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The Big Five personality traits as predictors of organic food purchase intention: Evidence from an emerging market

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ABSTRACT

The personality of an individual is a strong behavioral determinant that can have a profound impact on consumption-related decisions. A sound understanding of consumers' personality traits and their impact on their decision making can enhance the predictability of their consumption-related behaviors. Hence, the present research probes into the consumer's intention to purchase organic food in the context of an emerging market (India). Big five personality traits; agreeableness, extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (emotional stability) were taken into account to examine the relation between individual personality and buying intent for organic food. Through the survey method the data was collected from 646 respondents. The proposed theoretical model was empirically examined using the two-step approach. Firstly, validity and the reliability of the scale was assessed using measurement model (CFA) and then Structural model (SEM) was employed to test the hypothesized association between personality traits and buying intent for organic food. The findings indicate that agreeableness, extraversion, openness to experience, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (emotional stability) correlate positively with buying intentions for organic food. This study is amongst the few attempts made for investigating the

consumer behavior for organic food in an emerging market. Hence, it contributes to the consumer behavior literature and provides important insights to the marketers of organic food.

1. Introduction

Increased use of chemical inputs such as pesticides in production of food has led to an upsurge of demand for organic food because consumers consider it a healthy and safe alternative of conventional food (Bruschi *et al.*, 2015). The growing concern towards health makes consumers more careful about their food choices as they want to avoid adverse effects of pesticides on their bodies and for this they are even ready to pay premium (Tung *et al.*, 2012). As reported by Paul and Rana (2013), health-conscious consumers are preferring organic food over the conventional food since they consider organic food a healthy choice due to its production without synthetic chemicals (Suprpto and Wijaya, 2012). Moreover, organic food is approved and accepted by not only consumers of developed nations of Europe like Germany, Italy, France, Switzerland and nations of North America, but also consumers in emergent nations like India and China have started accepting it (Patel *et al.*, 2017). Consequently, this popularity has evoked curiosity towards the organic food consumption among the researchers resulting in development of enormous literature in this area, much of which is focused on psychological, societal and personal factors' influence on organic food consumption (Chang *et al.*, 2013; Sondhi, 2014; Mainardes *et al.*, 2017; Kaynak and Ekşi, 2014; Liang, 2016; Paul and Rana, 2013; Tleis *et al.*, 2017).

Extant literature indicates health and environmental concerns as the key drivers of organic food consumption (Essoussi and Zahaf, 2009; Paul and Rana, 2012; Prince and Krairit, 2017; Sondhi, 2014; Xie *et al.*, 2015). In addition, lifestyle is also an important factor influencing consumer behavior and consumers' growing concern towards poor and unhealthy lifestyle related health issues such as heart diseases and diabetes, made them diet conscious (Menrad, 2003). Therefore, organic food items have become an important part of consumers' daily diet (Tleis *et al.*, 2017). In relation to that food related habits are important indicators of consumers' food preferences (Liang, 2016). Further, many studies have investigated the rationale behind buying and consuming organic food items and results indicated consumers' concern for their health and safety was the main cause (Garcia and Teixeira, 2016; Xie *et al.*, 2015). Various studies have suggested that consumers with positive health related behaviour are the regular buyers of organic food (Eisinger-Watzl *et al.*, 2015; Aslihan Nasir and Karakaya, 2014; Kesse-Guyot *et al.*, 2013). Such consumers while buying food items use animal welfare as a sign of safe product. Hence, ethical consideration of consumers while choosing their food is also one of the crucial factors which leads to

the consumption of organic food items (Harper and Makatouni, 2002). In addition, increased environmental awareness has also made consumers more responsible towards their environment (Chaturvedi et al., 2020) which serves as another key determinant that may motivate consumers to buy organic food (Vega-Zamora et al., 2019; Essoussi and Zahaf, 2009;). Some studies have also examined the belief of consumers towards organic food and have discovered that consumers believe that it is more nutritious and more scrumptious than conventional food (Sondhi, 2014). Some authors have studied the correlation of attitudes and subjective norms with buying intentions of organic food (Al-Swidi et al., 2014; Teng and Wang, 2015). These studies revealed that buying intent for organic food items is influenced by attitude and subjective norms (Al-Swidi et al., 2014). Further, personal values of consumers' determine their buying intent for organic food items. These values are conservation, openness to change and self promotion (Mainardes et al., 2017).

Personality of consumers is also one of the most important internal influence that may affect decision making process with regard to organic food. Chang et al., (2013) have analyzed the relation of consumer's personality with their health-consciousness and have discovered that open, conscientious, and extroverted personalities are likely to be more health-conscious. Kaynak and Ekşi (2014) have investigated the relation of consumers' health consciousness and personality traits using big five model and their study revealed that conscientiousness and agreeableness positively related with health-consciousness. As health-consciousness is a strong driver behind inclusion of nutrient rich food. Consequently, it leads to the purchase of organic food (Paul and Rana, 2012). While purchasing organic food health-conscious consumers prefer organic vegetables, fruit and wholegrains products because of their healthy dietary habits (Kesse-Guyot et al., 2013). Extant literature on organic food consumption reveals that internal influences (Lifestyle, Attitude, Values, Beliefs, and Motives) have been a central point amongst the authors. However, studies investigating the link of personality traits with buying intent of organic food are still scant. Therefore, it is necessary to comprehend the role of consumer's personality in affecting the buying intent for organic food.

Although the organic food market in India is still at a nascent stage, the Indian government is continuously promoting the growth of organic food market by extending financial support to farmers for adopting organic farming. Several government schemes like National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY), Paramapragat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) etc. have been implemented to promote the organic farming in India (Priyadarshini and Abhilash, 2020). Further, increased disposable income and interest of consumers towards their health sets the stage for the organic food industry. This study was carried out on young consumers of India because out of total population about 65% of Indian nationals fall in under-35 years of age category

(Ministry of Youth Affairs and Sports, 2017-18). Hence, young consumers constitute a significant portion of the society. Therefore, it is essential to gain accurate and deep understanding of such consumers' behavior with respect to organic food. Thus, the present study aims at exploring the association of personality traits of with their buying intent for organic food.

2. Literature review and proposed model

Personality traits are found to be important determinants of health behaviors (Bessey, 2018). It has been widely accepted that personality traits are best described using five components namely openness to experience, agreeableness, extraversion, conscientiousness, and neuroticism (Norman, 1963; Goldberg, 1993; McCrae and Terracciano, 2005; Costa and McCrae, 2010).

2.1 Organic Food and its relation with health-consciousness

In recent years, the popularity of organic food has gained momentum throughout the world. The production of organic food involves natural substances and it is free from harmful chemicals, conventional pesticides, antibiotics, herbicides, etc. (Rana and Paul, 2017; Suprpto and Wijaya, 2012). Such nature of organic food makes its healthy and safe for consumption. Therefore, to avoid health and food- related risk health-conscious consumers increasingly prefer organic food items over conventional food items (Kim, 2019; Konuk, 2018; Nasir and Karakaya, 2013; Paul and Rana, 2013). Health-conscious consumers are worried about their health and which in turn also influences their everyday activities (Jayanti & Burns, 1998). As the health-consciousness increases in consumers it leads to more favorable attitudes towards organic products (Paul & Rana, 2010) because they consider organic products harmless to human health and safer than conventionally produced food (Hoefkens et al., 2009).

2.2 Extraversion

People with higher levels of extraversion have a propensity to be active, energetic, excitement seeking, talkative, sociable assertive, gregarious, warm, and have positive emotions (McCrae and Costa, 1992). Extroverts enjoy human interactions and their care for society increases their interests for ecological sustainability and society's health (Kaynak and Ekşi, 2014). Extrovert individuals enjoy being around other people as they like socializing and developing relationships with others (Albuquerque et al., 2012). Further, extraversion has a positive correlation with health consciousness (Jerram and Coleman, 1999). High scorers on extraversion are likely to have positive health behaviour. They avoid all sorts of negative health habits which may cause harm to their health and they engage themselves in health promoting activities like following healthy diet, and getting sufficient sleep (Kikuchi et al., 1999). Therefore, it would be rational to presume that:

H1 : Higher degree of extraversion enhances the purchase intent for organic food.

2.3 Agreeableness

Agreeable individuals exhibit higher levels of altruism, considerate, modesty, kind, compliance, trust, straight-forwardness, sympathy and tender-mindedness (Costa and McCrae, 1992). Higher scorers on this trait are likely to be cooperative, good-natured, and gentle (Roccas et al., 2002). In a recent study agreeableness correlated negatively to the probability of risky health-related behaviour (Bessey, 2018). Kaynak and Ekşi, (2014) have found that agreeableness correlate positively with health-consciousness. Individuals, with high degree of agreeableness, exhibit positive health behaviour (Allen et al., 2015). Hence, from the above discussion it can be hypothesized that:

H2: Higher degree of agreeableness enhances the purchase intent for organic food.

2.4 Conscientiousness

Conscientious individuals tend to be deliberate, self-disciplined, achievement striving, dutiful, orderly, and competent. Such individuals have a high concern for their health (Kaynak and Ekşi, 2014). In some studies it was found that conscientiousness correlates positively with preventive health-related behaviours (i.e. exercising, eating healthy) and it correlates negatively to risky health-related behaviours (i.e. alcohol and tobacco consumption) (Bogg and Roberts, 2004). Conscientiousness positively influences the health motivation. Furthermore, health-conscious consumers are likely to follow a healthy diet (Sun et al., 2014). Conscientious individuals tend to have healthy eating habit so they are careful about what they eat (Hampson et al., 2007). Hence, it can be hypothesized that;

H3 : Higher degree of conscientiousness enhances the purchase intent for organic food.

2.5 Openness

Open people are more curious, creative and motivated to explore information (Kaufman et al., 2015). Openness correlates positively with healthy eating habits and nutrient intake is higher among individuals who score high on this trait (Tiainen et al., 2013). High scorers tend to eat healthy food and reflect positive health-related behaviour (Mottus et al., 2013; Sutin and Terracciano, 2015; Keller and Siegrist, 2015). In their study Goldberg and Strycker (2002) found that openness stimulates healthy eating behaviour and weakens detrimental eating habits.

H4 : Higher degree of openness enhances the purchase intent for organic food.

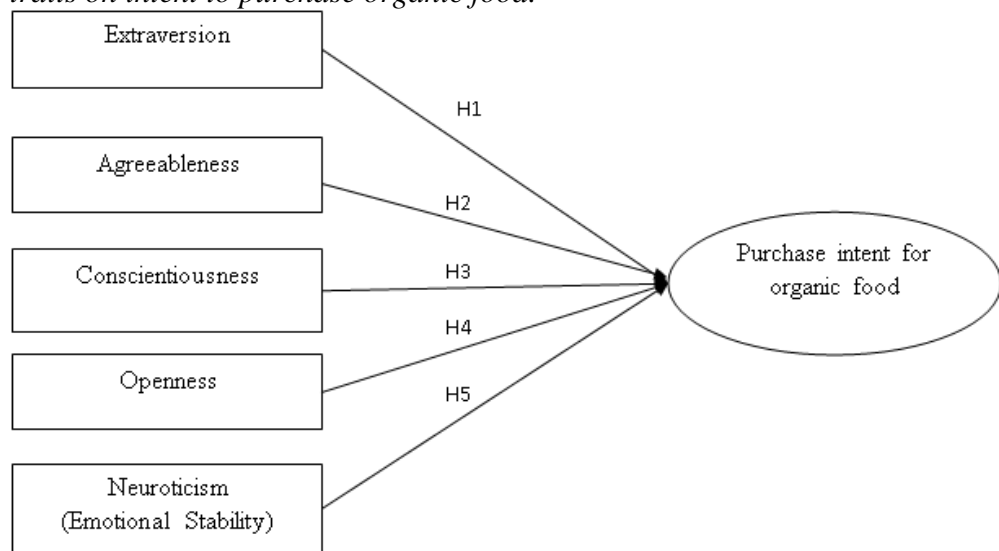
2.6 Neuroticism(Emotional Stability)

Neuroticism refers to worry, depression, irritability, sadness, anxiety, hostility, guilt, anger, self-consciousness, and vulnerability (Costa & McCrae, 1992; Goldberg, 1993). Higher scorers on neuroticism are likely to have poor health related behaviour as they experience excessive negative

emotions and stress (Friedman, 2000). Excessive negative emotions can also affect their food choices which may have adverse effect on their health (Keller and Siegrist, 2015). Low scorers on neuroticism were found to be high scorers on health aware diet (Mottus et al., 2013). However, neuroticism is not always bad for health and high scorers on neuroticism may have good health behaviors as speculated by Friedman (2000) but there is scarcity of research supporting positive relation between high scorers on this trait and positive health related behaviour. Therefore, the following hypothesis is proposed;

H5 : Emotional stability enhances purchase intent for organic food.

Figure1: The conceptual model depicting the effect of Big Five personality traits on intent to purchase organic food.



3. Research Method

The survey was carried out on the students of an Indian university in January and February 2020. Convenience sampling technique was adopted for data collection. Structured questionnaires were distributed across various campus locations of university including the student centers, fitness centres, departmental stores, computer labs, libraries, bookstores and parks. While selecting the cases for sample due care has been taken to ensure an adequate representation of population. Out of 820 questionnaires distributed and 698 received, a total of 646 usable questionnaires were obtained and analysed, yielding a 78.7% response rate. The sample included 48% male and 52% female students; 57% were under the age of 22; 43% were below the age of 26 and; 61% were enrolled in undergraduate program, while 39% were enrolled in postgraduate program. The responses were gathered by employing a self-administered questionnaire which contained lists of precoded items, each construct was measured on a scale from one (1) to five

(5) (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire included three parts: (a) the Big Five traits; (b) purchase intention for organic food; and (c) sociodemographics (age, gender, education). For understanding individual differences in personality a 20 item scale (mini-IPIP)-Big Five factors of personality (Donnellan et al., 2006) was operationalized which is widely accepted as a smaller form of the International Personality Item Pool (IPIP) consisting 50-items (Goldberg, 1999). Further, five items from two previous studies (Kareklas et al., 2014; Liang, 2016) were adopted to measure purchase intent for organic food.

4. Analysis and discussion

The two-step approach was followed to assess the theoretical framework (Anderson and Gerbing, 1988), firstly the validity and the reliability of the constructs were examined using CFA. further hypothesized relationship among constructs was examined by using structural model (structural equation modelling). SPSS and AMOS V.22.0 was used to perform the analysis.

4.1 Measurement Model

Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) was used to estimate the validity and reliability of the scales. The result of CFA showed that the model is plausible. ($\chi^2 = 649.089$, d.f. = 256, $p = 0.000$; $\chi^2/df = 2.53$, CFI = 0.953, TLI= 0.945, GFI= 0.925, IFI = 0.954, RMSEA = 0.049. All the values fall in acceptable threshold levels as suggested in previous studies (Schumacker and Lomax, 2004; Steiger, 2007). Cronbach's α was estimated for assessing the internal consistency. The value ranges from 0.825 to 0.901 which is within the commonly allowable limit of 0.70 (Hair et al, 2010).

Composite Reliability (CR), Average Variance Extracted (AVE) and Factor Loadings were examined for assessing discriminant and convergent validity. The values of standardized factor loadings were satisfactory as all the variables exceeded the cut off value of 0.6 and above. As suggested by Hair et al. (2006), the values of AVE are also within the acceptable limit (A.V.E. ≥ 0.5) as these values are ranging from 0.55 to 0.65, (Hair et al., 2006). Additionally, the value of square root of AVE is greater than the inter-construct correlation suggesting appropriate discriminant validity (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). The composite reliability was also above .80, showing within scale consistency of various items used in this research (Bagozzi & Yi, 1988).

The above discussed results suggest good discriminant and convergent validity for the proposed theoretical framework. Table 1 shows the summary of the values of CFA results.

Table 1 *Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) Results*

Factor	Standardized loadings
Extraversion (EXT) (Cronbach's α = 0.82; CR = 0.83; AVE = 0.55; square root of average variance extracted (AVE) = 0.747)	
EXT1-Am the life of the party	0.71
EXT2- Talk to a lot of different people at parties	0.85 0.80
EXT3- Don't talk a lot	0.58
EXT4-Keep in the background	
Agreeableness (AGR) (Cronbach's α = 0.88; CR = 0.87; AVE = 0.63; square root of average variance extracted (AVE) = 0.796)	0.87 0.70
AGR1-Sympathize with others' feelings	0.77
AGR2- Feel others' emotions	0.82
AGR3- Am not interested in other people's problems	
AGR4-Am not really interested in others	
Conscientiousness (CON) (Cronbach's α = 0.86; CR = 0.87; AVE = 0.63 ; square root of average variance extracted (AVE) = 0.797)	0.81 0.72 0.81 0.82
CON1-Get chores done right away	
CON2- Like order	
CON3- Often forget to put things back in their proper place	0.72
CON4-Make a mess of things	0.78 0.72
Openness (OPN) (Cronbach's α = 0.84, CR = 0.84; AVE = 0.57 ; square root of average variance extracted (AVE) = 0.757)	0.78
OPN1-Have a vivid imagination	0.88
OPN2- Have difficulty understanding abstract ideas	0.77 0.69
OPN3- Am not interested in abstract idea	0.78

OPN4-Do not have a good imagination	
Emotional Stability (ES) (Cronbach's α = 0.85, CR = 0.84; AVE = 0.58 ; square root of average variance extracted (AVE) = 0.764	0.85
	0.83
ES1- Am relaxed most of the time	
ES2- Seldom feel blue	0.78
ES3- Have frequent mood swings	0.75
ES4- Get upset easily	0.81
Purchase intention (PINT) (Cronbach's α = 0.90, CR = 0.90; AVE = 0.65 ; square root of average variance extracted (AVE) = 0.808	
PINT1-The next time I shop for vegetables, presumably I shall buy organic vegetables.	
PINT2-In future when I shop for cereals & legumes, presumably I shall buy organic cereals & legumes.	
PINT3-In future when I shop for fruit, presumably I shall buy organic fruit.	
PINT4-In future when I shop for meat, presumably I shall buy organic meat.	
PINT5-In future when I shop for processed food, presumably I shall buy organic processed food	

4.2 Structural Model

SEM was used with an aim to understand the role of personality traits (Big Five) in affecting the buying intent for organic food by employing the method recommended by Anderson and Gerbing (1988), the conceptual framework was empirically examined by assessing the goodness of fit indices. The values of fit indices showed an acceptable model fit (i.e., $\chi^2 = 680.688$, d.f.= 268, $p = 0.000$; $\chi^2/df = 2.540$; IFI = 0.95; GFI = 0.92, TLI = 0.94, AGFI = 0.90, CFI = 0.95, RMSEA = 0.049, SRMR = 0.04. The observed values indicate an acceptable fit as suggested in the previous studies (Rigdon and Hoyle, 1997; Hu and Bentler, 1999). Therefore, the proposed model shows a good model fit for measuring the purchase intent for organic food.

The estimates of standardized coefficients along with their respective t-values are shown in Table 2. The findings reveal that big five personality traits are strong indicators of purchase intention for organic food. Amongst

all the personality traits extraversion appears to be the strongest driver behind the purchase intent for organic food (H1; $\beta = 0.27$, $t = 6.68$, $p = 0.00$). This result is consistent with some past studies which show that individuals with high degree of extraversion tend to have positive health behaviours as indicated by (Jerram & Coleman, 1999; Kikuchi et al., 1999). Thus assertive, active, warm, energetic, talkative, sociable, and gregarious and excitement seeking individuals are likely to buy organic food.

Table 2 Structural Model Result

Symbol	Hypothesized relation	Standardized path coefficients	t-value	p-value	Result
H1	Extraversion → purchase intention	0.27	6.68	0.00	Accepted
H2	Agreeableness → purchase intention	0.34	8.70	0.00	Accepted
H3	Conscientiousness → purchase intention	0.28	7.49	0.00	Accepted
H4	Openness → purchase intention	0.29	7.34	0.00	Accepted
H5	Emotional Stability → purchase intention	0.21	5.71	0.00	Accepted

Agreeableness reflects a positive influence on intention to purchase (H2; $\beta = 0.34$, $t = 8.70$, $p = 0.00$). This finding is consistent with the previous studies of social and behavioral sciences research (Kaynak & Ekşi, 2014; Allen et al., 2015; Bessey, 2018) that claim individuals who score high on this trait are health-conscious and they avoid risky behaviour that may pose a threat on their health. Therefore, it can be inferred that good-natured, considerate and cooperative individuals who show concern for others are also likely to be concerned towards their own health. Hence, consumers scoring more on agreeableness show buying intention for organic food over conventional food. Conscientiousness also appears to be a significant influencing factor (H3; $\beta = 0.28$, $t = 7.49$, $p = 0.00$) affecting the purchase intention positively. The finding conforms to the previous researches (Kaynak and Ekşi, 2014; Bogg and Roberts, 2004;) that examined the relationship of conscientiousness with health related behavior. In addition to this Sun et al., (2014) found conscientiousness a significant predictor of health motivation and healthy diet among consumers these finding indicate that high scorers on this trait i.e. self-disciplined, orderly, dutiful and deliberate individuals exhibit positive buying intent for organic food items. In addition, positive relationship also exists for openness to experience (H4; $\beta = 0.29$, $t = 7.34$, $p = 0.00$) this also confirms previous findings which showed high scorers tend to eat healthy food and reflect positive health-related behaviour (Mottus et al., 2013; Sutin and Terracciano, 2015; Keller and Siegrist, 2015). Further, emotional stability correlates positively with

buying intent for organic food items ($H5$; $\beta = 0.21$, $t = 5.71$, $p = 0.00$). This finding is similar to the previous findings that show emotional stability leads to positive health related behaviour (Mottus et al., 2013; Keller and Siegrist, 2015).

5. Conclusion, Marketing Implications, Limitations

After its increased popularity in developed countries, demand of organic food is now gaining momentum in developing countries. Extant literature on organic food consumption reveals a wide range of variables playing vital role in consumers' selection of organic food items. Personality, one of the most important variables in consumer behavior, has got little attention in prior studies which focused on organic food consumption. Therefore, in this study we proposed and examined the conceptual model to understand how dispositional traits (Big Five) may influence the purchase intention of young consumers for organic food items. The empirical investigation confirms that extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience and neuroticism (emotional stability) were significant indicators of young consumers' intent to buy organic food items.

The current study adds knowledge to the consumer behavior literature in the following ways: (a) it is amongst the very few attempts that explores the relation between the Big Five traits and purchase intent of young consumers for organic food and uncovers some important insights into this area; (b) it is amongst those few studies that investigate the ontology of personality influenced purchase behavior; (c) this research can lay a foundation for further studies into this area. In addition to enhancing our knowledge about the personalities of young consumers who may prefer organic food items, the results of the present study can make worthwhile contribution for the marketers and retailers of organic food items particularly for organic vegetables, organic fruits, organic cereals, organic legumes, organic meat and organic processed food because out of total organic food consumed, organic staple food constitute a major proportion (Padel and Foster, 2005).

Since many consumers in developing countries now avoid conventional food rather they prefer organic food. Thus, in order to utilize this opportunity marketer need to get deeper insights into the drivers of consumer behavior for organic food items. Marketers can utilize the findings of this study for segmenting their target market and adapting some appropriate promotional strategies. The positive relation between extraversion and purchase intention indicates that marketers, while designing marketing campaign, must include extraversion related characteristics (energetic, sociable, excitement-seeking, active, warm). Further, young extrovert consumers are quite active on social media platforms (Agnihotri et al., 2020). Therefore, marketers can use social networking websites such as Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, WhatsApp etc. for promoting their organic food brands. Further, the

relationship between Agreeableness and purchase intention suggests for laying emphasis on Agreeableness-related traits (straight-forwardness, compliance, altruism, modesty, trust, and tender-mindedness). Agreeable individuals tend to favor altruistic brands due to their desire to contribute to the greater good. Therefore, for targeting agreeable consumers, marketers can design their promotional messages around their corporate social responsibility initiatives (CSR). In the same way association between conscientiousness and purchase intention shows that importance must be given to conscientiousness related dimensions (self-disciplined, deliberate, dutiful, orderly, competent, and achievement striving). Conscientious individuals usually take planned purchase decisions after carefully considering the complete information about the brands and products which gives them a rational basis for purchase. Therefore, the marketers must offer them thoughtfully constructed information that gives them all the positive reasons to buy their organic food brands. For example marketers may highlight the impact of organic food consumption on our environment and health of consumers. Similarly linkage between openness and purchase intention calls for greater emphasis on openness related traits (imaginative, curious, creative, open minded, intellectual curiosity, preference for varieties). Such consumers are open to new experiences and ideas and also appreciate innovative products. Therefore, marketers can introduce organic food products that include organic quality with strong consumer appeal, based on new taste and new ingredients. For example marketers may use innovative plant-based ingredient as a substitute to a similarly used animal-derived product. Further, they may also add product lines in order to provide variety, use innovative packaging etc. Likewise positive relation between emotional stability and purchase intention indicates that importance must be given to the related traits (emotionally stable, calm, cautious, cheerful, and even-tempered). Accordingly, marketers must design their communications in such a way that emphasizes the calming effect and anti-anxiety properties of organic food. Further, marketers may also use appeal of self-esteem in their promotional messages to establish a strong emotional brand connection.

Though the present study evidently contributes to the developing body of consumer psychology research yet it has some shortcomings that suggest the agendas for future research in this area. Firstly, a mini version of 20-item IPIP scale used in this study assisted in measuring domains but did not permit for evaluation of their constituent facets. Therefore, future studies in this area could use more exhaustive scale for measuring the Big Five traits and validating these results. Secondly, this research explored the linkage of personality traits with young consumers' behavior during at a specific period of time. However, personalities of individuals may gradually change across the life span consequently changing their behavior taste and preferences. Therefore, longitudinal studies could produce deeper insights into this area. Thirdly, only young people (age ranging from 18-34)

constitute the sample for this study. Therefore, the future studies may include varying age groups in the sample to ameliorate the generalizability of the results.

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