social class is about categorizing people in social stratums such as wealth, education, wealth and race. The theory is significant as it integrates most of the aspects of buyer behavior. It offers a linkage between the various constructs which may have an influence on the process of decision making and reveals their association that leads to a buying decision. The model emphasizes the significance of inputs to the consumer purchase process. In addition to revealing what constitutes loyalty towards a particular product, the model provides insights on how consumers process information. It was one of the first theories to reveal as to what comprises of loyalty towards a particular product. The model facilitated in the acquisition of insights into the processes as to how buyers process information. The theory of buyer behavior weighed-in on the criterion variable of buyer behavior and offered insights to the predictors of buyer behavior; such as social class, personality and culture in this study.

2.2 The Veblenian Social –Psychological Theory

The Veblenian socio-psychological model was advanced by economist Thornstein Veblen in 1899 in his book, "The leisure Class" (Almeida, 2016; Veblen, 1899). In his view, there is stratification of the society into social classes where there is an upper social classification in material terms. Veblen referred to this class as the leisure class, where they consume what are considered as the best products, not for physical satisfaction, but for social satisfaction. Veblen described this type of consumption as conspicuous consumption, where buying decisions involved dealing with psychological, social, economic and cultural influences.

The theory postulates that the buyers' societal settings are significant determining factors of their purchasing behavior. Further, Veblen argued that what the consumer buys is motivated largely by the need of maintaining social class, status and respect, instead of their intrinsic needs. This model has six significant elements namely; culture, subculture, social class, family, income levels, and reference groups (Mitra & Majuder, 2019). The social pressure on individuals establishes certain behaviors. As a consequence, the society influences the behavior. Culture, subculture, reference groups, social classes, family and the patterns of consumption is perceived as an avenue to achieve and signal social status as buying and consumption of the more excellent goods is an indication of wealth (Moraru, 2011). This theory had a significant contribution to this study given it brought out pertinent constructs of cultural and social elements in predicting buyer behavior. This theory supported the objective that evaluated the influence of cultural factors practices on loan performance among commercial banks in Kenya.

2.3 Empirical Literature

The effect of social factors on consumer behavior was well documented by Kotler and Armstrong (2012), and Schiffman, Wisenblit, and Kumar (2016).The scholars posited that social factors included the family, groups(reference and membership), and the individual's roles and status in the society. Schiffman *et al.* (2016), observed that reference groups and the family had a significantly bigger impact on consumer behaviour.The significant effect of the family construct on organic food consumption behaviour was also supported by Bett and Kiarie (2013), in their study on analysis of organic food products consumption tendencies among urban consumers in Nairobi, Kenya. An Indonesian study by Najib *et al.* (2021), on individual and socio-cultural considerations as the drivers of buying intention for organic foods by middle class consumers, postulated that groups influence an individual's behavior. The research documented that social element had a substantially less impact on purchase intention in comparison to the three other predictors variables of culture, personality and psychological factors.

A South African study by Chauke and Duh (2019), on the marketing and socio-psychological elements affecting organic food purchase, revealed the importance of participation of the family membership in the buying decision of certain products consumed by the whole or a member of the family. The influence of socio-cultural factors on food choices was documented by Ngugi, Mwangi and Apollos (2018), in their study on socio-cultural factors influence towards food choices among households in Kiambaa Sub County, Kenya. This study revealed that the family was the fundamental social unit where social values and behavior were molded, and food preferences being a social design, could be passed through childhood to adulthood, making it difficult to face modifications later in life. The findings of this research indicated that social interactions within the family unit significantly influenced food choices. A study by Baiyegunhi, Mashambane and Sambo (2018), conducted in South Africa on the effect of socio-psychological factors on the buyer's motivation to pay

for organic food products, argued that families with young children had a higher likelihood of buying organic foods. These findings revealed that children exert a positive influence on organic foods buying behavior. The findings were in concurrence with those of a study by Chelang'a, Obare, and Kimenju (2013), on the evaluation of urban consumers' readiness to pay a superior price for African Leafy Vegetables (ALVs) in Kenya.

Chen (2012), conducted a research on organic food consumption behavior in urban China which posited that women in the family were considerably anxious about fitness, nutrition and ecological information as compared to men, when making organic foods purchases for their families.. The conclusions of this investigation were in concurrence with those of Najib *et al.* (2021). Therefore, based on the reviewed literature, it was hypothesized that: Ho1: *Social factors do not have a statistically significant influence on organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya.*

2.4 Conceptual Framework

In this study, social factors were perceived to be the stimulus for the weighted scores for buyer behavior. Buyer behavior was measured using primary data and a weighted score for the same was transformed to be continuous.

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for Social Cultural factors and Buyer Behavior

2.5 Research Gaps

Existing reviewed literature pointed that there was scanty literature on the antecedents of organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya. Prior studies by Wang *et a.l* (2019), Ham *et al.* (2015), Nedra *et al.* (2018), and Paul and Rana (2012), majorly foccused on subjective norms, health conciousness, perceived behaviour control, environmental concerns and attitude constructs. Najib *et al* (2021), study had a divergence from other prior studies on organic food buyer behaviour and focussed on cultural, social, personal and psychological factors influences on organic foods purchase intention. However, this research was carried out in Indonesia and the findings might not be generalizable to the Kenyan population given the cultural and social dissimilarities between the two countries. Majority of the previous studies related to organic food consumer behaviour

have been guided by, Theory of Planned Behavior. Wang *et al.* (2019), Aertsens *et al* (2009), Maya *et al* (2011), and Hossain and Lim (2016), adopted the Theory of Planned Behaviour amongst other researchers in their studies on organic foods consumption behaviours. The theories of Buyer Behavior by Howard and Sheth, Veblenian Socio-Psychological theory, Freud's Psycho-analytical model and the Engel-Kollat-Blackwell model have not been adequately tested in preceding studies on organic foods buyer behavior.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Philosophy, Design and Instrumentation and Data collection

This study adopted a positivist research philosophy and a cross sectional descrptive research design. The population of target was 6,130 organic foods buyers from which a proportionate sample size of 376 was selected. Primary data was collected using a structured questionnaire. The constructs for social factors do not have a direct measure and as such, a five-point ordinal scaled tool with the equivalences; strongly disagree (1) on one side with a scale, followed by disagree (2), neutral (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5) on the other side of the scale (Saunders and Thornhill (2007). The measurement of the social factors was based on opinion, belief and an attitude based on the specific organic foods buyer (s). A drop and pick method were used as data collection method. The measure for loan performance was triangulated in measurement by using a secondary measure in addition to a primary measure. The study utilized the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21 in data analysis process. SPSS was preferred owing to its systematic capabilities on a wide range of statistical analyses and presentations (Porter & Gujarat, 2009). (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2007; Malhotra & Dash, 2016).

3.2 Test of Reliability and Construct Validity of Data Collection Instrument

The reliability of the data collection instrument was assessed using Cronbach Alpha Coefficient. Internal consistency test results are presented in Table 1. The results in this Table show that reliability of this construct using Cronbach was 0.708. Cooper and Schindler (2013), pointed that a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.7 and above is acceptable for a variable in a social study. The results further show that the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Coefficient was .690 <0.5 hence confirming the variable's acceptable degree of construct validity.

Table 1: Reliability and Construct Validity Test Results

Variable	Degree of Freedom	KMO	Number of Items	Cronbach Alpha Coefficient	Decision
Test of Reliability	-	-	06	0.708	*Acceptable Reliability*
Test of Construct Validity	15	.690	06	-	*Adequate construct Validity*

3.3 Data Analysis and Presentation of Results

Data analysis was carried in three phases; that is, descriptive analysis, test of regression assumptions and then inferential

analysis. The six (6) parameters of social factors had mean of 3.263 and standard deviation of 1.145, indicating a high convergence of responses across the scale and also minimal dispersion across the respondents. This was followed by test

of regression assumptions and finally inferential analysis. Hypothesis testing was done using simple linear regression model. Model R-Square, ANOVA statistics (F Statistic and associated p-value) and regression coefficients (Beta and associated p-value) were extracted. The equation used in this study was in the form; Y/Buyer behavior = $\alpha + \beta_1 + \epsilon$; where buyer behavior (BB) is (predictand) and β_1 is social factors (predictor). This equation is supported by Garson, 2012.

4. Findings & Discussions

4.1 Response Rate

Table 2: Response Rate

Establishment	Questionnaires Distributed	Questionnaires Returned	Response Rate (%)
Farmers Market Vendors	105	73	69.5
Supermarkets	34	25	73.5
Green Groceries	184	140	76.1
Basket Schemes	23	17	73.9
Hotels and Catering	30	23	76.7
Total	**376**	**278**	**73.9**

The results in Table 2 show that out of the three hundred and seventy-six (376) questionnaires distributed to the respondents (Organic foods buyers), two hundred and seventy-eight (278) were filled and returned for analysis. In the case of the 105 questionnaires distributed to respondents in farmers market vendors category, seventy-three (73) were returned while in the case of the ones distributed to supermarkets, 25 were returned, giving a response rate of 69.5% and 73.5% respectively. The green groceries category, baskets schemes category and hotels and catering category had a response rate of 76.1%, 73.9% and 76.7% respectively. These results show that there was adequate representation of the different categories in the response and hence the overall response rate of 73.9% was deemed adequate for this study. Baruch and Holtom (2008), observed that the average response rate for studies utilizing data collected from individuals was 52.7% with a standard deviation of 20.4. Saunders & Lewis (2012), asserted that a response rate of 70% is regarded as very good for a descriptive study. This thus, affirms the adequacy of the response rate of 73.9% registered by this study.

4.2 Test of Regression Assumptions

Shevlin & Miles (2010) stated that before data analysis is done, it is important to assess a number of statistical assumptions about the distribution of the dependent variable and the properties of the variables in general. The assumptions are basically on the response variable distribution and that of the residual's distribution.

4.2.1 Test of Normality and Test of outliers for Buyer Behavior

Buyer behavior was subjected to normality test using Q-Q plot and the test of outliers using Box plot. The initial analysis showed that the data was not normality distributed and has several outliers. Owin to this further data transformation was done using Box -Cox statistical transformation method. The final results are presented in Figure 2.
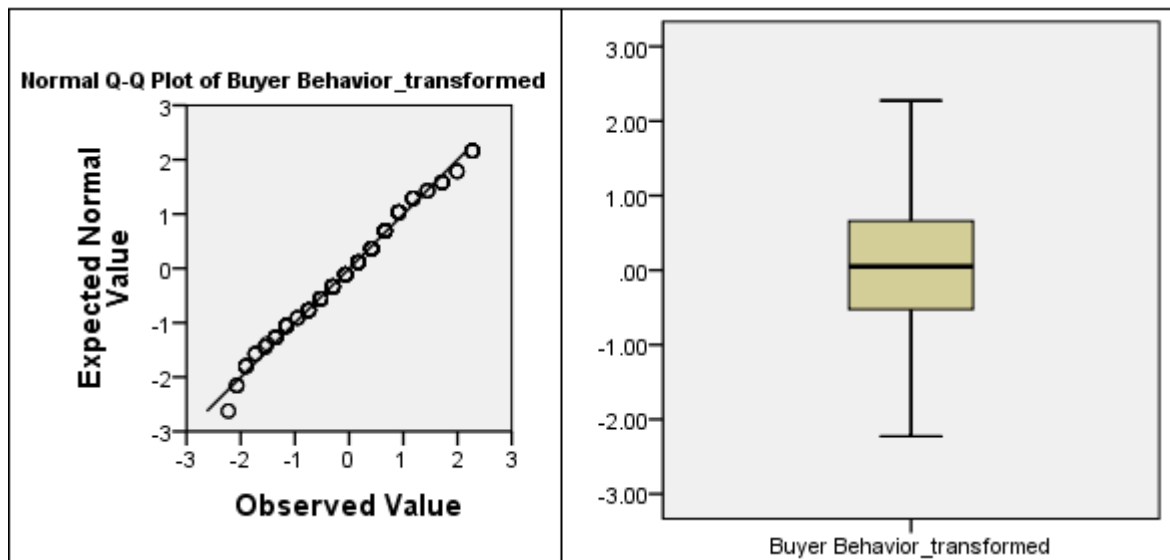

Figure 2: Normal Q-Q Plot and Box Plot for Box-Cox Transformed Scores for Organic Foods Buyer Behavior

The Figure shows that the Q-Q plot is cumulatively along the diagonal line from point (-3, -3) point (+3, +3). Further, Box and Whisker Plot indicates that the median of the interquartile range of the spread is about the middle of the Box and the associated whiskers are also about the same size on both sides of the box, meaning that the distribution is quite symmetric and hence no outliers.

4.2.2 Test of Autocorrelation for Cultural Factor Measures

The test of independence for social factors was carried out using Durbin-Watson d statistics. A Durbin-Watson d statistics of 1.608 was extracted. This was within the recommended range of 1.5 and 2.5 for an acceptable level of no autocorrelation in a variable measure and hence acceptable.

4.2.3 Test of Linearity

The predictor variable (cultural factors) and the predictand (buyer behavior) were subjected to a linearity test using Pearson's correlation coefficient (r). A correlation coefficient of 0.414* was generated at p-value of .000. This statistic implied that a linearity was present between social factors and buyer behavior. Simple linear model was considered appropriate for testing the study null hypothesis.

4.3 Inferential Results

In order to explore the influence of social factors on organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya, the following null hypothesis was tested by the study. *H_01: Social factors do not have a statistically significant influence organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya.* Scores of social factors were regressed against weighted measures of organic foods buyer behavior. Model summary, associated ANOVA and regression model coefficients were generated and the results presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Model Fitness for Social Factors and Organic Foods Buyer Behavior

Cultural Factors Model	R	R^2	Sums of Squares	F (1,276)	Beta (β)	t	Sig
Model Fitness	0.414	0.171					
ANOVA							
Regression			46.708	56.975			0.000
Residual			226.264				
Total			272.972				
Beta Coefficients							
Constant					-1.831	-.352	0.000
Social Factors					.562	7.548	0.000

Table 3 shows that the R was 0.414. This implies that social factors had a moderate correlation with organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya. In addition, the R-Square was 0.171. This implies that these factors accounted for approximately 17.1% of the variations in organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya. The Table further shows that F statistic was 56.975 and the associated p-value of 0.000< .05. This implies that the social factors had a statistically significant influence on organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya at a 5% level of significance. Based on these results the Null hypothesis (H_01) that stated: social factors do not have a statistically significant influence on organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya was rejected and instead confirmed that the factors have a statistically significant influence on buyer behavior in Kenya. Regression coefficients of the model shows that social factors have beta coefficient of 0.562 and associated p value of 0.000. This implies that a unit change in social factors is associated with a 0.562 change in organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya. The resultant simple linear regression model for the social factors is therefore;

Organic Foods BB= -1.831 + .562 (Social Factors)

The findings of this study have convergence with those of Ngugi, Mwangi, and Apollos (2018), Chauke and Duh (2019), Baiyegunhi, Mashambane, and Sambo (2018), and Chelang'a, Obare, and Kimenju (2013), whose studies documented a statistically significant influence of social factors on organic foods buyer behavior.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Conclusions

The associated ANOVA generated F statistic of 56. 975 and associated p-value of .000. Based on these two statistics, this study therefore, concludes the first study hypothesis (H_01); that, "there is no statistically significant influence of social factors on organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya" is rejected, and confirms that indeed, there is a positive and statistically significant influence of social factors on organic foods buyer behavior in Kenya at 95% level of confidence.

5.2 Recommendations

This study recommends that in application of the broader buyer behavior model(s) in Kenya and specifically the organic foods, social factors messaging can be used in the marketing of these organic foods. This is because, social factors were found to have statistically significant influence on buyer behavior among organic foods buyers in this study. These factors were deemed to be realistic and impactful and as such should be a possible preference to cultivate more buying behavior. Focus and due considerations(s) should be given to social dimensions amidst other antecedents of organic foods buyer behavior.

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