ETHICAL VALUES AND MOTIVES DRIVING ORGANIC FOOD CHOICE

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Abstract

The role of ethical motives in consumers' choice of organic food was investigated. A self-administered questionnaire was conducted on a representative sample of 1,283 Norwegian adults. A structural model was estimated in order to study the relations between ethical food choice motives, attitudes, and intention to consume organic food. Environmental and animal rights issues had a strong influence on attitudes towards organic food, meaning that the more people are concerned about these issues, the more positive attitude they have towards organic food, and the more likely it is that they will consume organic food. Also, political motives had some positive influence on attitudes, while religion was not important as a food choice criterion. Implications of our findings for marketers are discussed.

Keywords: Ethical beliefs, organic food choice, attitudes.

Introduction

The market for organic food is described as promising (Baker et al., 2004) and has been predicted to grow strongly in many European countries. Consequently, investigating drivers or motives for organic food consumption have become an important marketing research issue in recent years (Makatouni, 2002; Sparks and Shepherd, 1992; Torjusen et al., 2001). Personal values are one of the important factors found to influence organic food choice (Baker et al., 2004; Dreezens et al., 2005), as well as health issues. Shaw and Shiu (2003) argued that ethical and environmental concerns may play an increasingly important part in consumer decisions in general.

Organic food is produced according to certain criteria, which may differ slightly between countries. In general, materials and methods that enhance the ecological balance of natural systems are used in production. For example, organic food is produced without pesticides, herbicides, inorganic fertilisers, antibiotics, and growth hormones. Animal welfare is important, and bioengineering and genetically modified foods are not accepted. Given this definition of organic food, ethical issues should be of great interest to organic food marketers.

It is important for marketers to be aware of the changes in consumers' ethical beliefs. Some consumer organisations have organised boycotts when their perceptions of ethical concerns have been violated. The tuna boycott in the US because dolphins are being killed in the fishing process is an example of such a boycott (Sanyal, 2000). If marketers want to target the ethical consumer market, they need to have a profound understanding of the antecedents for ethical behaviour. Attitude towards consuming a product has been found to be one of the most important antecedents for predicting and explaining consumers' choices across products and services, including food products

(Bogers et al., 2004; Bredahl, 2001; Conner et al., 2003; Cook et al., 2002; Povey et al., 2001; Sparks et al., 1995; Stafleu et al., 1991).

In order to understand differences in attitudes, marketers need to study the antecedents for attitudes. We propose that ethical values are such antecedents. Finding segments of ethical consumers is thus crucial for product positioning. These segments are difficult to identify using the traditional socio-demographic variables because organic food consumers are present in all groups in society (Shaw and Clarke, 1999). Also, with knowledge of consumers' different ethical beliefs (environmental, political and religious), marketing communication can be based on a broader register than attitudes based on product attributes. Ethical consumers are likely to purchase products from ethically responsible companies. Despite the growing importance of ethical issues for consumers, ethics in general has been a neglected area in consumer studies. Most of the studies dealing with ethics have a managerial perspective (business ethics). The few studies where consumers have been targeted concentrate on behaviour that is 'morally questionable', like shoplifting, changing price tags, etc. (see Al-Khatib et al. 1997 for overview). Our focus is not on this type of 'moral ethics', but rather on consumers' social and environmental concerns related to food choice.

Although the relationship between food attitudes and organic food choice has been studied before (Dreezens et al. 2005; Lockie et al., 2004; Magnusson et al., 2003; Sparks and Shepherd, 1992; Squires et al., 2001), less attention has been given to the relations between ethical values, attitudes, and food choice. The main purpose of this study was thus to examine the structural relations between ethical food choice motives and attitudes towards organic food. The ethical food choice motives are measured with a scale constructed by Lindeman and Väänänen (2000). To our knowledge, the multidimensional structural relation between the ethical motives and attitude has not

been tested before. The scale is especially suited for organic food, since the choice of organic food obviously contains some ethical and environmental motivations (Magnusson et al. 2003; Wandel and Bugge, 1997). Further, we wanted to confirm the relation between attitudes and intention to consume organic food. Finally, this study is conducted on a representative sample in Norway.

Motivation and purchasing of organic food

Many of the consumer studies on organic food have considered factors that facilitate or limit organic food consumption. They have dealt with motivations to purchase organic food, including health concern, environmental concern, food safety (free from pesticides, additives, not genetically modified), sensory variables, ethical concerns, or value structure (Baker et al., 2004; Chinnici et al., 2002; Lockie et al., 2004; Magnusson et al., 2003; Makatouni, 2002; McEachern and Willock, 2004; Sparks and Shepherd, 1992; Torjusen et al., 2001; Tregear et al., 1994; Zanoli and Naspetti, 2002). Health concern is often found to be the most important factor motivating organic food purchase (Alvensleben, 2001; Harper and Makatouni, 2002; Magnusson et al., 2003; Makatouni, 2002). It is, however, debatable whether marketers can use the health claim for marketing purposes because studies on possible health effects of organically grown food are ambiguous. Rather, most of the research concludes that there is no evidence that organic food is healthier or more nutritious than conventional food (Holmboe-Ottesen, 2004; Magkos et al. 2003). Moreover, Brunsø and Scholderer (2001) found that the importance of healthiness in food choice is declining. Factors found to limit organic food choice are high price, limited availability, satisfaction with

conventional food, lack of trust, and lack of perceived value (Davies et al., 1995; Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2002; Makatouni, 2002).

Another line of studies looks upon organic food purchase behaviour as a part of broader "green" purchase behaviour, or environmentally friendly behaviour (Schlegelmilch et al., 1996). Many of these studies have used the Norm Activation Theory (Schwartz, 1977), or a modified version thereof, as a model to explain environmentally friendly behaviour (Guagnano et al., 1995; Gärling et al., 2003; Stern et al., 1993; Stern and Dietz, 1994; Thøgersen et al., 2003; Widegren, 1998). Central to this theory is the idea that altruistic (or pro-environmental) behaviour is influenced by feelings of moral obligation to act on one's personal internalised norms. These norms become activated when a person is aware of harmful consequences to others caused by a state of the environment and when the person ascribes responsibility to him/herself for changing the condition. Later, Stern (2000) developed this model into a Value-Belief-Norm theory of environmentalism, which integrates the Schwartz value theory (Schwartz, 1992), the Norm Activation Theory (Schwartz, 1977), and New Environmental Paradigm (Dunlap and van Liere, 1978) perspectives in a causal chain leading to environmentally friendly behaviour. The model implies that different types of environmentally significant behaviour are predicted by different patterns of values, norms, and beliefs. Importantly, many of the studies conclude that environmental attitudes are based on moral reasoning (e.g., Thøgersen, 1999).

Conceptual foundations and model for analysis

Several theories suggest that an individual's values are organised in a cognitive belief hierarchy consisting of global values, domain specific values, and attitudes (Rokeach, 1973; Vinson et al., 1977). The first level corresponds to the type of values defined by Rokeach (1980) and Schwartz (1992), who considered values as trans-

situational, enduring beliefs concerning desired states of existence or modes of behaviour. Global values are the most central belief category. Values are not directed towards any specific object or idea; rather, they provide standards relating to modes of conduct, goals, and evaluations (Lessig, 1975). Some values may be centrally located within a person's belief system, and may therefore be closely related to the self (Verplanken and Holland, 2002). These values can thus be considered to guide our behaviour, but are very abstract and it can be difficult to find direct relations between these values and specific attitudes (Vaske and Donnelly, 1999).

The second level concerns Vinson's domain specific values, which are beliefs relevant to economic, social, religious, and other activities through which personal values influence attitudes. Other authors refer to beliefs at this level as value orientations (Fulton et al. 1996) or food-related lifestyles (Brunsø et al., 2004). These beliefs are more numerous than basic values, but they still possess an "ought to" quality (i.e. "products I consume should be produced in an environmentally friendly way"), being more specific than personal values, but more abstract than attitudes. We define ethical food choice motives to be at this level of the value construct. Ethical food choice motives were originally introduced by Steptoe et al. (1995) in their food choice questionnaire (FCQ). Lindeman and Väänänen (2000) criticised the scale, suggesting that ethical motives were underrepresented in the FCQ, and provided a new scale for ethical food choice motives. The scale consists of three dimensions: ecological motives, political motives, and religious motives. The ecological motives reflect a strong animal rights perspective in addition to general environmental concern. The political values reflect the importance of the political acceptability of country of origin, and human rights concern. Religious motives reflect the acceptability of a food in one's religion. Earlier research has shown that environmental concern, including ecological aspects, is

an important motive for buying organic food (Schlegelmilch et al., 1996; Squires et al., 2001). Similarly, political values and religious motives are expected to influence attitudes towards organic food.

The final belief level refers to general attitudes or evaluative beliefs about products, brands, attributes, or other attitude subjects (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). General attitude is defined as a psychological tendency that is expressed by evaluating a particular object with some degree of favour or disfavour (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). The definition implies that attitudes are evaluative responses to stimuli. Traditional analyses of attitudes (e.g. Onkvisit and Shaw, 1994; Rosenberg and Hovland, 1960) have assumed that attitudinal responses can be divided into three classes: cognitive (thoughts), affective (feelings) and conative (or behavioural).Others have organised attitude structure differently. One perspective distinguishes cognitive and affective attitude components, thus leaving out the conative component (e.g., Breckler and Wiggins, 1989; Crites et al., 1994; Verplanken et al., 1998; Zanna and Rempel, 1988). However, the most prevalent view on the attitude construct nowadays is represented by Fishbein and Ajzen (1975; see also Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). These authors viewed cognitive, affective, and conative responses to an attitude object as independent constructs, i.e., beliefs as a cognitive component, attitude as an affective component and behavioural intention as a conative component. This model has been widely used over the past thirty years, and their view on the attitude construct is the perspective we take in this article.

The attitude object can be a product, an abstract entity, or as in our case, behaviour. Attitudes are also embedded in or influenced by values (Feather, 1995; Honkanen and Verplanken, 2004; Johnson and Eagly, 1989; Maio and Olson, 1994). Compared to values, attitudes are more directed towards specific situations, objects, or behaviour, and more specific than domain specific values. In addition, whereas variance in valence is

the defining quality of an attitude, variance in importance is the defining quality of values.

We propose that the distinction between ethical food choice motives and attitudes is that the meaningful variance of ethical motives and values is in importance, not in valence (positive-negative), whereas the defining characteristic of an attitude is its valence, while importance is a secondary characteristic. There is also a difference in number of beliefs: there are dozens of global values, hundreds of domain-specific values, and thousands of attitudes/beliefs in the belief hierarchy (Vinson et al., 1977).

Intention can be looked upon as "… a psychological construct distinct from attitude and it represents a person's motivation to carry out a behaviour" (Eagly and Chaiken, 1993). Intentions are generally good predictors of behaviour. Fishbein and Manfredo (1992) considered analysis of determinants of intention to perform behaviour often to be identical to the analysis of the determinants of the behaviour itself. Sheeran (2002) found in a meta-study that the overall correlation between intentions and behaviour was 0.53. In marketing and consumer behaviour literature, intention is often used as a surrogate for buying behaviour, choice, and loyalty (Dennison and Shepherd, 1995; Kozup et al., 2003; Shaw and Shiu, 2001; Thompson et al., 1994). In many studies on food, attitudes are found to be the most important predictor of intention to buy that food (McCarthy et al., 2004; Povey et al., 2000; Thompson et al., 1994). We expect that the relation between attitudes and intention in our study will be positive and significant.

The relationship between personal values and product attitudes has been problematic although significant relationships have been found (e.g., Homer and Kahle, 1988; Vaske and Donnelly, 1999). Many of the studies have, however, shown disappointingly low relations between values and attitudes (Kristiansen and Hotte,

1996). This may be due to the abstract nature of global values. Personal values are widely shared by people within a culture, and may not explain much of the variance in product attitudes or intended behaviour. Dreezens et al. (2005) found that beliefs about organic food mediate the relation between values and attitudes. We suggest that studying ethical beliefs at the food level may help explain the foundation of attitudes towards and intention to consume organic food. Based on the above discussion, we suggest the conceptual model presented in Figure 1.

TAKE IN FIGURE 1

Method

Sample and design

The data used in this study are part of a larger survey of Norwegian consumers' perceptions of different foods. A self-administered postal questionnaire was used as a research instrument. Two thousand five hundred questionnaires and prepaid return envelopes were sent to a representative sample of the Norwegian population. The participants were pre-recruited by telephone in advance in order to ensure better response. One thousand six hundred and three questionnaires were returned (64%), of which 1,283 were usable. Of the participants, 48% (n = 621) were male, while 52% (662) were female. The average age of the participants was 47 years.

Measurement of the constructs

Ethical food choice motives were measured with a scale developed by Lindeman and Väänänen (2001). The scale consists of 11 items that make up three dimensions: ecological, political, and religious food choice motives. The ecological motives scale consists of five items: "Has been produced in a way that has not caused animals to experience pain", "Has been produced in a way that respects animals' rights", "Has been prepared in an environmentally friendly way", "Has been produced in a way that has not disturbed the balance of nature", and "Is packaged in an environmentally friendly way". Political motives were measured with four items: "Comes from a country I approve of politically", "Comes from a country in which human rights are not violated", "Has the country of origin clearly marked" and "Has been prepared in a way that does not conflict with my political values". Religious motives were measured with two items: "Is not forbidden in my religion" and "Is in harmony with my religious views". All items were measured with a 7-point semantic differential scale, labelled from 1 (totally unimportant) to 7 (extremely important).

Attitude towards consumption of organic food was measured with three 7-point semantic differential scales: "Bad-Good; Unpleasant-Pleasant; Unsatisfying-Satisfying", coded from 1 to 7. These items are commonly used in food-related studies (see e.g., Armitage & Conner, 1999).

Choice of organic food was measured as an intention to consume organic food. The scale consisted of three items, indicating how often the subjects expected, planned, or tried (see for example Conner et al., 2002) to consume organic food during the next two weeks (from 0 to 14 days), coded from 0 to 14. We chose a frequency measure because it is deemed the most appropriate scale to use when the behaviour in question is repeated behaviour, as food choice is (see e.g., Courneya, 1994).

Results

Analytical procedures

Descriptive statistics were studied first with focus on mean and correlations. Next, the construct structures were confirmed by confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) with LISREL 8.54 (Jöreskog and Sörbom, 2003). Covariance matrix was used as input, and maximum likelihood method was used for estimation procedures. Finally, a structural equation model was estimated to explore the relations between ethical values and attitude towards consuming organic food on one hand, and attitude and intention to consume organic food on the other.

The traditional χ^2 was reported as a fit measure, although it is quite sensitive to large sample size. We therefore chose to report three additional fit measures: Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), Goodness of Fit Index (GFI), and Comparative Fit Index (CFI). Acceptable models should have an insignificant χ^2, RMSEA < 0.08, and GFI and CFI greater than 0.90 (Browne and Cudeck, 1992).

Descriptive results

Table 1 shows the univariate statistics for the constructs in the study. The results show that all constructs are correlated, with the exception of religious motives, which were only correlated with other ethical food choice dimensions. Ecological food choice motives received a high mean score (5.3), political motives had a somewhat lower score, but were still considered important. Religious motives were not important to the subjects (mean = 2.49). In fact, 96% of the sample did not consider religious motives important. This result confirms the result in Lindeman and Sirelius (2001), suggesting that religious motives are not important in influencing food choice. The mean attitude

score was positive and high. Table 1 also shows that the mean score of intention to consume organic food was slightly more than once a week.

"TAKE IN TABLE 1"

Validation of measures by CFA

A confirmatory factor analysis for the measurement model with five constructs was performed. The model fit was just beyond acceptable limits: RMSEA = 0.088, GFI = 0.90, and CFI = 0.95. The factor loadings varied from 0.59 to 0.97. For ecological motives, items one and two in the original scale were found to correlate very highly, so the second item was excluded in the final model. Item 5 was also excluded from the study because of high loading to the political motives as well as ecological motives. Political motives were measured by three items in our final model: "Comes from a country I approve of politically", and "Comes from a country in which human rights are not violated", and "Has been prepared in a way that does not conflict with my political values". The item "Has the country of origin clearly marked" was excluded because it does not seem to be primarily an ethical concern.

The final measurement model results were good, indicating good reliability, although the chi-square value was significant (chi-square = 247, df = 67). RMSEA was 0.046, GFI = 0.97, and CFI = 0.99. Internal consistency was assessed by item reliability (loading), the composite reliability measure and variance extracted. Table 2 shows the factor loadings, composite reliability, and variance extracted for the measures in the model. All factor loadings were significant, and varied between 0.68 and 0.97, satisfying the convergent validity criteria (Bagozzi et al., 1991). The composite

reliabilities varied from 0.83 to 0.97, satisfying the criteria of 0.6 (Bagozzi et al., 1991). The variance extracted varied between 0.62 and 0.91, thus satisfying the criteria of 0.6.

"TAKE IN TABLE 2"

Structural model

Figure 2 shows the relations between ethical food choice motives, attitudes towards consuming organic food, and intention to consume organic food. The chi-square for the model was significant and large (257, df = 70), but the other fit measures were good: (RMSEA = 0.046, GFI = 0.97, CFI = 0.99). The explained variance for attitude was $R^2 = 0.13$ and $R^2 = 0.15$ for intention.

"TAKE IN FIGURE 2"

The positive path coefficient between ecological motives and attitude was quite strong and significant, while the path between political motives and attitude was significant but weaker. The religious motives were even lesser related to attitudes, as expected. The path between attitude and intention was significant and positive, as expected.

Discussion

The purpose of this paper was to investigate relations between ethical food choice motives, attitude towards organic food, and intention (choice) to consume organic food in a representative Norwegian sample. We found a significant relation between the three ethical value dimensions and attitudes. We also found a significant relation between attitude and intention to consume organic food.

Ecological motives had the strongest impact on attitudes, indicating the important role of environmental and animal welfare concerns in forming attitudes towards consuming organic food. This means that the more concerned people are with environmental and animal rights issues, the more positive attitudes they have towards organic food. Ecological motives were considered very important in our sample, with a mean score of 5.3 on a scale from one to seven. This confirms findings in other studies (Squires et al., 2001; Harper and Makatouni, 1995; Makatouni, 2002).

Also, political motives had a positive impact on attitudes towards consuming organic food, indicating that countries of origin should be politically acceptable for consumers. We suspect, however, that environmentally-concerned individuals (like organic food consumers) are also interested in avoiding pollution in transportation of the food. This means that it should be produced quite near to the sales point, if possible. Also, the organic nature of the food without any additives implies a nearby production. This could mean that political issues are more important to other foods than organic, for which this may, in fact, be irrelevant. For other foods, the fair trade and human rights perspective may be more important than the ecological concern.

Religious motives had only a minor influence on attitudes, as expected. The survey was conducted in Norway, where the dominant religion (Lutheran) does not forbid any foods. The results would probably differ in countries with other dominant religions that have stricter rules for what is and is not acceptable (countries with Jewish religion, Islam, Hinduism, or Catholicism).

The relation between attitude and intention was positive, as expected, and quite strong, indicating that consumers with positive attitudes towards consumption of organic food are more likely to form intentions to consume such food, thus converting

positive attitudes to intentions. This is in accordance with studies by, for example, Saba and Messina (2003); and Sparks and Shepherd, (1992).

The explained variance of attitude towards consuming organic food was 13%, which is acceptable taken into account that the model included only ethical values as predictors. Many other potential factors can influence attitude towards consumption of organic food, such as health concern, sensory attributes, personality factors, (Shepherd and Sparks, 1994), price, etc. The explained variance of intention to consume organic food was 15%. It is likely that other variables also come into consideration here, like price and availability, as documented in other studies (Baker, 2004; Chinnici et al., 2002; Lockie et al. 2004). Our study shows, however, that ethical values give an important contribution to explaining attitudes.

A future study should look at actual behaviour in relation to attitudes and ethical values. The organic food market has not developed as expected in all countries, even though opinion polls show that the majority of people have very positive perceptions of organic food. Variables other than intentions may influence behaviour, such as price, availability, sensory properties, habit, etc. (Norman et al., 2000; Verplanken et al., 1998; Verplanken and Faes, 1999). Whether the discrepancy between attitude and behaviour is an effect of other variables that influence or moderate behaviour or social desirability in surveys, is an area that should be studied further. Another interesting future topic could be studies about potential relations between organic food and vegetarianism or political activism. Obviously, the ecological motivations underlying organic food choice and vegetarian diet choice are quite similar (Jabs et al., 1998; Povey et al., 2001).

Implications

This study has shown that ecologically oriented consumers are more likely to form intentions to consume organic food, thus making them a natural target for organic food marketers. Consumers who are concerned with fair trade and human rights may be another important segment.

The results suggest that marketers of organic products may appeal to two levels in the belief hierarchy in their communications: the ethical belief level or the attitude level (based on product attributes). This means that the demand of organic products may be enhanced either by appealing to general ethical and ecological beliefs or by appealing to the attitudinal beliefs based on the attributes of organic products. Also, one could appeal to the potential advantages of consuming organic products. Global values, which were not measured in our model, may be an additional level in the belief hierarchy that can be appealed to in marketing (Vinson et al., 1977). Dreezens et al. (2005) found that universalism values had an impact on attitudes towards organic food, thus providing another path to influencing attitudes. Generally, the deeper a belief is located in the belief hierarchy, the more stable it is. Thus it is an obvious advantage if personal values can be activated and related to organic food.

There may be consumers who are environmentally interested, but who are not active consumers of organic food. The marketers' goal would then be to create positive intentions towards organic products among non-users. Actually, universalism values (which are motivated by concern for protecting nature) are important to most people. They may not, however, see the link between these values and organic food. Therefore, activating universalism values or ethical beliefs (Verplanken and Holland, 2002) may enhance the likelihood of choosing organic products, thus increasing the market share for such products. There may thus be more potential in the organic food market than its current status shows.

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Table 1. Correlations and means for the model constructs

	Ecological motives	Political motives	Religious motives	Attitude	Intention	Mean
Ecological motives	1					5.27
Political motives	0.56	1				4.50
Religious motives	0.15	0.33	1			2.49
Attitude	0.38	0.26	0.02 ns.	1		5.33
Intention	0.35	0.14	0.03 ns.	0.35	1	2.45

All correlations are significant at 0.01 level unless otherwise indicated.
ns.: Not significant.

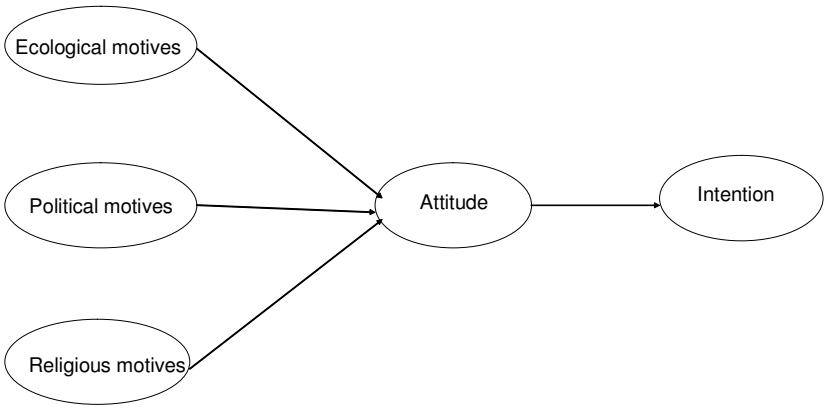
Table 2. Confirmatory factor analysis for the constructs

Constructs and indicators	Standardised factor loading	t-value	Composite reliability	Variance extracted
Ecological motives			0.84	0.91
Produced without pain to animals	0.68	26.09		
Environmentally friendly production	0.89	36.58		
Produced without disturbing nature	0.80	31.82		
Political motives			0.83	0.73
From a politically acceptable country	0.85	34.25		
From a country with no violations of human rights	0.78	30.90		
Has been prepared in a way that does not conflict with my political values	0.73	27.97		
Religious motives			0.94	0.63
Is not forbidden in my religion	0.96	32.68		
Is in harmony with my religious views	0.93	31.87		
Attitude			0.89	0.62
Good/bad	0.68	27.20		
Pleasure	0.93	41.58		
Satisfaction	0.93	42.07		
Intention			0.97	0.63
Expect to consume	0.96	46.19		
Plan to consume	0.97	47.43		
Try to consume	0.93	44.18		

Composite reliability: $(\Sigma \text{ std. loading})^2 / ((\Sigma \text{ std. loading})^2 + \Sigma\epsilon)$

Variance extracted: $\Sigma \text{ std. loading}^2 / (\Sigma \text{ std. loading}^2 + \Sigma\epsilon)$

Figure 1. A conceptual model for the suggested relationships



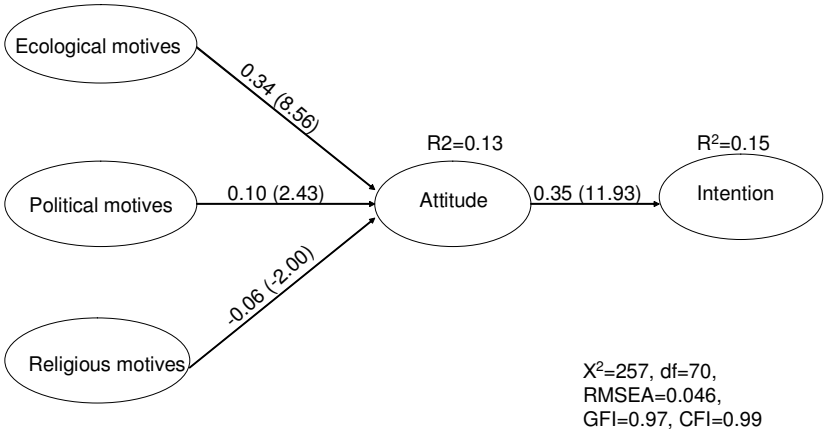


Figure 2. Relationships between ethical food choice motives, attitudes, and intention to consume organic food

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