

Drivers of organic food purchase: trust, price, and quality

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ABSTRACT

This paper applied the theory of planned behaviour to South Africa's urban areas to determine the intentions behind the purchase of organic food. Trust (an external antecedent), perceived quality (an attitudinal determinant), and price sensitivity (a perceived behavioural control constraint) were found to be drivers of behavioural intention. Research on emerging markets with weak institutional and regulatory standards has not yet been conducted on these relationships; thus, this study provided insights into consumer behaviour in developing organic food markets. A questionnaire was distributed to urban South African consumers; only metropolitan cities were included in the survey: Pretoria, Johannesburg, eThekweni and Cape Town. The sample population consisted of people living in urban areas who were aware of organic foods and had intentions of buying or had bought organic food products. A total of 255 viable responses were used to analyse the results. Hypothesis 1 revealed that trust significantly predicted purchase intention ($\beta = 0.39$, $R^2 = 33\%$), thus establishing trust as an important external factor. The results for hypothesis 2 indicated that perceived quality was the strongest predictor of purchase intentions ($\beta = 0.50$, $R^2 = 46\%$). Meaning that perceptions of quality are more important than formal certification in emerging markets. Price sensitivity negatively impacted purchase intention ($\beta = -0.19$, $R^2 = 9\%$). Trust did not moderate the relationship between price sensitivity and purchase intention ($p = 0.178$) in hypothesis 4. Understanding which drivers are more crucial in various contexts and their relationships would enable marketers and policymakers to grow the organic food markets.

KEYWORDS

Organic foods, consumer trust, price sensitivity, theory of planned behaviour, perceived quality, purchase intention

PLAGIARISM DECLARATION

I declare that this research project is my own work. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Business Administration at the Gordon Institute of Business Science, University of Pretoria. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in any other University. I further declare that I have obtained the necessary authorisation and consent to carry out this research.

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3 November 2025

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION TO THE RESEARCH

1.1 Introduction

This study explores the purchasing intention of organic foods in South Africa, with a specific interest in consumer behaviour. The behaviours and consumer perceptions in relation to organic foods are analysed to understand how consumers balance economic considerations with perceived product quality when making purchasing decisions. This chapter provides the background to the study and outlines the business and academic contributions in research.

1.2 Background of the study

Globally, the food sector has seen an increase in the demand for organic foods (Leonidou et al., 2022). The stated increase in demand for organically produced foods is primarily driven by consumers' awareness of environmental sustainability, health concerns, and ethical consumption (Bhardwaj et al., 2024; Leonidou et al., 2022). The production of organic food is premised on organic techniques of agricultural production that prioritise ecological balance, biodiversity, and minimal amounts of synthetic chemicals (Abu Seman et al., 2024). Over the years, the organic food market has transitioned from a niche segment to a significant and rapidly expanding food segment in response to a shift in consumer values and health consciousness (Leonidou et al., 2022).

The organic food sector has experienced substantial expansion globally. As Bhardwaj et al. (2024) stated, the industry has become a dynamic agri-food sector, with the rates of production and consumption increasing significantly. The organic market is well-developed in developed economies such as the United States and Western European countries because they possess a certification system and government subsidies which support the industry. In contrast, emerging markets such as South Africa are nascent markets with low consumer awareness, disjointed certification processes, and limited affordability (Erasmus et al., 2020). These problems prevent the mass adoption of organic products, even with urban consumers' increasing health and environmental awareness.

These factors necessitate studies investigating organic food buying behaviour in South Africa. Although South Africa's urban middle class is growing, the awareness and availability of organic products is low when compared to

international markets (Marokhu and Fatoki, 2024). In metropolitan cities such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, and Pretoria, sustainable consumption behaviours are increasingly popular, which is manifested by the popularity of local farmers' markets and community-supported agriculture (Dancey, 2024).

The literature has identified a variety of consumer purchase intention determinants in relation to organic food, although trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity have consistently been identified as the most reliable factors (Murphy et al., 2022). Trust is associated with consumers' trust in the organic labels, producers, and retailers. Where trust cannot be verified (by verifying product claims), it can serve as a proxy to authenticity and lessen the doubts pertaining to product claims (Michaelidou and Hassan, 2008). Perceived quality, in turn, is based on the subjective opinions regarding a product's healthiness, taste, and safety, and has been proven to have a substantial impact on repeat purchase behaviour (Pham et al., 2018). Price sensitivity is, however, a significant deterrent factor, with higher prices of organic foods compared to conventional ones being an essential constraint which deters purchase intentions, particularly among people with lower incomes (Padel & Foster, 2005).

According to Lavuri (2022), these are valuable insights; however, they remain dispersed throughout academic literature. Duong (2025) and Li et al. (2023) studied the variables of trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity independently, resulting in a lack of integrated models that capture the impact of multiple factors and inform customer decision-making.

1.3 Research Problem

Even studies to grasp the factors that drive the consumption of organic foods have been conducted, there is still a significant gap in knowledge concerning how these factors interact in the emerging markets, especially in South Africa. Most of the research has examined the individual constructs of trust, price, and quality, instead of understanding how these constructs interact to affect the consumer's purchase intention (Duong, 2025; Li et al., 2023). This has resulted in a disjointed solution to creating an integrated theoretical framework that reflects consumer behaviour's multifaceted nature in dynamic and sophisticated emerging markets.

The unstable certification methods and low levels of state regulation ensure that South African consumer's scepticism towards a product's authenticity is relatively high (Busch et al., 2024). Most consumers are still sceptical about organic labels

representing the stated standards of production. Moreover, the expensive nature of organic food compared to non-organic ones make consumers more sensitive to price, especially amongst middle- and low-income consumers (Labiad, 2024). Despite consumers being aware of the health benefits of organic products and its environmentally friendly advantages, affordability usually overrules the positive dispositions.

Furthermore, due to a disintegrated supply chain and unverified assertions in informal markets, the problems of comparatively low levels of consumer awareness of organic brands and a lack of trust in regulatory policies are worsened (Dinçer et al., 2023). Consequently, the organic food sector in South Africa is still lagging in growth compared to the developed economies. There is limited understanding of how trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity influence consumers' purchase intentions toward organic food in the South African emerging market environment (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024)

The importance of dealing with this issue is both theoretical and practical. Theoretically, it can be used to incorporate various determinants under one model of behaviour, which will help improve The Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) in the field of sustainable consumer behaviour. In practice, it offers knowledge to marketers and policy makers who wish to develop strategies to improve consumer confidence, effective communication of product quality, and barriers to affordability.

1.4 Research Purpose and Objectives

The study will investigate the individual and combined effects of trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity on consumers' purchasing intention in the organic food segment and evaluate the moderating role of trust on the relationship between price sensitivity and purchase intention. The objective of the study is to explore and evaluate the relationship between these constructs. The study will also examine how these constructs influence or drive the purchase intention.

The study aims to provide insights that will enhance marketing strategies and improve consumer engagement in the organic food market. This offers a more in-depth insight into how multiple beliefs interact to influence the development of behavioural intentions (Wu et al., 2021). The research also addresses the geographical research gap, since it expands the TPB model to the South African

setting as an emerging market with unique socio-economic, cultural, and regulatory features (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024).

This research will help improve current consumer decision-making models by empirically moderating the impact of trust on the price-intention relationship and provide a new addition to the theoretical body of knowledge on sustainable and ethical consumption. Using the findings and the theories of consumer behaviour, future comparisons can also be made between developed and developing markets, which can be better generalised.

Furthermore, the study provides practical recommendations to the South African organic food industry's retailers, producers, and marketers. Knowing how consumers make choices on trust, quality, and price will help companies develop successful marketing elements and consumer confidence in organic products. For example, a company can invest in clearer labelling, third-party certification, and consumer education programs to build trust. Similarly, conveying concrete qualities such as freshness, taste, and health benefits can justify price premiums and create a more substantial perceived value (Najib et al., 2022).

To policymakers, the results emphasise the need to increase regulatory systems and certification procedures to guarantee the authenticity of products. Greater control will enable more trust in the institutions, a favourable pricing framework, and sustainable development in the organic food industry.

1.4.1 Research Objectives

Specifically, the research objectives are to:

- 1) Quantitatively determine the individual and combined predictive effects of consumer trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity on the purchase intention for organic foods among urban South African consumers.
- 2) Test the specific moderating effect of consumer trust on the relationship between price sensitivity and purchase intention, thereby exploring trust's potential to mitigate price-related barriers.
- 3) Develop and validate an extended model based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) that integrates these constructs, offering a more comprehensive explanatory framework for organic food consumption in an emerging market context.

1.5 The Need for the Study

This section outlines the significance of this study, focusing on both practical business significance and theoretical significance. The organic market economic and business opportunity is currently valued at nearly R1 billion annually and projected to grow at a compounded annual growth rate of 13.25% between 2024 and 2029 (Bhardwaj et al., 2024). Although the South African organic food market consumer has health consciousness and is environmentally aware, the penetration of organic food into the market is still in a development phase (Marokhu and Fatoki, 2024). Through robust quantitative insights of how South African consumers trade off price, quality, and trust using theory, this research will offer actionable insights for market segmentation.

1.5.1 Business Need

South Africa's market is underdeveloped in relation to global trends, yet it shows promising potential as consumer preferences shift toward health and sustainability (Rana & Paul, 2020). Urban centres such as Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, and Pretoria host a growing demographic of middle-to-upper-income earners with increasing awareness of food origins and nutritional value. However, retailers often encounter challenges when it comes to positioning organic products due to inconsistent consumer knowledge, perceptions, and price-related barriers (Erasmus et al., 2020). According to Lavuri (2022), retailers and producers can utilise these insights to refine their pricing models, enhance transparency, and invest in quality certifications that foster trust with consumers.

1.5.2 Theoretical Contribution

The study contributes to the theoretical development of consumer behaviour literature by integrating three well-established constructs into a single framework grounded in the Theory of Planned Behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Unlike previous research that isolates these factors, this study proposes a holistic model that reflects real-world decision-making complexities. Existing studies that use the TPB model have shown that behavioural, normative, and control beliefs significantly influence purchase intentions, and this study will examine how trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity align with these components (Wu et al., 2021). Moreover, this study will contribute towards addressing the geographic research gap by focusing on South Africa, an emerging market with unique demographic and economic characteristics (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024). By

examining whether and how these constructs interact in this context, the research will enhance the generalisability of existing theories and potentially offer modifications suitable for developing-market settings. The findings may serve as a basis for future comparative studies or for refining behavioural models used in similar socio-economic contexts (Leonidou et al., 2022)

1.6 Research Scope

The research focuses on the urban South African consumer, particularly those in Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, and Pretoria. The choice of these cities is determined by the fact that such urban centres have a optimal representation of the largest and most economically active cities in South Africa, and have relatively high access to organic food products as compared to rural areas (Statistics South Africa, 2024). Targeting urban consumers will ensure that the study's participants have a minimum familiarity or exposure to organic products.

The research is constrained to investigate three primary constructs, namely, trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity, and their correlation to purchase intention. The other possible factors, including environmental awareness or social identity, are not within the confines of this study. Moreover, the study is quantitative and cross-sectional, meaning it will only capture perceptions of consumers at one point in time. Although this method offers good insights into variable relationships, it fails to consider the changes in behaviour over a specific period.

The next chapter explores recent academic literature which informs the basis of this research. The chapter will outline the relevant key theories and gaps in theory that guides the formulation of the research questions to follow.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter comprehensively reviews the literature available regarding the main variables being tested in the study, including trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity, and how these constructs affect consumer purchase intentions of organic food. The relationships between these determinants are examined, explaining how they influence consumer behaviour in the market when they interact. Therefore, special consideration is given to the determinants of organic food items, particularly in the South African context. The chapter questions the mediating effect of trust, examining the relationship between price sensitivity and purchasing decision-making, and consequently outlines the need to combine these variables into a unified model. It also explains the gaps that exist in previous research and the reasons why the current study should be conducted. Lastly, the final parts define the conceptual and theoretical frameworks, which guide the research and determine the relationship between the literature review and the objectives of the current study. Framed by the Theory of Planned Behaviour, the review integrates each construct to attitudes, norms, and perceived behavioural control (Ajzen, 1990).

2.2 *Global Perspectives on Organic Food Consumption*

Yeo et al., (2022) link ecological motivation and social identity in forming environmentally responsible consumption, whilst Fernandes (2022) notes the increasing integration between health motivations, lifestyle, and self-image. This reflects a broader trend where organic consumption has emerged as a form of ethical self-identity that allows consumers to signal their values through their purchasing decisions (Fernandes & Saraiva, 2022; Qasim et al., 2019). Moreover, recent behavioural studies conducted by Qasim et al. (2019) and Hansen et al. (2018) have revealed how the increasing importance of identifier signalling among consumers, whereby organic foods are consumed as a form of ethical and environmental values, positively enhances behavioural consistency.

2.3 *Overview of Organic Food in the South African Context*

Despite the extensive availability of global literature, scholarly literature provides limited insights into how various constructs such as trust, quality perception, or price sensitivity, jointly affect a customer's purchase intent within the unique

socio-economic landscape of South Africa (Erasmus et al., 2020). This gap in the literature restricts local businesses and policymakers from creating holistic strategies that consider the holistic nature of consumers' motivations. Furthermore, the socio-economic diversity prevalent in South Africa, together with the history of inequality and varying consumer literacy levels, makes it difficult to apply existing global models to its market (Madi, 2018). This contextual gap is significant, given that the evidence shows that consumer behaviour is deeply embedded in cultural and economic realities (Madi, 2018). Factors such as vast disparities in access to retail channels, historical mistrust in food labelling claims, and the prominent role of the informal food sector necessitate a context-specific investigation rather than a simple extrapolation of findings from developed and other emerging markets (Lang & Rodrigues, 2022; Du Plessis, 2019).

2.4 Emerging Evidence from South Africa

According to recently emerging evidence from South Africa, the consumer inclination for organic food is increasing, especially for locally sourced, ethically produced, and additive-free items (Marokhu, 2024). In the case of the urban centres of Cape Town and Johannesburg, this trend is supported by the increase of farmers' markets and organic food cooperatives (Dancey, 2024).

However, the organic food market still faces significant barriers. Price sensitivity is cited as a major inhibiting factor, as evidenced by, for example, the availability of products (Labiad, 2024). This reflects broader global findings, where consumer willingness to purchase organic products is curtailed by perceived cost concerns (Cao et al., 2022). These concerns are amplified in lower-income consumer groups, who, despite strong health and environmental motivations, may prioritise affordability and accessibility over ethical considerations (Nguyen et al., 2023). As a result, consumption patterns often diverge across socio-demographic lines, creating a bifurcated market landscape where higher-income consumers dominate the organic segment, while middle- to lower-income groups remain price-constrained.

Empirical evidence shows that this bifurcation is a key defining feature of the South African market. It specifically comprises a distinct segment of consumers

typically younger (Millennials and Gen Z), affluent, urban, and more educated groups, who actively seek and are willing to pay a premium for organic products (Erasmus et al., 2020; Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024; Mhlophe, 2022). Within this segment, health, sustainability, and quality factors are primary drivers (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024). Despite this, high income inequalities mean that a large portion of the population is severely price-constrained in their purchase decisions (Madi, 2018; Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024). For this latter segment, affordability is the dominant factor that often overrides other motivations, leading to trade-downs to cheaper conventional alternatives (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024; Nguyen et al., 2023).

2.5 Impact of Trust, Perceived Quality, and Price Sensitivity on Purchase Intentions

According to the theory of planned behaviour, which reflects the relevant behavioural intention Azjen, (1991), the organic food literature consistently identified three intervening variables which have been found to be significant in achieving purchasing decisions. These are trust, perceived quality and price (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024; Teixeira et al., 2022). The poor institutional frameworks, inequality in incomes, low consumer awareness in emerging markets, particularly in South Africa, and their impact on purchasing organic foods are different from developed markets (Mkhize & Ellis, 2020; Roy et al., 2023). The sub-sections will dissect how each variable directly influences the purchase intentions, as shown by international and South African evidence.

2.5.1 Trust

Consumer purchase intention is a crucial construct in marketing science, referring to a person's tendency to engage in a given transaction due to their identifications, perceptions, and non-incidental factors (Ho Nguyen et al., 2022). The conceptualisation of trust in organic food research shows that there are various perspectives that explain the different empirical findings. Trust is believed to act as an antecedent variable, which influences the attitude through the reduction of uncertainty (Canova et al., 2020). It may also act as a moderator which stipulates the conditions when attitude translates into intention (Khan et al., 2023). In addition, trust may also be a boundary condition which allows or constrains the impact of other variables. Thus, markets such as South Africa, where regulation is not strong, trust tends to take first priority (Marokhu & Fatoki 2024).

Marketers, producers, and policymakers should understand the motivations and deterrents associated with purchasing decisions. Busch et al. (2024) emphasised the need for a high level of trust in organic certification, brand integrity, and transparent supply chains to have confidence in organic products. Pedersen et al. (2023) suggested that when there is a lack of institutional trust, particularly in governmental regulation, it can significantly diminish willingness to purchase organic foods, even when other motivations are strong. This is further supported by Abu Seman et al. (2024) and Zhang et al. (2022) who also emphasised the need for institutional trust, which is the confidence in government regulations and third-party certification bodies, to ensure standards are met and enforced

The second aspect is system trust. This focuses on the confidence consumers develop towards the supply chain actors such as producers, processors, and retailers, to act with integrity (Abu Seman et al., 2024; Zhang et al., 2022). A breakdown of trust in any of these will have a direct negative impact on organic food demand as consumers may dissociate themselves from any such actors. Product trust is the final aspect of consumer trust. It focuses on consumers' attitudes to specific products, which is often signalled by labels, branding, and packaging (Murphy et al., 2022).

The trust landscape is uniquely challenging within the South African context. This, according to experts, stems partly from South Africa's lack of a comprehensive national policy and a single, nationally enforced organic standard, creating a regulatory vacuum (Dancey, 2024; Du Plessis, 2019; Madi, 2018). The result has been a fragmented market with a proliferation of private, foreign, and self-declaratory labels that have caused consumer confusion and scepticism (Dinçer et al., 2023; Du Plessis, 2019). As a result, Erasmus et al. (2020) reported that only about half of South African organic consumers trust the labels they encounter. Thus, due to low institutional trust, consumers often transfer their trust to specific entities. Reputable retailers with strong brand equity, such as Woolworths, effectively become *de facto* certifiers, with their brand serving as a powerful proxy for trust and quality assurance (Mhlophe, 2022; Rana & Paul, 2020). There is empirical evidence suggesting that once consumers form an opinion about the credibility of organic labels, certification bodies, or specific brands, they are more likely to develop a positive attitude and intentions towards acquiring such products (Curvelo et al., 2019). The foundation of trust is essential

in the South African environment, where the organic food market is still in its infancy, as the lack of awareness and uneven product quality in the stressed area can cultivate scepticism among consumers (Mkhize & Ellis, 2020).

However, while some studies emphasise trust as the dominant predictor of purchase intentions, others highlight perceived quality or price sensitivity as stronger influencers in different socio-economic contexts, reflecting inconsistent findings among global and emerging markets (Konuk, 2018). Trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity are the determinants that have continued to emerge as relevant predictive determinants of consumer behaviour and consequential procurement actions. This is consistent with the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) by Ajzen (1991), in which purchasing intention is predicted based on perspective, personal standards, and perceived behavioural control. Therefore, trust has a favourable impact on perceptions and perspectives regarding behavioural control and purchase intentions. Empirical evidence strongly supports this association. Carfora et al., (2020) revealed that trust in organic products was a significant antecedent that positively influenced both consumers' attitudes and their perception of subjective norms. Thus, trust is viewed as an indirect booster of purchase intentions and behaviour. In contrast, a lack of trust could make the product seem inauthentic, failing to motivate consumers.

2.5.2 Perceived Quality

Studies by Massey et al. (2018) depicts that trust is the most consistently significant predictor of purchasing intention across various market. However , Teixeira et al. (2022) conceptualised the opposite with the notion that consumer attitudes towards organic foods are influenced by perceived quality. Health benefits, freshness, and ethical sourcing are perceived as qualities that influence people's perceptions. According to Najib et al. (2022) and Su et al. (2022), within the context of food product attributes, nutritional value, flavour, and negative health implications influence a consumers' willingness to pay, even if price has a negative relationship.

Since the core attributes of organic food are credibility-based, consumers rely on a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic cues to infer quality. Specifically, extrinsic cues that include brand name, price (where higher price often signals higher quality), packaging, and country of origin, while intrinsic cues relate to the physical product, such as freshness, taste, and appearance (Erasmus et al., 2020; Roy et

al., 2023; Wu et al., 2021). In emerging markets such as South Africa, there is often a perception that foreign products and international certifications are of higher quality because of perceived stricter standards (Pedersen et al., 2023; Watanabe et al., 2021). Within the South African context, consumers primarily associate the quality of organic food with personal gain factors such as superior health benefits and better taste, rather than broader environmental or ethical considerations (Erasmus et al., 2020; Lang & Rodrigues, 2022).

Su et al. (2022) extended the comparison to show that the two constructs, specifically perceived quality and brand trust, are mutually enhancing; hence, the existence of a mediating result of perceived quality between brand trust and purchase intention was indicated. This highlights the interdependent relationship between trust and quality perception. In other words, trust is the foundation upon which quality perceptions are built, so that a positive experience with quality reinforces that trust (Bhat et al., 2024; Li et al., 2023). In addition, the findings indicate that perceived quality affects consumer loyalty and repeat purchase behaviour, which are critical for market growth and retention (Bhat et al., 2024). It has been established that certain markets, particularly South Africa, where exposure to organic products may be limited, a first impression of quality (e.g., taste and freshness) has a disproportionate effect on subsequent buying behaviour (Otundo Richard, 2024). Florack et al. (2021) proposes that when a consumer evaluates a new product, they focus on different attributes that distinguishes the product from others, and that they do not focus on shared positive attributes. As a results when organic food is positioned as a healthier alternative than the conventional foods the consumer evaluates the the positive quality attributes.

2.5.3 Price Sensitivity

While trust and quality are powerful motivators of purchase behaviour, actual and intended price sensitivity consistently emerges as the most significant barrier to the widespread adoption of organic food, particularly in South Africa and other emerging markets (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024; Cao et al., 2022; Lavuri, 2022). Organic food is generally more expensive due to higher production and certification costs (Nassar et al., 2021). According to Roy et al. (2023), the premium price of organic products, which can be 10% to 40% higher than their conventional counterparts, makes them inaccessible for a large segment of the

population in emerging markets such as South Africa. This barrier reflects economic reality more than mere preference. In a country with high income inequality like South Africa (Madi, 2018; Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024), the distinction between willingness to pay and ability to pay is crucial. Thus, even consumers who value the benefits of organic food and are willing to pay more, may lack the financial capacity to do so (Madi, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). This often forces consumers to prioritise affordability of perceived benefits of organic foods such as health benefits.

Hydock et al. (2023) found that consumers who are quality-focused often willingly pay a premium for the product, particularly when they perceive that the product is of quality. Thus consumers first identify a product as being high quality, then justify choosing the specific product despite its higher price points (Engangelidis et al, 2023). Thus showing that consumers strong perceived quality perception may reduce price sensitivity. however it is paramount for the producer to also demonstrate to the consumer that sustainable consumption can be encouraged regardless of the premium prices when the context of the decision explicitly outlines the benefits (White et al, 2019).

The economic concept of price elasticity of demand provides a useful lens for understanding this phenomenon (Mohr & Associates, 2020). Specifically, while specific elasticity data for organic food in South Africa is scarce, studies on general food demand indicate that lower-income households are more price-sensitive than those who are in the higher income bracket.(Madi, 2018; Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024;). Research from other markets suggests that the demand for organic food is typically more price-elastic than for conventional food demand (Cao et al., 2022; Zhang et al., 2022). This means that a small increase in price can lead to a disproportionately large decrease in quantity demanded. This underscores the critical role of price in shaping consumption patterns pertaining to organic food consumption and highlights why it must be considered a central variable in any model of organic food purchasing behaviour in the South African context.

2.5.4 Socio-Cultural and Market-Specific Considerations

Perceptions of national or local suppliers or brands are highly subjective, especially in emerging markets, where organic consumer experiences are

relatively new and often based on word of mouth and social proof. However, the issue of how the combination of these constructs affects consumer purchase intentions has not been thoroughly investigated in a single model that integrates their synergy. Although the studies by Mhlophe (2022) and Sharp (2023) have attempted to model these relationships internationally, the South African relationship landscape involves socio-economic and cultural constructs that warrant closer examination. For instance, differences in race and economics, historical mistrust among consumers in food labelling claims, and differences in access to organic food venues might have influenced how consumer evaluations were shaped, which goes beyond what could be accounted for by global frameworks. Moreover, the informal sector plays a role in food distribution, where organic claims are unverified, and the role of this sector in confusing consumer perception needs to be considered (Dinçer et al., 2023). This gap is important in the context of emerging markets such as South Africa. However, whilst Anisimova & Vrontis (2024) preliminary examination of integrated behavioural constructs in similar developing regions has started, most studies remain isolated. Furthermore, the previous study was only able to develop one-dimensional relationship marketing programs using a fragmentation approach and provided minimal insights into the actual relationship between influencing factors.

2.5.5 The Interplay of Trust, Quality, and Price

The review establishes that trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity are critical individual determinants of organic food purchase intention. However, holistically considering the interactive effects of these factors raises a more profound understanding. These variables reflect a synergistic system where the influence of one is often contingent on the levels of the others. None of the variables operate in isolation. The relationship between trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity is interactive and often non-linear, rather than being merely additive. This further highlights the importance of an integrated research model.

Recent literature provides compelling evidence for these interaction effects. A key relationship is the moderating role of trust on price sensitivity. Thus, high levels of trust in a brand, retailer, or certification system can mitigate the negative impact of premium pricing. In other words, when consumers have strong confidence in a product's authenticity and quality, their perception of risk is lowered, making some

consumers more willing to accept a higher cost (Zhang et al., 2018). Zhang et al. (2022) empirically demonstrated that trust in both retailers and producers significantly strengthens the relationship between purchase intention and actual behaviour, thus, bridging the intention-behaviour gap (Zhang et al., 2022).

The theoretical perspective on the moderating role of trust can also be studied in terms of the TPB, which posits that behavioural intentions are composed of an attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control (Tian et al., 2023). Trust enhances a positive attitude and perceived power among consumers by reducing the uncertainty associated with product reliability. As such, despite the relatively high prices, consumers who possess strong trust beliefs will have increased confidence and will be more likely to finalise a purchase. This interactive process also demonstrates that trust is a stabilising variable that alleviates the negative impact of price sensitivity on purchase intentions (Chetioui et al., 2021). Viewed through the TPB lens, trust reinforces perceived behavioural control by reducing uncertainty and enabling consumers to act in line with their attitudes and social expectations, thereby strengthening the intention behaviour link.

Perceived quality and trust are mutually reinforcing. The quality of organic food is an important attribute serves as the foundation upon which quality perceptions are built. Without trust, claims of superior health benefits or taste, by retailers and other supply chain stakeholders, are effectively not credible (Jürkenbeck, 2023; Li et al., 2023;). In contrast, a positive experience with a product's quality, such as superior freshness or flavour, reinforces and validates the consumer's initial trust, thus helping to build brand loyalty over time. Perceived quality often functions as a crucial mediator between product attributes, such as certification labels, and the development of customer trust (Li et al., 2023; Bhat et al., 2024). The consumer's ultimate decision to buy or not to buy organic food can be conceptualised as a mental value equation, where the perceived value is a function of the interaction between perceived quality, the level of trust, and the price of the product in question. A high level of trust and perceived quality can justify a higher price, leading to a positive purchase intention. Equally, low trust can render even a low-priced organic product unattractive due to the perceived risk. Table 1 summarises the existing evidence on the drivers of organic food purchases.

Table 1: Drivers of Organic Food Purchases

Study	Core Constructs Investigated	Context (Country/Group)	Key Findings Relevant to This Study
Marokhu and Fatoki (2024)	Extended TPB (Health & Env. Consciousness, Moral Norms, Ethical Self-Identity)	South Africa (Young Consumers)	Confirms TPB applicability in SA. Health & environmental consciousness are key antecedents of attitude and intention. Price is a major barrier.
Zhang, Zhang, Zhang, and Wang (2022)	Extended TPB (Trust in Producers/Retailers, Price Sensitivity)	China	Trust in producers and retailers positively impacts purchase behaviour. Price sensitivity is a negative factor. Trust moderates the relationship between TPB antecedents and behaviour.
Carfora, Cavallo, Catellani, and Cicia (2020)	TPB, Trust	Italy	Trust is a critical antecedent to the TPB constructs, positively influencing attitude and subjective norms, and indirectly influencing intention and behaviour.
Curvelo, Watanabe, and Alfinito (2025)	Attributes, Perceived Purchase Intention, Trust, Value,	Brazil	Emotional value and consumer trust are the strongest positive predictors of purchase intention. Sensory appeal had a negative relationship.
Tey, Ang, Ho, Liew, and Cheah (2021)	TPB, Trust, Price Consciousness (Moderators)	Bangladesh (Generation Y)	Confirms TPB constructs. Trust positively moderates the intention-behaviour relationship, while price consciousness negatively moderates it, highlighting their roles in the intention-behaviour gap.

2.6 Research Gap

Despite extensive research on consumer behaviour regarding organic food, several gaps remain, indicating the necessity of this study. The existing literature primarily focused on trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity as isolated determinants of purchase intention, rather than examining their interactive effects on consumer behaviour (Wang et al., 2020). This fragmented approach limits a holistic understanding of the multifaceted relationships that underpin consumer decision-making in the organic food market.

Moreover, although trust has been widely recognised as a factor that significantly reduces perceived risk, its moderating role between price sensitivity and purchase intention has received limited empirical attention, particularly in emerging markets such as South Africa. Mondesign (2024) highlights that existing literature concentrates on developed economies, where consumers are more knowledgeable and regulatory frameworks are more consistent. These Western-based findings may not directly translate to the South African context, which features unique socio-cultural, economic, and regulatory conditions that influence consumers' willingness to pay for organic products (Religia et al., 2024).

Furthermore, few studies have integrated trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity into a unified model grounded in the TPB. As a result, evidence regarding the combined effect of these constructs on attitudes, perceived behavioural control, and behavioural intentions toward organic food consumption remains scarce. Addressing these gaps will provide a more comprehensive understanding of consumer decision-making and deliver actionable insights for marketers and policymakers aiming to promote sustainable consumption practices in South Africa.

2.7 Summary, Theoretical Focus, and Research Gaps

Several studies have identified trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity as important factors influencing purchase intention for organic food. Trust reduces uncertainty regarding an organic claim. This is particularly true of the credence or credence quality of organic attributes of food, which consumers cannot verify (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008; Konuk, 2018). If consumers observe organic producers and labels as trustworthy, their intention to purchase organic food will

significantly increase. Furthermore, perceived quality, measured in terms of healthiness, freshness, and taste, has a positive effect on organic food purchase behaviour (Pham et al., 2018; Le-Anh & Nguyen-To, 2020).

Consumers who view organic food as having a higher quality will be more willing to pay a premium price, thus forming favourable intentions toward repeat purchases. Nevertheless, price sensitivity remains a significant challenge in many emerging markets, where organic foods typically incur premium pricing compared to their conventional counterparts (Padel & Foster, 2005; Pham et al., 2018). Price sensitive consumers tend to not purchase organic food unless there are sales or promotions in place. Price sensitivity could, however, be mediated through trust, as trust may reduce the negative elements of price on intention to purchase, permitting the consumer to justify the premium pricing when they perceive high credibility and value (Konuk, 2018).

These linked constructs provide the theoretical focus for testing the study hypotheses and illustrate the relevance of the TPB as an explanation of consumer choices and decisions while placing the research in the South African organic food market context. This research will investigate the interrelationship between trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity as influencing factor of purchase intentions in the South African organic food market, making an academic and actionable contribution to sustainable marketing strategies. The findings of this study will offer valuable implications for market practitioners, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) promoting sustainable agriculture, and policymakers seeking to reduce the environmental and public health burdens associated with conventional food systems.

2.8 Theoretical Framework: The Theory of Planned Behaviour

2.8.1 Theory of Planned Behaviour

The complexity of marketing within a dynamic market such as South Africa has been elucidated. Thus, this study adopts the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), to provide robust theoretical lenses for investigating the complexity in consumer dynamics. The TPB is an extensively validated and highly influential social psychology model for predicting and explaining human behaviour across a wide spectrum of contexts. At its core, the TPB holds that human intention to perform a given behaviour is the most immediate and significant predictor of human behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). Such behavioural intention is, in turn, dependent

on three core constructs, namely, (1) attitude towards behaviour, (2) subjective norms, and (3) Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) (Carfora et al., 2020; Lang & Rodrigues, 2022).

According to Ajzen (1991), attitude towards the behaviour refers to the individual's overall evaluation (positive or negative) of performing the behaviour. For example, the individual may ask themselves if purchasing organic food is beneficial and wise. Comparatively, subjective norm reflects the perceived social pressure from significant others, such as family and friends, to either perform or not perform the behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). In the context of this study, a consumer may ask themselves if people who are important to them think they should buy organic food. The third core construct of the TPB is perceived behavioural control (PBC), which refers to the perceived ease or difficulty of performing the behaviour and is shaped by past experiences and anticipated impediments. For example, the customer may ask if they have the resources and opportunity to buy organic food. Furthermore, PBC can influence behaviour both directly and indirectly through its effect on intention.

The TPB's relevance in organic food research is well-documented. A systematic review of recent literature confirms the model's status as a dominant and powerful framework for understanding consumer choices in the organic food domain (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024; Tey et al., 2021). More importantly, contemporary scholarship demonstrates a strong trend towards extending the TPB where scholars incorporate additional, contextually relevant variables as antecedents to the core constructs. This approach enhances the TPB's predictive power by accounting for the specific beliefs that shape attitudes, norms, and perceived control within specific contexts, which is South Africa in this study (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024; Tey et al., 2021).

Further studies on the TBP highlighted its usefulness for understanding purchasing behaviour. However, some evidence showed that it may not be useful in all contexts. Hagger et al. 2022 confirmed that attitudes PBC controls the influence of behavioural intentions, but the effects on each case are context specific. Teixeira et al. (2022) demonstrated that attitude has a significant impact on purchase intention, while Khan et al. (2023) found the opposite, where attitude did not hold such a significant impact on purchase intention. The importance of using predictions through TPB holds true in that the relative strength of the

different components does differ fairly from emerging markets to developed markets. Thus, the context needs to be clear and considered when applying the model.

This study follows a similar approach and argues that trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity are key antecedents of belief structures that inform the TPB's primary components in the South African context. Figure 1 illustrates the basis of the Theory of Planned Behaviour for the research study.

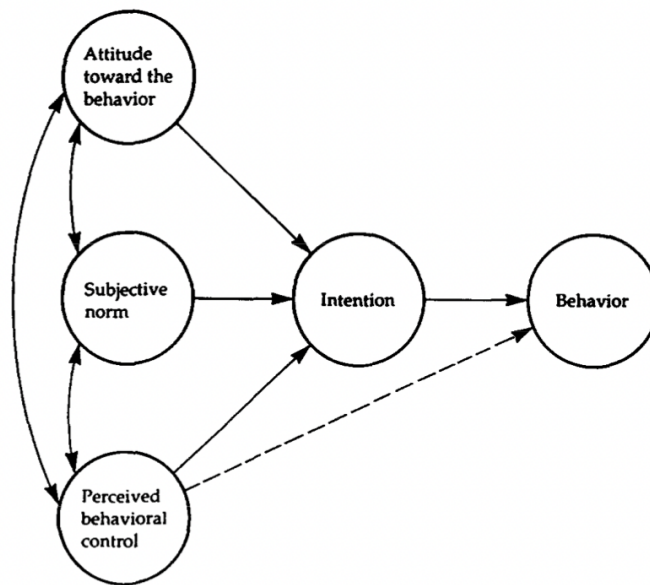


FIG. 1. Theory of planned behavior.

Figure 1: Model of the theory of planned behaviour

Source: Azjen (1991, p.4)

2.8.2 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework (Figure 2) illustrates the theoretically proposed relationships between the critical variables developed by the (TPB). The independent variables are modelled to establish consumers' purchase intention towards the purchase of organic food, and consist of perceived quality, price sensitivity, and trust. Trust is a moderating factor between price sensitivity and purchase intention, with the assumption that trust can lessen the negative impact of perceived high prices.

The model combines cognitive (quality perception), affective (trust), and economic (price sensitivity) strengths of consumer intentions in the South African organic food market. The framework provides the theoretical foundation on which

empirical tests will be conducted, in which theoretical assumptions are matched to measurable constructs, which all combine to explain the impact of consumer beliefs on sustainable purchasing behaviour.

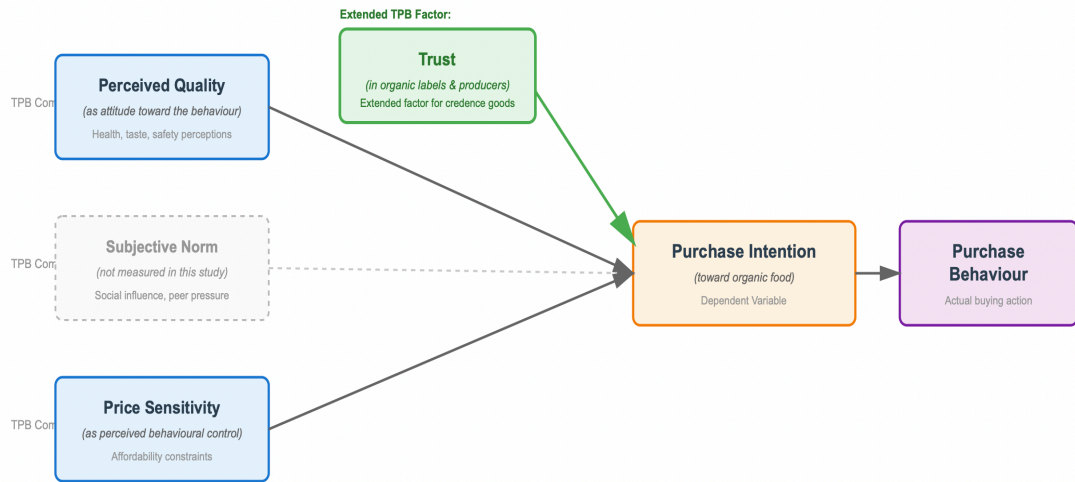


Figure 2: Conceptual framework using the theory of planned behaviour

Source: Researcher's Own

Literature reveals three critical research gaps that this study is designed to address. Firstly, there is an integration gap. This is due to the fact that whilst individual drivers of consumer purchase behaviour are well-researched, there remains a lack of quantitative, integrated models that simultaneously test the synergistic effects of trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity on purchase intention. Secondly, there exists a contextual gap. There is limited theory-driven, quantitative research which applies such integrated models within the unique socio-economic and regulatory context of South Africa, an emerging market uniquely characterised by high income inequality and low institutional trust. Finally, there is a need to explore the moderation gap. In other words, the specific role of trust as a psychological mechanism that can moderate and potentially mitigate the significant barrier of price sensitivity remains under-explored, particularly in the South African context.

2.9 Conclusion

Despite extensive research on consumer behaviour regarding organic food, several gaps remain, substantiating the necessity of this study. Previous literature has focused on trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity as individual determinants of purchase intention, as opposed to how they interact to determine

the impact on consumer behaviour (Wang et al., 2020). This fragmented manner is limiting in developing a holistic understanding of the multifaceted nature of relationships that form the basis of decision-making within the organic food market.

Moreover, although trust has been widely recognised as a significant influencing factor for perceived risk, its moderating role between price sensitivity and purchase intention has not been well studied. Mondesign (2024) clarifies that much of the existing literature has concentrated on developed economies, where consumers are more knowledgeable and have higher levels of income and regulatory standards, which differ significantly from those in developing settings (Religia et al., 2024). Accordingly, research conclusions on Western markets are not necessarily applicable to South African consumers, who encounter unique social, cultural, and economic processes that influence their propensity to pay for organic products.

Furthermore, minimal research has combined trust, quality impressions, and price sensitivities in a single model based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB). Consequently, there is limited evidence on the combined effects of these constructs on influencing attitudes, perceived behavioural control, and behavioural intentions on the consumption of organic foods. Filling these gaps will enable the presentation of a more comprehensive view of consumer decision-making, and offer valuable insights to marketers and policymakers interested in promoting the sustainable consumption of organic products in South Africa.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH QUESTION AND HYPOTHESIS

This chapter has provided the research questions, propositions, and hypotheses that inform the empirical test of factors which affect the purchase intentions of consumers of organic food in South Africa. All these factors directly result out of the aim and conceptual framework of the study, which is rooted in the TPB (Ajzen, 1991). It is assumed that the model predicts the purchase intention based on trust, perceived quality and price sensitivity, and that there is a possibility of trust moderating the negative effect of price sensitivity on consumer decision. Figure 3 encapsulates the hypothesis model.

3.1 Hypotheses

Based on the research objectives of this study and the theoretical framework developed, this section develops relevant hypotheses to be tested.

H1: Trust has a positive and significant effect on purchase intentions towards organic food (Hassan & Michaelidou, 2008; Konuk, 2018).

H2: Perceived quality has a positive and significant effect on purchase intention (Carvelo et al., 2019; Le-Ahn & Nguyen-To, 2020; Pham et., al 2018).

H3: Price sensitivity is negatively associated with consumer purchase intentions toward organic food (Padel & Foster 2005; Pham et., al 2018).

Justification for H1-3

Existing academic papers demonstrate that trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity factors primarily influence purchasing behaviour in the organic food sector. Plasek (2020) and Zhang et al. (2018) demonstrated that a better perceived taste and health lead to higher consumer intentions; however, the price remains an obstacle. When consumers trust organic labelling, approval labels, and brands, they are more open to paying more for their products (Lang, 2022). Koswatta et al. (2023) and Yeo et al. (2022) have looked at how these factors act together to influence whether someone makes a purchase decision. With this question, the research aims to understand how these variables work together to fully impact consumer behaviour.

H4: Trust moderates the relationship between price sensitivity and purchase intentions (Konuk, 2018).

Justification for H4

It is built on the understanding that trust may play a role in connecting how much prices impact a customer's happiness with their purchase. Although high organic prices tend to deter buyers, trust in their quality can make people less reluctant to purchase them (Di Guida, 2023; Jürkenbeck, 2023). This is all the more important in markets where people are sceptical about what they buy due to mixed or incorrect labels. No previous research has thoroughly examined how trust in organic products influences reactions to pricing for such foods. Therefore, it aims to contribute to the growth of theory by investigating trust as a potential factor influencing consumers' willingness to pay extra for organic products.

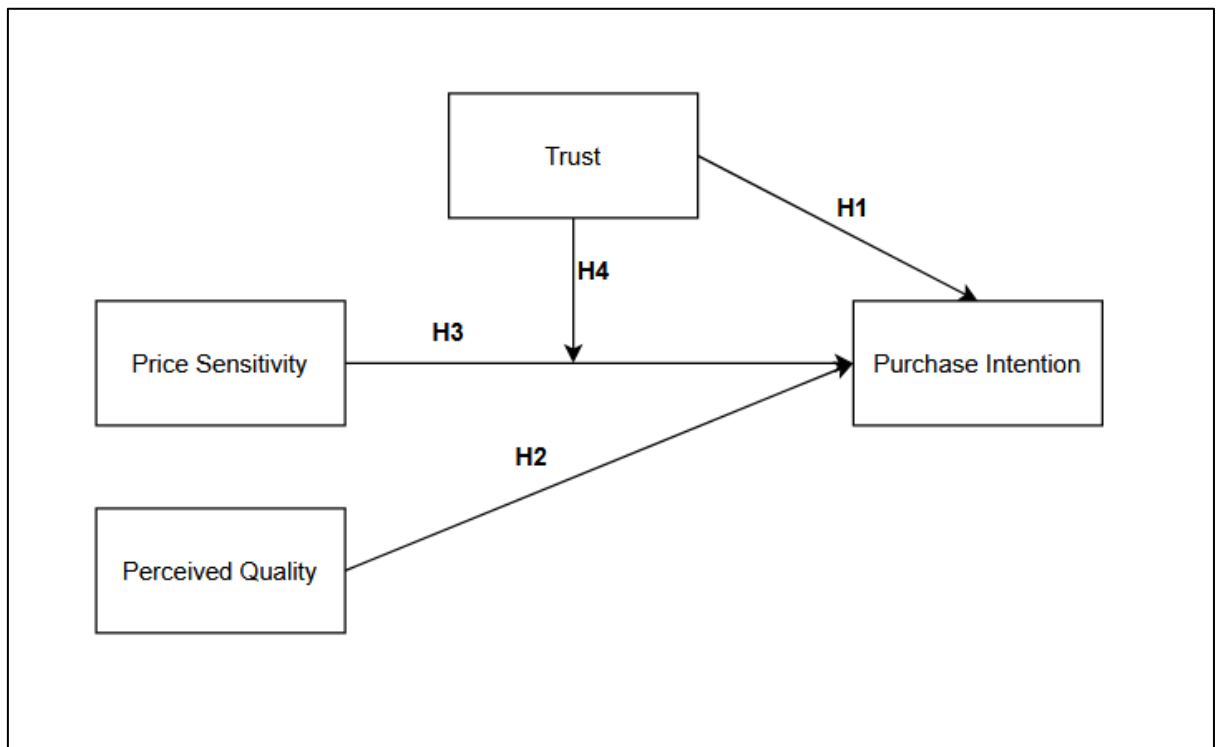


Figure 3: Research framework with reference to the hypotheses

Source: Researcher's own

The following Chapter discusses the research methodology to answer the stated research questions and related hypotheses.

CHAPTER 4: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology and research design that was used in the research to investigate the effects of trust, perceived quality and price sensitivity on organic food purchase intentions in urban South Africa. A quantitative research design, in the form of a descriptive-explanatory research design, made it possible to measure the variables and investigate the causal relationship between them (Redzioch-Korkuz, 2023). The data were collected using an online survey at the level of the individual consumer. The data were analysed and categorised into themes that were outlined in Chapter 2.

The chapter further describes in detail the research philosophy, methodology and design, selected population, unit of analysis, sampling method, sample size, measurement instruments, data collection processes, and analysis thereof. Ethical considerations, limitations, and delimitations of the study are outlined in the conclusion of the chapter.

4.2 Research Philosophy and Approach

The research was based on the positivist paradigm, which focuses on objectivity, testing of measures, and hypotheses. Quantitative studies can be applied to positivism, where it is required to develop generalised patterns and investigate cause-and-effect connections between variables (Karupiah, 2022). Consumer behaviour under this school of thought, might be regarded as an observational event that was measurable through the assistance of structured questionnaires.

The study was directed by the deductive research methodology. The work with the application of the existing Theory of Planned Behaviour was used to construct a hypothesis on the influence of trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity on the intention to make a purchase. The deductive methodology allowed the empirical test of theoretical assumptions (Casula et al., 2021). This method has been coordinated with the quantitative research methodology which helps analyse numerical data and establish the statistical relationship between variables.

4.3 Research Design

A descriptive explanatory, which assumed the benefits of descriptive and explanatory methods to show the comprehensive nature of consumer behaviour concerning organic food in urban South Africa (Firdaus et al., 2021), was used as the research methodology. The descriptive part was also concerned with the perception of consumers on the organic food items, and the most significant constructs were trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity (Aggarwal and Ranganathan, 2019). This enabled the researcher to record the right information about the attitudes, beliefs, and inclinations of the consumers to give a synopsis of the prevailing trends on the consumers' purchase behaviour in the urban setting. The study provided a platform on which the determinants of choice among consumers in a competitive market of organic foods is defined by the systematic exposition of the variables.

The explanatory part of the design delved further into the cause-effect relationship of trust, perceived quality, price sensitivity, and purchase intentions. This attribute of the design allowed the research to determine the presence of consumer behaviours and the conditions that cause the consumer behaviours to exist, enabling the acquisition of information regarding the determinants of the existence of consumer behaviours. By including both description and explanation, the research would then be able to test theoretical relationships based on the Theory of Planned Behaviour and establish the predictive power of key variables on consumer intentions that would contribute to both real world and theoretical knowledge on the topic (Ha & Yada, 2012).

The study used a cross-sectional research design. Data extrapolated from respondents was only collected from one point in time (Saunders & Lewis, 2018). For the study, the focus was on consumers in urban areas, and each respondent was only given one opportunity to answer the survey. Previous studies on consumer behaviour and organic food have used a cross-sectional design to conduct these studies, although limited (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024).

4.4 Population

The sample population was a group of South African adults who are grocery buyers for their homes and either already eat or had intentions to eat organic food products. The primary target population was consumers based in urban areas since they have greater access to retail stores that stock organic foods.

The study included participants from four major cities (Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban and Pretoria) which represented a good percentage of the urban population and provided geographical diversity. South Africa had a population of 63 million people in 2024 (Stats SA, 2024), with urban areas accounting for 66.86% of the population (Trending Economics, 2024). These attributes make the target population relevant for a study which aims to elucidate the organic food market, and the demand thereof.

The identified population enabled the research to ensure that the data obtained was reflective of the group with the greatest possibility of using the products manufactured under the organic food brand. This was crucial in the process of meaningful analyses and applicability of the report to the South African urban setting.

4.5 Unit of analysis

Keller (2010) states that the unit of analysis is the reference point around which the research project is defined. This unit of analysis is often an individual in the social sciences, which is supported by Vog (2005). This research project was designed accordingly to use the individual consumer in South Africa, as identified in the literature review, as the unit of analysis. As Muijs (2004) explains, research is not properly scientific unless there is a clear, defined collection of participants. This study was based on individual consumers who purchase or intend on purchasing organic food. Identifying and focusing on individual units of analysis allows the study to collect in-depth data regarding the personal influences of purchasing behaviour. To better outline the unit of analysis, screening questions were included in the instrument whereby only consumers that buy organic food in the stated metropolitan cities can continue with the questionnaire.

4.6 Sampling Method and Sample Size

The study used the probability-based stratified random sampling method. With this method, every member of the defined population had a calculable opportunity of being selected, thus resulting in generalisability and minimised sampling bias (Williams et al., 2021). Stratification allowed the sample to represent the unique perspectives of organic food consumers in South Africa, since people may be distributed differently within commonly used demographic categories, such as age, income, education, and geographic location.

This method of sampling has been used many times in consumer behaviour research and has allowed the study to draw meaningful conclusions based on a representative population. For the study to be statistically significant, the research aimed to target a sample size of 250 respondents; this is consistent with the suggested sample sizes from previous studies with similar purposes (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024). The sample size was determined by a power analysis, which accounted for the guideline of 10 observations per predictor (Hair et al., 2018).

The study sought a 95% confidence level and a 5% margin of error. A total of 100 samples, 95 of which will capture the actual population values within 5%. Williams (2021) argues that larger samples reduce the standard error, resulting in a tighter confidence interval.

A total of 410 individuals participated in the survey, of whom 255 completed the survey with valid responses needed for the analyses of the data. Table 2 depicts the numbers described. With the nature of the study being probability-based, screening questions were used to exclude participants outside of the metropolitan stated cities and participants who did not purchase any organic food. This technique allowed the researcher to ensure representation across key demographic segments without sacrificing the true randomness of empirical sampling. Each person in the defined population had a known and equal chance of being selected based on some defined criteria. The respondents were sourced by sharing the link on various social media platforms, social groups, and organisations.

Table 2: Sample size

Selection Criteria	N	% of Initial
Total survey participants	410	100.0%
Excluded: Participants with <10% questionnaire completion (Answered only first 2 demographic questions)	155	37.8%
Final Valid Sample ($\geq 90\%$ completion)	255	62.2%

4.7 Measurement Instrument

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire which contained questions that had been tested and confirmed as a valid measurement scale, and were adjusted alongside the urban situation in South Africa (Clark & Watson, 2019)). The questionnaire was also designed to capture critical constructs that were relevant with the objectives of the study, which were consumers' behaviour with respect to the purchase of organic food (Taherdoost, 2022). These constructs were assessed under a Likert scale of 5 points (strongly disagree) to 5 points (strongly agree) and in English for the urban population, which provided uniformity in responses and enabled a simple statistical analysis of the attitudes, perceptions, and behavioural intentions (Alabi & Jelili, 2022)).

To measure each construct, the measurement items used were based on the earlier validated scales used in consumer behaviour studies to make sure they have content and construct validity. The scale used to measure trust was based on Chen (2007) and Pivato et al. (2008) because it measures consumer confidence in the correctness of product claims and truthfulness of producers. This scale originally had an alpha of between 0.83 and 0.89 which reflected a high internal consistency. The Diagourtas et al., (2022) et al. (2001) scale and Wei et al., et al. (2022) scale based items on perceived quality of items including perceptions of healthiness, safety, and environmental benefits of organic foods. The initial Cronbach alpha of these scales was presented between 0.78 and 0.87. The scale of price sensitivity was also measured using the items modified as previously reported (Kamzabeck et al., 2020 ;Lichtenstein et al., 1993) and

evaluated the degree to which price affects the consumer purchasing choice with an initial Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.80$. Lastly, purchase intention was evaluated with the help of a scale developed by Yadav and Pathak (2016), which evaluated the intent to buy and recommend organic products. The construct indicated a Cronbach's alpha of 0.85 in the investigation. These developed and dependable scales meant that all constructs were evaluated using methods used in previous studies on consumer behaviour towards organic food.

To enhance clarity and order, the questionnaire was divided into six parts. The initial part gathered demographic data such as age, income, education, and location, which offered context in analysing consumer behaviour differences among various segments of the population. The following items matched the four constructs of trust, price sensitivity, perceived quality, and purchase intention, and each had several items to identify subtle features of the constructs.

4.8 Data Collection Process

Data collection took place using a self-administered online survey administered through SurveyMonkey <https://www.surveymonkey.com>. The approach facilitated efficient data collection of a geographically diverse sample in different areas of urban locations, including Johannesburg, Cape Town, Durban, and Pretoria. Online self-administering implied that all participants were given the same instructions, questions, and type of responses, reducing variability of meaning or administration that could affect the quality of data (Olson et al., 2020). Moreover, online surveys provided the respondents with the opportunity to peruse the questionnaire at their own discretion which amplified the degree of involvement in the questionnaire participation.

Participants were first screened to determine their eligibility; respondents who resided in the cities listed above and those individuals who purchased or intended to purchase organic food were able to complete the full questionnaire. These screening questions were made compulsory for the participants to answer. If a response to any of the screening questions was 'no', the survey instruments automatically closed the survey as described previously (Anisimova & Vrontis, 2024).

Before the full-scale administration of the survey, the questionnaire was pilot tested on a sample of 30 respondents who were representative of the target population. The pilot test was done to ensure that the survey items were clear,

understandable, and applicable to the participants, and to test how useful the online survey interface was (Sharma, 2022). From the feedback provided, grammar issues on some of the questions limited participants understandability regarding the concept of 'Trust in organic foods' in Section C of Appendix A. Participants also reported that they would prefer to see how far they are in the survey, which was a function the researcher added. Further feedback was that participants would prefer to see how far they are in the survey, which was a function the researcher added to the study. Time feedback was given to the researcher regarding the duration of the survey which was 4 minutes. Feedback enabled the researcher to make small adjustments to enhance the coherence, flow, and overall effectiveness of the data collection. Feedback enabled the researcher to implement small adjustments to enhance coherence, flow, and effectiveness of the overall data collection process.

4.9 Data Analysis Approach

The analysis of the data was conducted using the R software using R (version 4.5.1, <https://www.R-project.org/>). All statistical analysis is performed at a 5% level of significance. The data was coded by the researcher and transferred to an Excel spreadsheet, whereby a qualified statistician from the University of Pretoria processed the data in conjunction with the researcher.

4.9.1 Data cleaning and Screening

During the collection stage, it was noted by the researcher that some questions were missing, whereby the respondents did not finish the survey. This was circumvented by making all the questions compulsory to answer, not just the screening questions. Due to the invariability of the missing data of those questions, it was decided to exclude those questions as it was classified as missing data. Missing data from the dataset were identified, and unusual outlying values were identified to satisfy the requirements for the next parametric tests (Field, 2018).

4.9.2 Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were calculated after cleaning the data to provide a visual image of the features of the sample and distribution of the key variables of the study (Credé & Harms, 2021). Demographic data, including age, income, education, and geographic location, and major constructs, including trust, perceived quality, price sensitivity, and purchase intentions, were summarised using frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations (Hayes, 2024). These descriptive analyses provided some background to the information provided and any unusual patterns or trends that were awaiting to be explored.

4.9.3 Validity Analysis

This was followed by a reliability analysis to determine the internal consistency of the multi-item constructs of the study (Flake et al., 2022)). The alpha coefficients accepted as satisfactory were ≥ 0.7 , meaning that items making each construct were good measures of the concept intended (George & Mallery 2016).

4.9.4 Reliability Analysis

To supplement this test of reliability, a test of validity was conducted using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA), which validated that the questionnaire items had the ability to measure the theoretical constructs identified in the study framework (Shrestha, 2021).

Correlation analysis was conducted to establish the correlations between constructs using factor scores from the CFA. This action yielded the information regarding the strength and direction of the correlation between trust, perceived quality, price sensitivity, and purchase intention, which was later used to test the hypothesis. The predictive power of trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity on purchase intentions has been determined by the multiple linear regression analysis which approximated the individual and compounding effect of independent variables on the dependent variable (Roustaei, 2024).

4.9.5 Hypotheses Testing via Regression Analysis

The hypothesis testing using regression analysis was conducted together with moderation analysis to outline how the relationships between variables depend on each other. To study how trust, quality, and price impact consumer decisions to buy, Multiple linear Regression was used. Output from this outline, which independent variables have an effect on a dependent variable, whether those

variables work independently or together, and how other variables influence it (Muijs, 2021). Table 3 outlines the hypothesis testing framework. Moderation analysis was conducted to evaluate whether trust sits between price sensitivity and purchase intentions. Using this technique helps to discover how relationships between variables depend on one another. The Independent Variable (IV) and Dependent Variables (DV) are outline in the category column

Table 3: Hypothesis Testing Framework

Hypothesis	Construct(s)	Variable Category	Statistical Test	Justification
H1: Trust in organic food increases consumer purchase intentions.	Trust → Purchase Intentions	IV → DV	Multiple Linear Regression	Tests predictive effect (Muijs, 2021)
H2: The perceived quality of organic food influences consumer purchase intentions.	Perceived Quality → Purchase Intentions	IV → DV	Multiple Linear Regression	Suitable for continuous predictors (Field, 2018)
H3: Price sensitivity is negatively associated with consumer purchase intentions towards organic food.	Price Sensitivity → Purchase Intentions	IV → DV	Multiple Linear Regression	Determines the unique contribution of the predictor (Pallant, 2020)

H4:	Trust	Trust x Price	IV	×	Moderation	Explores
	moderates	Sensitivity →	Moderator		Analysis	conditional
	the	Purchase	→ DV		(Process	effects
	relationship	Intentions			Macro)	(Hayes,
	between					2018)
	price					
	sensitivity					
	and					
	purchase					
	intentions.					

Source: Researchers' own

4.10 Quality Controls

The credibility of the proposed study was enhanced by putting in place quality controls. For the study, the research instrument was pretested and rectified where necessary, this was done based on the feedback from the pilot research data. Reliability and credibility tests was conducted, incorporating Cronbach's alpha and Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA). This measure verified the accuracy and consistency of the constructs that were being measured for this study. (Kothari, 2019). Reliability ensured that the data from the instruments was replicable. Validity ensured that the instrument in the research measures what needed to be measured objectively (Lewis-Beck et al., 2004). In this case, the constructs of trust, perceived value, perceived quality, and their impact on the purchasing intention of the consumer were analysed. The inclusion of Cronbach's alpha and factor analysis in the study ascertained that the constructs were precise and consistently measured (Kothari, 2019).

Content validity ascertained that questions in the survey cover all relevant facets of the constructs that are being measured (Saunders & Lewis, 2018) Construct validity confirmed that the items truly measured what they are intended to (Mujis, 2011) CFA conducted after data collection verified that the survey items appropriately represented the latent constructs. This step strengthened the study's overall methodological rigour and supports the reliability of the findings.

4.11 Ethics

Prior to the commencement of data collection, the study was approved by the Ethics Committee of the Gordons' Institute of Business Science on the 21st of July 2025. Data collection will only commence after receiving ethical clearance from the university to ensure that ethical safeguards such as informed consent and confidentiality are adhered to (Wang et al., 2020). That way, the credible and reliable results will be enhanced while also strengthening the study's internal and external validity.

Furthermore, the respondents were introduced to the content of the study at the beginning of the survey and had been assured of voluntary participation, whilst anonymity and confidentiality were ensured in the processing of responses (Wang et al., 2020). Not only did these ethical processes meet the requirements of the institution, but they also guaranteed the integrity and reliability of the received data. These quality control steps assisted in developing a reliable, robust, and valid study, such that the results were credible, reproducible and ethically sound.

4.12 Limitations

Below are the limitations of the study:

Time Horizon

By virtue of and nature of the study, the limitations will be cross-sectional in that they were limited in their capability to make causal inferences. A study by Marokhu and Fatoki (2024) substantiated this by stating in their limitations in a study on organic food consumers that cross-sectional studies, by nature, are limited in the capacity to make causal deductions in research.

Consumer behaviours and attitudes tend to fluctuate and change with time due to several factors, including socio-economic changes. Thus, these changes tend to make longitudinal studies more favourable in capturing consumer behaviour and the related changes. Social bias is also noted as one of the limitations of the study, in part due to the structured questionnaires, whereby the participants can

answer questions that are perceived to be socially acceptable over the truth which reflects purchasing intention (Leonidou et al., 2022).

Limited geographical elements

The scope of the study was limited by geography as it focused solely on urban consumers in four South African cities; this has potentially failed to observe the behaviours of rural consumers. These rural consumers may have different market conditions, as well as economic conditions and availability of organically sourced food (Erasmus et al., 2020). These limitations underscore the need to explore the rural segment through longitudinal studies that incorporate qualitative methods, thereby capturing a wider range of behaviours related to organic food consumption (Fifita et al., 2020).

Contextual and market limitations

The South African organic food market is still developing and thus consumer awareness varies across provinces. Limited availability of products in the market may have influenced the perception of the respondents on quality and trust. As such, the feedback should be interpreted on the preface of an evolving market space. Collecting the data within a specified period of time also added constraints on the researcher as the limiting questions meant that the researcher had to obtain responses from respondents in order to have the specified number of respondents needed for the study. Reminding respondents on a regular weekly intervals to complete the survey assisted in getting the necessary data set.

CHAPTER 5: FINDINGS AND RESULTS

5.1 Introduction

The commencing chapter comprehensively reports the empirical results regarding the drivers of organic food purchases in the context of major South African metropolitan cities. The chapter will cover the data assumptions and decisions made from the measuring instrument outlined in Appendix A. Missing data decision based on the completion rate is outlined in Appendix B Descriptive statistics whereby the composition of the data collected will be outlined for context, exploratory factor analysis, confirmatory factor analysis, regression, and moderation analysis will then be covered in relation to the related research questions, hypotheses, and the aim of the study. All statistical analysis was performed using R software (version 4.5.1, <https://www.R-project.org/>). at a confidence level of 5%.

5.2 Demographic profile of the respondents

5.2.1 Respondents Location

Respondents were first screened by location. The study, as discussed in Chapter 3, focused on participants from four major metropolitan cities in the South Africa, namely Durban/eThekweni, Johannesburg, Pretoria/Tshwane, and Cape Town. The participants locations are summarised in Table 4. Johannesburg and Pretoria/Tshwane had the highest number of participants (102 and 112, respectively). This is likely to be due to the population densities in those two metros. Durban/eThekweni and Cape Town came in distant third and fourth in terms of the number of participants.

Table 4: Respondents' Location

Location	Frequency (%)	Percent
Cape Town	17 (6.67 %)	6.67%
Durban/Ethekweni	24 (9.41 %)	9.41%
Johannesburg	102 (40 %)	40%
Pretoria/Tshwane	112 (43.92 %)	43.91%

5.2.2 Organic food purchasing habits

Table 56 shows that all the respondents either purchased or considered purchasing organic food 6 months prior to this study. This means that these

participant had pre-existing knowledge of the issues regarding organic food purchasing as investigated by this study.

Table 5: Respondents' organic food purchasing pattern

Variable Name: Have you purchased or considered purchasing organic food in the past 6 months?	Frequency (%)	Percent
Missing Values	1	
Yes	254 (99.61 %)	99.61%

5.2.3. Age of participants

The sample distribution was skewed towards the middle-age groups. It peaks with the 35–44 years category, which yielded the highest number of responses at 42.35% of the total. The second-most-common group was the 25–34 year old age group, which contributed $n = 90$ responses (35.29%). The number of respondents in the older and younger groups decreased significantly, with the 45–54 age group contributing 32 responses and the 55+ and Under 25 groups each contributing 10 and 15 responses, respectively. This indicates that the survey sample is predominantly composed of the active component of the population, consumers in the 25 to 44 age range represented in Table 7.

Table 6: Represented ages in the sample

Age (in years)	Frequency	Percent
25–34	90	35.29%
35–44	108	42.35%
45–54	32	12.55%
55+	10	3.92%
Under 25	15	5.88%

5.2.4 Respondents' Gender

The study's sample predominantly women, constituting 60.39% of the study sample, while men accounted for 38.43% of the study sample (Table 7). The remaining 1% of respondents preferred not to disclose their gender, with non-binary and transgender categories registering 0% of the responses. This significant gender skew, where women are considerably overrepresented,

indicates that the collected data heavily reflect the perceptions and behaviours of consumers who are women. While the research aims to provide generalisable insights into the urban South African organic food market, the uneven gender distribution may limit the direct applicability of the findings to men and suggests that gender should be considered an important variable for subsequent segmentation.

Table 7: Gender distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Women	154	60.39%
Men	98	38.43%
Undisclosed	3	1.18%

5.2.5 Respondents income

The largest segment of respondents had an income ranging from R50 001 to R100 000 (25.49%), followed closely by the R15 001–R30 000 income bracket (23.14%), and then the R30 001–R50 000 bracket (21.18%). Notably, 87% of the sample earned $\leq$ R100 000 per month, indicating strong representation from segments where price barriers and affordability concerns for premium organic foods are known to be most amplified. Less than 10% of the study participants earned >R100 000 per month (9.8%), making up the smallest income group (Table 8). This robust sample composition across the income spectrum (particularly the middle and lower-middle ranges) was crucial for understanding price sensitivity and the trade-off with perceived quality, and how these factors influence purchase intentions.

Table 8: Represented Income

Monthly Income	Frequency	Percent
Above R100 000	25	9.8%
R15 001–R30 000	59	23.14%
R30 000–R50 000	54	21.18%
R50 001–R100 000	65	25.49%
Under R15 000	49	19.22%

5.2.6 Highest education level

In terms of education, tabulated in Table 5.4, the respondents are highly educated, with 43.92% having a postgraduate degree, 23.92% having a diploma or an advanced certificate, and 21.18% having a bachelor's degree. It was only 10.98% of the respondents who achieved their highest level of education in high school. This distribution implies that most people who buy or think of buying organic food are highly-educated buyers, who can comprehend the health, environmental and ethical effects that the consumption of organic food has

Table 9: Highest education level

Highest Education level completed	Frequency	Percent
Post Graduate Degree	112	43.92%
Bachelors's Degree (Undergraduate)	54	21.18%
Diploma or Advanced Certificate	61	23.92%
High School	28	10.98%

5.3 Descriptive statistics of the constructs

The descriptive statistics below (Tables 10-13) summarise the overall response patterns of all valid respondents across the four primary constructs of trust, price sensitivity, perceived quality, and purchase intention. Factor scores for all constructs are centred at zero ($M=0$) and scaled to have a standard deviation of approximately one. Standardising is a useful statistical technique for enabling comparisons and consistent regression of different constructs (Hair et al., 2019). The average values prove the fact that the respondents are mostly positive about the consumption of organic food. Among the variables, Perceived Quality had the most significant mean, which means that the consumers believe, on the one hand, that organic food products have better quality, freshness, and nutritional value than conventional ones. This is an attitude that enhances the growing health and environmental sustainability among South African consumers.

Trust indicates that participants not only trust organic food certification and labelling systems but are also willing to buy such products to a significant Degree. These results suggest that product quality perceptions and consumer trust are

closely interrelated and have a decisive impact on purchase behaviour. Refer to Table 10.

Table 10: Descriptive Statistics for Trust

Metrics Variable Name:	Descriptive Statistics : N=255 Trust
Missing	6
Minimum	-2
Maximum	1.24
Median (IQR)	0.16 (-0.60, 0.51)
Mean (SD)	0 ± 0.81
Mean (95% CI)	0 (95% CI: -0.1, 0.1)

Price Sensitivity was moderate, meaning that the higher price of organic food may not deter consumers. Still, it may be a good investment due to its perceived advantages. The standard deviations are relatively low, which shows a high degree of consensus among the respondents, proving that the same views are present among the sample. Overall, the findings underscore the positive consumer attitude towards organic products, with perceived quality and trust becoming the key factors and price being a significant but not a veto factor in buying behaviour. Refer to Table 11.

Table 11: Descriptive Statistics for Sensitivity

Variable Name:	Price_Sensitivity
Missing	6
Minimum	-2.19
Maximum	1.4
Median (IQR)	0.11 (-0.70, 0.62)
Mean (SD)	0 ± 0.86
Mean (95% CI)	0 (95% CI: -0.11, 0.11)

The standard deviations are relatively low, which shows a high degree of consensus among the respondents, proving that the same views are present among the sample. Overall, the findings underscore the positive consumer

attitude towards organic products, with perceived quality and trust becoming the key factors and price being a significant but not a veto factor in buying behaviour. Refer to Table 12.

Table 12: Descriptive Statistics for Perceived Quality

Variable Name:	Perceived_Quality
Missing	6
Minimum	-2.98
Maximum	1.11
Median (IQR)	0.01 (-0.48, 0.66)
Mean (SD)	0 ± 0.74
Mean (95% CI)	0 (95% CI: -0.09, 0.09)

Purchase intention (M = 0, SD = 0.55, Median = 0.05) showed the most homogenous distribution among all constructs, with the smallest standard deviation indicating relatively consistent intentions across respondents. This implies a general willingness among consumers to purchase organic products. Refer to Table 13.

Table 13: Descriptive Statistics for Purchase Intent

Variable Name:	Purchase_Intent
Missing	6
Minimum	-1.79
Maximum	1.13
Median (IQR)	0.05 (-0.34, 0.31)
Mean (SD)	0 ± 0.55
Mean (95% CI)	0 (95% CI: -0.07, 0.07)

5.4 Validity and Reliability Testing

5.4.1 Exploratory Factor Analysis

Iteration 1

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure was used to determine the sampling adequacy. According to Shreshtha (2021), the KOM values range from 0 -1 and suggest that scores from 0.8-1 indicate the sample size is sufficient, scores between 0.7- 0.79 are considered to be moderate, while those between 0.6 -0.69 are weak. The KOM measure for this study was 0.8743, indicating that a factor analysis could be performed. The Bartlett's test was checked to determine

whether a factor analysis was necessary for this data set. A p-value of less than 0.05 indicates that correlation can be checked in the data (Shrestha, 2021). Table 15 depicts the Bartlett's test.

Table 14: Bartlett's Test

Test	Value
Chi-Square Test Statistic	3181.31
P-Value	<0.01
Df	190

Principal Axis Factoring was used with oblique rotation. The initial Iteration (1) made an output of 4 factors with eigenvalues of greater than 1. Table 16 depicts how much of the questionnaire's total variance is accounted for by each factor in the first iteration of EFA. Proportion Variance depicts that Factor 1 accounts for 22 %, Factor 2 for 15 %, Factor 3 for 11 %, and Factor 4 for 12 %. The cumulative variance shows that the first two factors explain 37%, the three factors 49%, and all four factors 60%. Proportion explained Percentage depicts that Factor 1 explains 36% of the common variance, Factor 2 explains 24%, Factor 3 explains 20%, and Factor 4 explains 19%. The cumulative proportion depicts the total of common variance explained, which sums to 100 %.

Two items ('Organic foods is worth the extra cost' and 'I will recommend organic foods to others') were removed due to the low factor loadings. Of the 20 variables included, 18 remained. Table 15 depicts the factor loadings for Iteration 1.

Table 15: Factor Information and Variance Explained: Iteration 1

Factor	PA1 (F1)	PA2 (F2)	PA4 (F3)	PA3 (F4)
SS loadings (Eigen Value)	4.39	2.94	2.45	2.29
Proportion Var	0.22	0.15	0.12	0.11
Cumulative Var	0.22	0.37	0.49	0.60
Proportion Explained	0.36	0.24	0.20	0.19
Cumulative Proportion	0.36	0.61	0.81	1.00

Table 16: Factor Loading for the first iteration

Factor Loadings for first iteration of factor analysis: Unsorted				
	PA1	PA2	PA4	PA3
I trust that organic food is genuinely organic.	0.8416	0.0327	-0.0619	0.0741
I believe organic food producers are transparent about their practices	0.8831	0.0456	-0.0277	-0.0170
I feel confident in the integrity of the organic food I buy.	0.9256	-0.0802	-0.0643	0.0605
I trust the sources from which I buy organic food.	0.7937	-0.1134	0.0706	-0.0255
I believe that organic foods certificates are trustworthy	0.8131	0.0429	0.1184	-0.0998
I consider organic food too expensive.	-0.1192	0.5237	-0.1485	0.1784
Price is the main reason I sometimes avoid buying organic food.	-0.0131	0.8065	-0.1124	0.0752
I only buy organic food when it's on promotion.	-0.0182	0.7397	-0.0111	0.0196
I will switch to non-organic options if the price is too high.	-0.0834	0.7780	-0.0361	-0.0033
I compare prices between organic and non-organic foods before deciding to purchase.	0.0944	0.8625	0.1177	-0.1083
Organic food is healthier than conventional food.	0.0477	0.0609	0.1224	0.6621
I believe organic food tastes better.	0.0245	0.0103	0.1128	0.7078
Organic food is fresher than non-organic food.	0.0063	-0.0310	-0.0388	0.8685
Organic food is worth the extra cost.	0.1461	-0.0939	0.2783	0.3296
I believe that organic food is produced in a safe and healthy process	0.6089	0.1606	0.1085	0.1375
I intend to buy organic food regularly	0.1236	-0.0235	0.6820	0.0038
I will recommend organic food to others.	0.2312	0.0943	0.3755	0.3009
I plan to switch to organic food as my main food source	-0.0282	0.0048	0.7272	0.1177
I am willing to pay more for organic food if I trust its quality.	-0.1509	-0.0625	0.6724	0.0359
I am likely to choose organic foods when shopping, if it is available	0.1307	-0.0478	0.5618	0.0231

After removing the items that loaded weakly, a second iteration was conducted with the 18 remaining variables. Table 17 depicts the factor loadings for Iteration 2.

Table 17: Factor Loadings, Iteration 2

Factor_ID	Variables	Factor Loading	Communality
PA1	I believe organic food producers are transparent about their practices	0.8799	0.7466
PA1	I believe that organic food is produced in a safe and healthy process	0.6111	0.5678
PA1	I believe that organic foods certificates are trustworthy	0.813	0.6938
PA1	I feel confident in the integrity of the organic food I buy.	0.9239	0.8534
PA1	I trust that organic food is genuinely organic.	0.8391	0.7186
PA1	I trust the sources from which I buy organic food.	0.7933	0.6900
PA2	I compare prices between organic and non-organic foods before deciding to purchase.	0.8633	0.7107
PA2	I consider organic food too expensive.	0.5215	0.3643
PA2	I only buy organic food when it's on promotion.	0.7384	0.5537
PA2	I will switch to non-organic options if the price is too high.	0.7799	0.6309
PA2	Price is the main reason I sometimes avoid buying organic food.	0.8037	0.7026
PA3	I believe organic food tastes better.	0.7183	0.6387
PA3	Organic food is fresher than non-organic food.	0.8732	0.7435
PA3	Organic food is healthier than conventional food.	0.6231	0.5331
PA4	I am likely to choose organic foods when shopping, if it is available	0.5536	0.4256
PA4	I am willing to pay more for organic food if I trust its quality.	0.6577	0.4047
PA4	I intend to buy organic food regularly	0.6837	0.5773
PA4	I plan to switch to organic food as my main food source	0.7214	0.6135

The Cronbach's alpha was calculated off the basis that communality values with less than the square of the loadings threshold should be omitted on Likert scale data (Vaske et al., 2017). The Cronbach's Alpha per factor for the final solution depicted in Table 19, which further assists in the investigation of the final factor results. The final alpha values are above 0.75, which is indicative of a strong reliability test.

Table 18: Cronbach's alpha per factor

Factor	Cronbach Alpha
Factor 1: Trust in Organic Food	0.9281
Factor 2: Price Sensitivity	0.8659
Factor 3: Perceived Quality of Organic Food	0.834
Factor 4: Purchase Intentions	0.782

5.5 Confirmatory factor analysis

CFA was conducted to validate the four-factor model identified earlier as trust, price Sensitivity, perceived quality and purchase intention. CFA depicts how the data set relates to the hypothesised measurement model and provides evidence of construct validity (Hair et al., 2018). The CFA demonstrated a good fit for the

factors, chi-square value of 250, $p < 0.01$, RMSEA of 0.062(90% C: 0.051–0.071), SMR of 0.060, CFI of 0.94, and TLI of 0.93. Refer to Table 19.

Table 19: Performance metrics for CFA Model

Performance metrics for CFA Model	
	x
chisq	281.8434
pvalue.scaled	0.0000
df	129.0000
smr	0.0599
rmsea.scaled	0.0616
rmsea.ci.lower.scaled	0.0508
rmsea.ci.upper.scaled	0.0723
cfi.robust	0.9301
tli.robust	0.9171
cfi.scaled	0.9385
tli.scaled	0.9271

Table 20 outlines the reliability statistics of the four factor model. All factors demonstrated strong internal consistency, with Cronbach's alpha ranging from 0.8043 (Purchase Intention) to 0.9295 (Trust), well over the threshold of 0.70. McDonald omega coefficients for the various measures were close to the alpha coefficients (0.8045 – 0.9329). Thus the composite reliability is confirmed. All factors' Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values exceeded the threshold of 0.50 (convergent validity) as per Hair et al. (2019); among the factors, Trust had the highest convergent validity with AVE = 0.7016 followed by Perceived Quality (0.6425); Price Sensitivity (0.5891), and Purchase Intention (0.5099). These findings indicate that the measurement model is deemed reliable and valid for testing hypotheses.

Table 20: Reliability Metrics Per Factor

Metric	F1	F2	F3	F4
alpha	0.9295	0.8684	0.8325	0.8043
omega	0.9329	0.8751	0.8411	0.8045
omega2	0.9329	0.8751	0.8411	0.8045
omega3	0.9329	0.8818	0.8420	0.7976
avevar	0.7016	0.5891	0.6425	0.5099

5.6 Correlation Analysis

Following the CFA, a correlation analysis was conducted using the Spearman correlation. The Shapiro-Wilk's Test of Normality in **Appendix C** indicated that the resultant factor scores are not normally distributed. Table 21 depicts the correlation between the factors latent variables. F1 and F3 (0.50) and F1 and F4(0.60) depicts a positive relationship with p value of less than 5%, outlining the statistical significance. F3 and F4 (0.650) shows a strong link between the factors, meaning the overlap is considerable with statistically significant correlations.F2 and F4 (-0.30) shows a significant negative relationship and lastly F1 and F2 (-0.11) and F2 and F3 (0.12) are uncorrelated.

Table 21: Correlations between the factors (latent variables)

rowname	F1	F2	F3	F4
F1	1.00	-0.11	0.50	0.60
F2	-0.11	1.00	0.12	-0.30
F3	0.50	0.12	1.00	0.65
F4	0.60	-0.30	0.65	1.00

Table 22 depicts the latent variables with p-values.

Table 22: Correlations between the factors (latent variables) p-values

rowname	F1	F2	F3	F4
F1	<0.0001	0.0774	<0.0001	<0.0001
F2	0.0774	<0.0001	0.0645	<0.0001
F3	<0.0001	0.0645	<0.0001	<0.0001
F4	<0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001	<0.0001

5.7. Hypothesis Testing

5.7.1 H1: *Trust in organic food increases consumer purchase intention of organic food*

H1 hypothesised that consumers with higher levels of trust could demonstrate a stronger purchase intention. Regression results yielded a regression coefficient β of 0.39 ($P < 0.001$), indicating a strong and positive relationship; thus, hypothesis 1 was supported by the data analysis in this study. Refer to Table 23.

Table 23: Model 1 Purchase intention vs Trust

Term	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	0	0.0287	0	1
Trust	0.3932	0.0354	11.1145	<0.001

5.7.2 H2: *The perceived quality of organic food influences consumer purchase intentions*

The regression analysis for H2 concluded that perceived quality had a positive relationship with purchase intention, depicting a regression coefficient β of 0.5, suggesting that perceived quality is the most powerful single predictor of purchase intent. Refer to Table 24.

Table 24: Model 2 Purchase intent vs Perceived Quality (with Robust (HC3) standard errors)

Term	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p value
(Intercept)	0.0000	0.0260	0.0000	1
Perceived Quality	0.5067	0.0354	14.2961	<0.001

5.7.3 H3: *Price sensitivity is negatively associated with consumer purchase intentions toward organic food*

H3 yielded a negative and significant relationship between price sensitivity and purchase intention (β of - 0.19) indicating that as consumers become more price-conscious, purchase intention decreases. Thus, H3 is supported by the data from the study. Refer to Table 25.

Table 25: Model 3 Purchase intent vs Price Sensitivity (with Robust (HC3) standard errors)

Term	Estimate	Std. Error	z value	p value
(Intercept)	0.0000	0.0338	0.000	1
Price Sensivity	-0.1901	0.0424	-4.485	<0.001

5.7.4 H4: Trust moderates the relationship between price and purchase intention

H4 through the moderation analysis revealed price sensitivity β of -0.14 and trust with β of 0.38 were both significant; however, the interaction term of the trust as a moderator between the price sensitivity and purchase intentions was not significant, as it had a p value of 0.178, which is greater than 0.05. This indicates that the negative effect on purchase intention does not depend on the level of trust that the consumer has. H4 is not supported by the data in the study. Refer to Table 26.

Table 26: Model 4 Purchase intent vs Price Sensitivity, with Trust as a moderator

Term	Estimate	Std. Error	t value	Pr(> t)
(Intercept)	-0.0046	0.0278	-0.1635	0.8703
Price Sensivity	-0.1408	0.0327	-4.3032	<0.001
Trust	0.3801	0.0346	10.9945	<0.001
Price Sensivity: Trust	-0.0528	0.0391	-1.3511	0.1779

5.7 Conclusion

The data collected from the online survey, in the form of a Likert-scale questionnaire, investigated the behavioural drivers of organic food purchase intention. Trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity were independent variables that assessed purchase intention, the dependent variable, as well as the moderating effect of trust on price sensitivity and purchase intention. The results indicated that perceived quality is the biggest predictor of purchase intention in consumers. The interaction of trust and price sensitivity also did not

have a significant impact on purchase intentions. The results from the study are further discussed and interpreted in Chapter 6 in relation to the literature outlined in the study. Chapter 7 moves to conclude the study with the limitations of the study, the contribution of the study to the body of literature and the practical implications in business.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

6.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from the data sets that were outlined in Chapter 5. The chapter aims to capture the essence of the theory, literature, and business needs presented in Chapter 2. The chapter will discuss the significance of each hypothesis within the theoretical framework TPB and the study's contribution to the topic, and will close the discussion with the model representing the relationships between the constructs of trust, price sensitivity, perceived quality and price intention.

6.2 Hypothesis 1: Trust in organic food increases consumer purchase intention of organic food

H1 of this study was to investigate the impact of trust on consumers' purchase intentions for organic food in urban South Africa. The results showed that purchase intention had a positive correlation with trust ($r = 0.60$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that consumers are more likely to exhibit purchasing behaviour for organic food when they have stronger trust in this product. The literature describes organic food buying behaviour as multidimensional, which supports these findings. Several studies have shown that trust is a substitute for product authenticity in marketplaces where consumers cannot witness fundamental product features like organic or chemical-free (Curvelo et al., 2019). Organic labels, accreditation agencies, and merchants influence customer purchase decisions in the latter circumstances. The substantial correlation in our research supports the latter. It implies that trust influences consumer attitudes by decreasing risk perception and improving perceptions of organic food (Mkhize and Ellis, 2020).

The lack of a significant, distinctive trust impact in the correlation models implies a more complex picture. The inconsistent strength of trust as a predictor of organic purchase intentions across different markets has been previously documented (Konuk, 2018). Trust is found to be a significant driver of attitude in some research, but very weak when adjusted for perceived quality or price concerns. This variation is commonly associated with market maturity and institutional settings. However, in an emerging market such as South Africa, where the organic food industry is

relatively new and policy drivers are not yet firmly in place, trust alone may have less purchasing power. This is in line with Mkhize and Ellis (2020), who assert that low awareness and variations in product quality may instil scepticism, which can also be seen from the perspective of the Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB), on which this study is based. In TPB, attitudes towards the behaviour determine behavioural intentions, perceived behavioural control, and subjective norms. Trust plays an indirect role in attitude formation rather than serving as a direct determinant of behaviour. It reinforces favourable attitudes toward quality, symbol, and morality of the product as precursors of intentions. This can also be supported by the observation that there is a significantly strong and positive relationship between trust and perceived quality ($r = 0.50$, $p = <0.05$) in the study, which indicates that trust may serve as a preceding factor to purchase intention for perception of quality, rather than an independent predictor of purchase intention.

The South African context also serves to explain why trust did not emerge as an independent predictor. As Mkhize and Ellis (2020) pointed out, poor regulatory oversight with certifications and the lack of standardised labelling weaken consumer confidence in organic food claims. In those contexts, trust cannot outweigh physical signs (e.g., brand image or price). This result also supports the argument of Ho Nguyen et al. (2022) and Jakubowska et al. (2024) that a single psychological variable does not influence an individual's intention to purchase but rather by the interaction of trust, quality perceptions, and price sensitivity.

Moreover, as Curvelo et al. (2019) suggest, trust serves as a “credence cue” that influences the extent to which it can reduce uncertainty regarding product authenticity. In developed markets with robust certification systems, direct trust plays a more significant role. However, in emerging markets like South Africa, consumers may rely more on surface-based and price signs to guide their purchase decisions, due to some scepticism or hesitancy. Although trust effects are attitudinal, they may not be strong enough to supplant economic motives in this case.

Since trust has no distinctive predictive value, this does not mean that only task-related characteristics matter. It suggests that trust is mediated by perceived quality or attitude development. Wu et al. (2021) imply that trust influences customer

involvement via affecting risk and authenticity, not behaviour. Trust moderates price sensitivity and perceived value, but seldom operates alone, according to Yin et al. (2019). This research found no moderating impact for trust on price sensitivity, but face validity remains: users who mistrust the directory are less likely to grasp why prices are higher (Murphy et al., 2022).

Figure 4 visually represent H1 that is adapted from the TPB depicting trust as an external factor to purchase intentions. Literature supports this model as there has been the extension of the TPB classical model by extending into contextually relevant variables as antecedents to the theoretical core constructs of attitude, subjective norms and PBC (Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024; Tey et al, 2021). In contrast to the established TPB model, trust acts as an exogenous factor that shapes consumer attitude and perception of organic foods. Canova et al. (2020) stated that trust is an antecedent variable that affects the attitude through the reduction of uncertainty. Trust as a construct indicates a significant influence over purchase intention. Thus, justifying the inclusion of the external variable into the model. The relevance of this positioning of trust in South African metropolitan cities is strong, thus indicating that the consumer should first trust before they evaluate attitudes or note perceived behavioural control regarding purchases of organic food.



Figure 4: Path model of trust and purchase intentions

Source: Researchers' Own

In closing, these findings reveal contextual disparity between South Africa and more developed organic markets around the world. In markets where consumers trust established institutional trust mechanisms (such as certification and traceability), a high level of trust may be interpreted as a value signal favouring the acceptance of a premium price. For South African consumers, however, further proof of quality or price incentives may be necessary before they make equivalent purchase decisions. Finally, the findings contribute to the literature on the context-dependent nature of trust. Although trust is frequently used as a universal driver of purchase intentions in international studies, the present research suggests that this effect can only be observed in relation to implemented levels of regulatory certifications and mature markets.

6.3 Hypothesis 2: The perceived quality of organic food influences consumer purchase intentions

The goal of this hypothesis was to investigate how perceived quality from a consumer's point of view impacts their decision to purchase organic food. The results indicated that perceived quality had the strongest positive link to purchase intention ($r = 0.65$, $p < 0.05$). Demonstrating that consumers who believe that if organic food is of high quality they will tend to buy it. This observation supports previous studies, which highlight the significance of the quality of the products consumed by consumers in making decisions, and in a market where consumers are mostly determined by their health consciousness and environmental awareness, consumer preference is strongly influenced by the quality of the products they consume.

There are a number of reasons related to this that have made perceived quality particularly strong in South Africa. According to Erasmus et al. (2020) and Mhlophe (2022), South African organic consumers constitute a unique demographic segment in which the young, affluent, and educated value quality over price. For these consumers, organic food is a lifestyle choice that shows their concern for health and the environment.

The early development of South Africa's organic market could ironically strengthen the quality-intention connection. In mature markets where there are

organic options, quality might be an assumed base quality. Nonetheless, in South Africa where the organic sector is still developing and organic products are relatively new and scarce, perceived quality is an essential distinguishing factor to justify the search effort and premium price associated with them.

The perceived quality is dominant enough that it may counteract the trust deficits noted in the organic certification systems in South Africa. As outlined in the literature review, there are no national organic standards in South Africa, which leads to regulatory uncertainty (Dancey, 2024; Du Plessis, 2019). In this context, consumers can trust their own quality assessments based on what they see, their knowledge of the brands, and the credibility of the retailer rather than certification labels. The premium retailers are perceived to be quality guarantors and act as a substitute for trust in formal certification because of brand equity (Mhlophe, 2022).

The strong quality-intention relationship also embodies what Murphy et al. (2022) call product trust, defined as confidence instilled by a product's features rather than institutional mechanisms. Consumers in South Africa, however, seem to deal with uncertainties about the certification by relying on the visible quality. The assessed quality stands out as the strongest predictor, which may be due to this pragmatic approach.

Figure 5 illustrates that perceived quality is the main predictor of the purchase of organic foods. TPB shows that the internal factor of perceived quality affects consumer attitude through the evaluation of their behaviour (Ajzen, 1991). The power of perceived quality is 13% greater than that of trust. That is, South African consumers primarily base their purchase decision for organic food on perceived quality attributes. This assessment of organic food purchase decision is based on quality attributes of perceived quality, which, according to Teixeira et al. (2022), are the main determinants of attitude regarding organic foods. Consumers who have high ratings of the quality of organic food will have strong intentions to purchase.

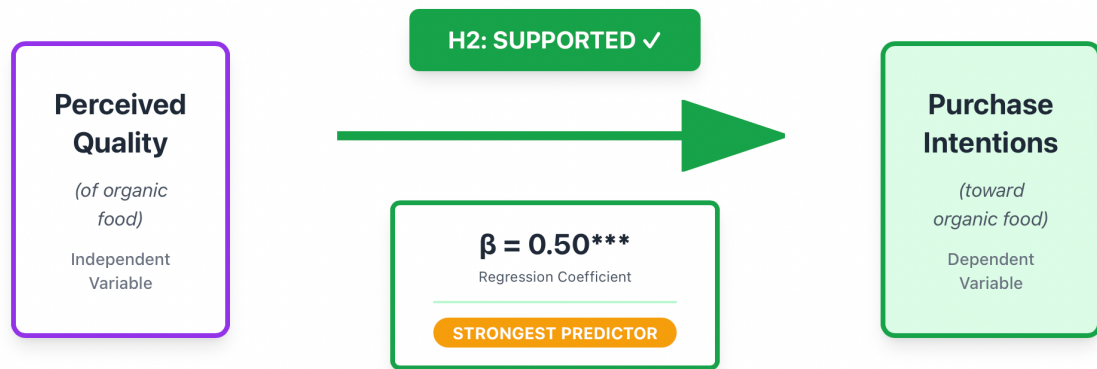


Figure 5: Path model of perceived quality and purchase intentions

Source: Researcher's own

A central principle of organic food marketing is that perceived quality drives consumer intentions to purchase, which has important implications for organic market development in South Africa. Quality perceptions can be influenced more easily via marketing and product presentation rather than price or trust, as the latter require institutionalisation over a longer period. This result indicates that focusing on quality through packaging design, point-of-sale information, marketing communications, etc., may be more effective than price promotion or even certification emphasis in the present market scenario.

Lastly this association indicates that the South African organic market may be less price-elastic than previously thought, at least for the target market tested. If consumers perceive quality benefits as being strong, they appear willing to convert such perceptions into purchase intentions, even despite price premiums. It is not true that price is the main barrier to organic food-related behaviour in emerging markets (Nguyen et al., 2023).

6.4 Hypothesis 3: Price sensitivity is negatively associated with consumer purchase intentions toward organic food

The study revealed that the effect of price sensitivity was on the purchase intentions, which was moderate in nature ($r = -0.171$, $p 0.01$). Consumers who were highly price sensitive bought organic food less often, which supports the fact that price is a major deterrent to the use of organic foods, especially in price-sensitive

economies. The observation is similar to the results presented by Wang et al. (2020), who described high prices as one of the key barriers to buying organic foods in an emerging economy where consumers are subjected to income limitations.

The results obtained herein are in line with the available academic literature that suggests that the factor of price is one of the strongest obstacles to the use of organic foods, especially in low-income markets (Tan et al., 2025). As an illustration, Ghali-Zinoubi and Toukabri (2019) proved that price elasticity always serves as a deterrent to the purchase of organic products in the new markets, despite the fact that the customers might be aware of the health and environmental advantages that the given foodstuffs have.

As depicted in Chapter 2, the model of TPB depicts price sensitivity as a perceived behavioural control variable. This depicts the perceived difficulty or ease of performing a behaviour, given resources or opportunities (Ajzen, 1991). The consumers' price sensitivity from the study reduces the purchase intention. The red arrow in Figure 6 shows the negative effect that price sensitivity has on purchase intentions. This finding makes price sensitivity less effective than perceived quality and trust. Nevertheless, price sensitivity remains an important barrier in the context of South Africa, as it is evident from the negative coefficient that cost sensitivity is one of the highlighted constraints of organic food consumption (Cao et al., 2022; Lavuti, 2022; Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024)

Organic foods are priced 10% to 40% higher than conventional foods (Roy et al., 2023) and production and certification costs have been increasing (Nassar et al., 2022). Thus many organic foods are not affordable in developing market. In accordance to the TPB framework, price sensitivity can affect the PBC of consumers because it deteriorates the belief that they have the financial resources to purchase organic food.

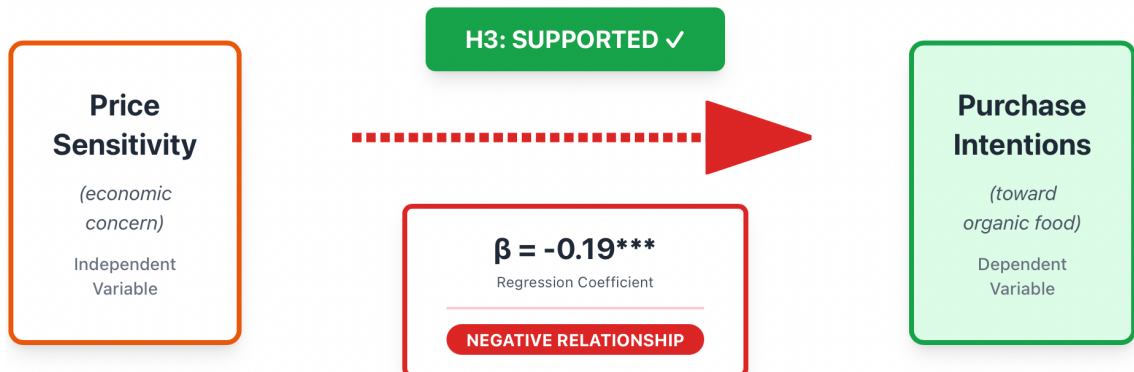


Figure 6: Path model of price sensitivity and purchase intentions

Source: Researcher's own

Although price sensitivity has an $R^2 = 9\%$, given South Africa's income inequality, the difference between willingness to pay and ability to pay is crucial (Madi 2028; Marokhu & Fatoki, 2024). This clearly depicts that consumers who value the benefits of organic food may be willing to pay more; however, they may not be able to due to financial constraints. The consumer thus tends to value the lower prices associated with organic foods, than the perceived benefits (Madi, 2018; Nguyen et al., 2023; Zhang et al., 2022). Economics mainly dictates the reason for this barrier; Cao et al. (2022) and Zhang et al. (2022) stated that the price elasticity of organic foods may be less than that of conventional food. Which would mean that organic foods have more elastic prices than conventional food which can be inelastic. This shows that a small price increase will lead to a drop in the demand of organic foods (Mohr & Associates, 2022).

Quality-oriented consumers are often willing to pay a premium when they perceive the product to be of high quality (Hydock et al., 2023), and strong perceived quality perceptions will likely reduce price sensitivity (Engangelidis et al., 2023). The finding in the model shows that perceived quality is a strong predictor with R^2 46%, which denotes that stronger perceptions of quality may help mitigate the impact of price. Thus producers need to clearly present the benefits of sustainable consumption in order to stimulate purchase behaviour even in the face of the premium price (White et al, 2019), as price sensitivity continues to hinder organic food uptake in the South African market.

The relationship between trust and price sensitivity that was found in this study was weak and unexpected. It was theorised by the first hypothesis that purchase

intentions would be influenced by the effect of price sensitivity moderated by trust in the organic food product, its certifications and brand reputation, in which greater trust would reduce the effect of price concerns. In contrast to this hypothesis, the findings showed that the relationship between trust and price sensitivity was not significant, thus going against the literature. Researchers (Murphy et al., 2022 and Konuk, 2018) have postulated that trust may be used as a moderator by alleviating perceived risks of high prices, therefore, allowing consumers to make purchases regardless of the price factor.

This difference can be explained by the fact that the level of trust in the South African context of organic food products is rather low, and the market of organic food is still in its infancy, and customers might be poorly informed about certified organic products. Also, the cultural variations in trust building and perception processes might be the basis of why trust did not have a major moderating effect in this case. Future research needs to be conducted to understand the relevance of the elements of trust building, like product certification and brand reputation, in developing countries, to have a better idea about how these factors influence consumer behaviour.

Trust is a stronger factor in reducing price sensitivity when compared with research that has been done in the developed economies, where organic food markets are more sophisticated. Consumers with high trust in organic labels tend to pay high prices in Europe and the United States, as proved by Lee et al. (2015) and Liang (2016). South Africa, in contrast, experiences issues with consumer trust, which could be the cause of the price sensitivity until it is removed, even when the consumers regard organic products as healthier or environmentally more acceptable.

The results indicates that in such markets as South Africa, the increase of consumer trust in organic food can be an effective strategy to reduce the impact of price sensitivity and can be used to promote purchasing intentions, which can be achieved through labelling, third-party certification, and consumer education. Retailers and marketers in emerging economies ought to focus on creating consumer confidence and emphasise the inherent value of organic products to overcome the obstacle of price sensitivity.

6.5 Hypothesis 4: Trust moderates the relationship between price and purchase intention

The hypothesis investigated the moderating influence of trust on the association between price sensitivity and purchase intention with respect to organic food. Trust is normally considered to be a very important issue in reducing perceived risk, especially in any market where the credibility of products and their assertions, including organic certification, is not clearly visible. It was hypothesised that trust would mediate the harmful effect of price sensitivity on purchase intention, whereby consumers who believe in organic food brands and certification would be less influenced by the negative effects of high prices.

Nonetheless, this hypothesis was not supported by the current research. Rather, trust only had a weak positive correlation with the purchase intention ($r = 0.129$, $p = 0.025$) and the correlation between trust and price sensitivity was not significant ($r = 0.067$, $p = 0.05$). These results suggest that, in this regard, trust was not a salient variable in mitigating the effects of price sensitivity on purchase intention, as expected based on earlier literature.

According to the model in Figure 7, trust does not moderate the relationship between price sensitivity and purchase intention. The literature points out that trust can moderate or establish the conditions under which attitudes can lead to purchase intention (Khan et al., 2023). This is further supported by Lee et al. (2012), in that consumers in developed markets are willing to pay premium prices for organic food and that this notion was reliant on the presence of trust, particularly on the product's labels. In South Africa, however, the context is significantly different to these developed markets, revealing that the moderating role of trust is not universal, but rather context-based on the market maturity and regulatory institutions.

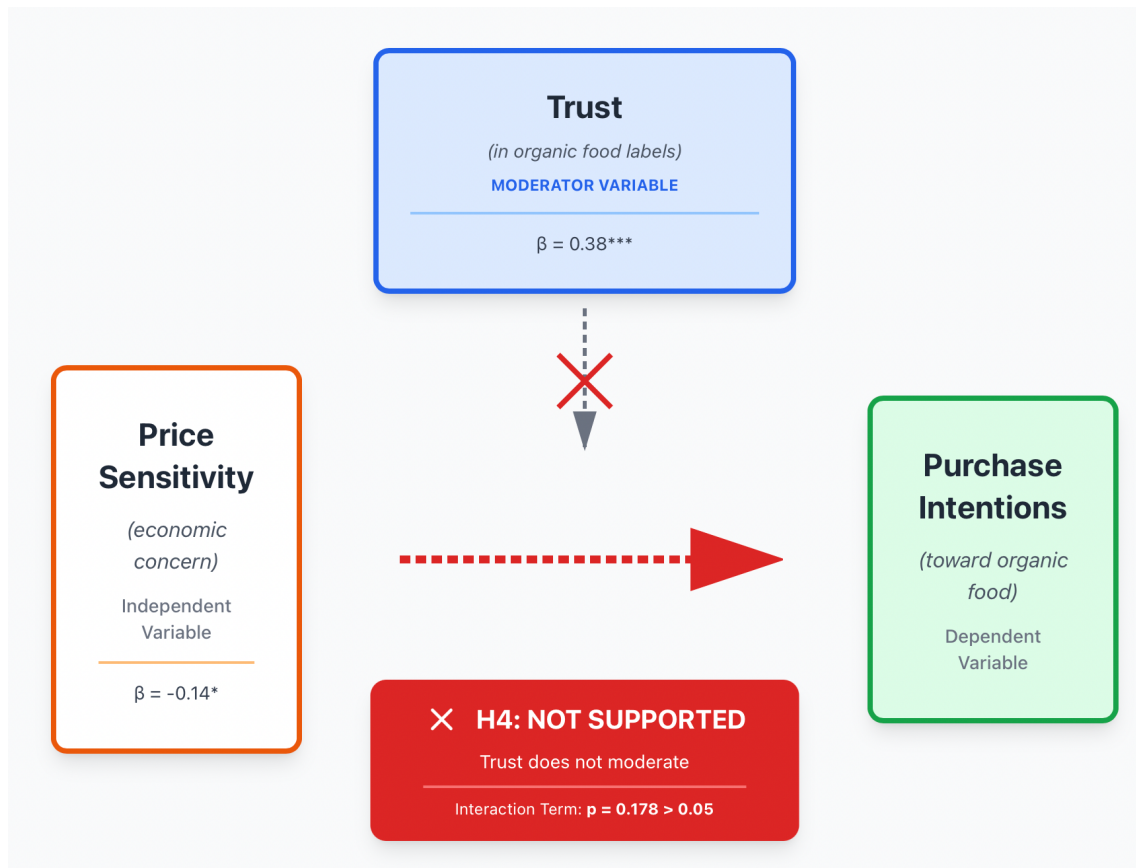


Figure 7: Path model of trust as a moderator

Source: Researchers' own

Trust has been put out to be a defining factor in the consumption of organic foods, and the reason behind this is that organic foods are commonly known to provide a health and environmental advantage that cannot easily be verified through the accreditation of third-party certification. Trust, in this case, may be conceptualised to refer to the quality and authenticity of the products or the quality that is used as a proxy of the perceived risk that a higher price of organic foods will bring. It has been found in several studies that consumers have a stronger tendency to buy organic products with confidence in the brand or a certification system, even though these products might be priced higher in comparison to the conventional options (Murphy et al., 2022; Li et al., 2016).

Lee et al. (2015) detected that the willingness to pay premium prices was a crucial factor dependent on consumer trust in the labels of organic products, especially in developed markets, in which organic systems of certification are established, and

consumers are highly aware. This implies that trust will be able to reduce the negative impact of price sensitivity, as trusting consumers of organic labels will be more open to paying high prices because of the perceived value of sustainability, health, and environmental advantages.

In addition, Wu et al. (2021) and Gultekin and Veuphuteh (2023) contended that trust can even reduce the price issue, especially where organic food is seen to be of high health worth or even moral value. They hypothesised that high prices might be warranted when the consumer is assured of the authenticity of the organic food products, either by certification or brand transparency. However, the results of this research study have shown that price sensitivity is still a dominant consideration in purchase intentions within the South African environment, with consumer confidence in organic food certification systems yet to be developed.

According to the results, in emerging markets, including South Africa, price sensitivity can have a stronger effect on intentions to purchase than trust. The observed deviation may be explained by a number of factors. To start with, the organic food market in South Africa is not yet sufficiently developed, so the degree of trust moderating price sensitivity might be restricted.

Although there is continued growth in the availability of organic foods, they are still in their infancy in the market relative to developed countries like the United States or Western Europe. As a result, the level of trust towards organic products might not be as high among the South African customers, as the system of organic certifications is still evolving, and the general understanding of the certifications is scarce. Second, the moderating impact of trust can also be softened by the fact that the prevalence of effective communication on the issues of organic food products, as one of the foundations of trust-building, is limited. Even though evidence by Liang (2016) and Chetioui et al. (2021) points to the idea that transparency and labelling may result in trust and price sensitivity decreases, these initiatives seem less prevalent in South Africa. Consumers will easily be affected more by price concerns when making their purchase decisions unless they have strong trust-building communication that helps them understand the composition, benefits, and cost justification of organic products.

The findings of the proposed research support the idea that price sensitivity is still one of the main factors that determine the purchasing intentions in South Africa, despite the effects of trust that have been observed in the developed markets. The perceived value of organic products is more positive in mature economies because consumers refer to the perceived benefits of organic products as quality, ethically sourced, and sustainable. According to Liang (2016), the established market consumers are ready to pay a higher price because of their confidence in organic certification systems and their predictability of long-term health and environmental advantages. In South Africa, price is, however, a significant hurdle due to economic factors and the fact that organic food in the country was only developed relatively recently. Even when consumers recognise that organic food is genuine, the price increase can easily counteract the perceived advantages, especially when the more fundamental issues of cost of living are driving buying behaviour.

6.6 Conclusion

The study investigated the drivers of organic food purchasing intentions among metropolitan citizens of South Africa using TPB, by incorporating trust, price sensitivity and perceived quality as the core constructs. The model in Figure 8 integrates the hypothesised findings from the study. This The empirical results demonstrates that perceived quality. The empirical findings indicate that purchase intentions are best predicted by perceived quality ($\beta = 0.50$) followed by trust as an external antecedent variable ($\beta = 0.39$) and price sensitivity has a significant negative influence ($\beta = -0.19$) The hypothesised moderation effect, asserting that trust would mitigate the negative relationship between price sensitivity and purchase intentions, was not supported ($p = 0.178$). Meaning that these variables do not work through an interactive rather than an independent path in South Africa.

The findings enhance theoretical understanding of organic food purchasing behaviour by showing that the relative influence of key determinants varies in a systematic manner across market contexts. In mature organic markets with developed certification systems and wealthy consumers, faith in institutional mechanisms could moderate price concerns and enable consumers to rationalise high prices owing to confidence in authenticity and long-term benefits. But in developing markets like South Africa, with no regulation, confusion about

certification and big gaps in income, perceived quality is more important because consumers want to see something tangible that justifies paying the premium. While trust is still significant, it acts more as a direct influence of beliefs and intentions rather than as a moderating shield against economic constraints. The barrier from pricing still exists regardless of trust levels. In other words, even if consumers trust organic foods and understand what it is, they still may not be able to afford them. Market development strategies in emerging contexts should involve creating visible quality through product branding and regulatory certifications.

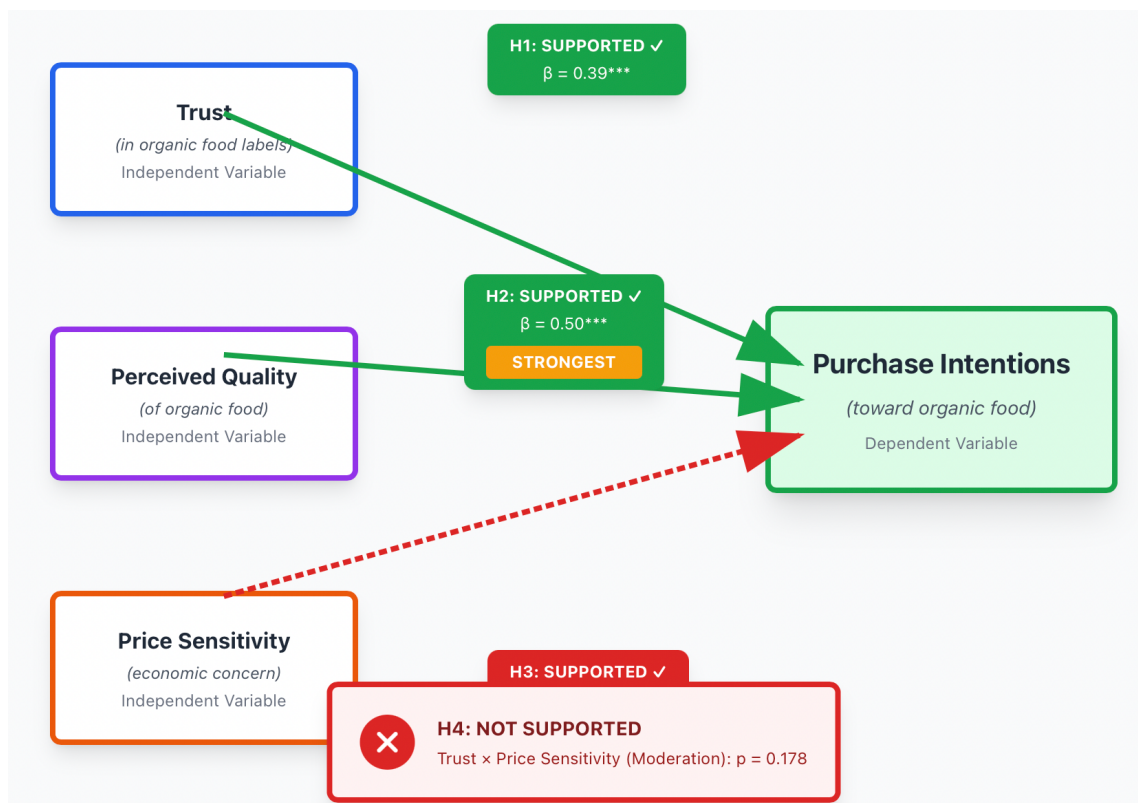


Figure 8: Integrated model of organic purchase intentions

Source: Researcher's own

CHAPTER 7 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

7.1 Discussion

This research aimed to understand the drivers of purchase intentions for organic food products in South Africa, including the influence of trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity. The study aimed at investigating the interaction between these constructs and their influence on consumer choices in a market which is yet to mature with regard to consumption of organic foods. There is a growing demand of organic food around the world given the growing concern of health, sustainability and ethical consumption. These trends are however more eminent in the developed markets where organic food is now a mainstream product. South Africa, as an emerging market, where the level of awareness regarding sustainability is developing, has a specific issue because of the lack of financial resources and the comparatively low level of trust in organic certification of food.

Knowledge of these factors will be important to businesses and policymakers who want to see more organic food being adopted in South Africa and other emerging markets. The research is relevant as it offers useful insights on consumer behaviour in price-sensitive markets and the ways in which these markets have the potential to overcome the risk of barriers in the form of high prices and the absence of consumer trust. The results can assist the companies to revise their marketing strategy and make consumers more interested in using organic products.

The study was conducted in South Africa, using the metropolitan cities of Johannesburg, Pretoria, eThekweni and Cape Town. The organic food market is emerging in South Africa. The organic food market is associated with high socio-economic inequalities, low levels of awareness and uneven distribution of organic products. Organic food is a niche product, despite the increasing health and sustainability concerns of urban consumers. In addition, organic food certification is not as developed as it is in the global standards and hence consumers find it difficult to believe in the authenticity of products. This background is important as it indicates the environment in other developing markets, as consumer awareness keeps rising, while economic difficulties continue to be present. The organic food market in South Africa can be used as an example of the developing markets that have impediments to mass adoption of organic products because the prices are

prohibitive and because people do not trust organic certification. Using trust and price sensitivity to influence purchase decision in this context may have most of the insights to businesses and policymakers who would want to improve the organic food industry. The results of this study can be especially applied to other developing economies as organic food companies there can be confronted with some similar issues regarding price sensitivity, consumer trust, and market growth.

Past studies on the consumption of organic food have determined the main factors that drive the purchase behavior, which include the perceived quality and price sensitivity. The research is always consistent that perceived quality is a major factor that influences purchasing intentions because consumers would relate organic food with improved health benefits, freshness, and taste (Lee et al., 2015; Eberle et al., 2023). The price sensitivity has been also determined as another significant hurdle especially in emerging markets whereby many customers shy away of higher prices of organic products (Wang et al., 2020; Tan et al., 2025).

The study intended to understand was how these variables interact in the emerging markets, such as South Africa, where trust in organic food products and price sensitivity can be more influential in consumer decision-making. In particular, the possibility of moderating the role of trust became a gap in knowledge, as to whether an increase in trust about organic certifications can offset the adverse influence of price sensitivity. This research was an attempt to understand this gap by incorporating trust, perceived quality, and price sensitivity in the comprehensive model of consumer behaviour.

To further unpack the research gap, the study undertook a quantitative research design, and an online-based survey method was used to collect data from 410 South African consumers. With the assistance of validated Likert-scale items, the aim of the survey was to evaluate the most important variables, i.e. trust, perceived quality, price sensitivity and purchase intention.

The data were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation analysis and multiple regression analysis to determine the relationship between the variables. The study assumed cross-sectional research, which enabled the researcher to examine consumer behaviour at a single time. This was an appropriate methodology that was employed in the process of establishing the intensity and orientation of the relationship between the factors and purchase intention in the South African context. The survey method enabled the study to secure quantitative data that provided an insight into the relationship between trust, perceived quality and price sensitivity as a factor of persuading a consumer to buy organic food.

The analysis of the data collected from the respondents yielded key findings that assist in understanding the dynamics of the purchase of organic foods in the South African context. Firstly, perceived quality emerged as the strongest predictor of purchase intentions, and the relationship was positive. This implies that consumers who believe that organic food is more advantageous in terms of health, taste, and safety are highly likely to purchase the food. The conclusion is also consistent with the trend in the world where perceived quality is often a major influence on the adoption of organic food.

Price sensitivity was found to be moderately negatively correlated to the purchase intentions, and this confirms that the high prices are a key hindrance to the wide use of organic food especially in price elastic markets like South Africa. Price is an issue that has become a sensitive factor to most consumers in spite of the heightened health and environmental concerns particularly to the low-income bracket consumers.

Third, trust was positively but significantly correlated to the purchase intention, and this implies that trust in organic certifications and products is also an

important aspect of consumer decision making, but not as important as perceived quality. Trust, however, did not mediate the negative effect of price sensitivity on purchase intentions significantly. This means that the trust cannot be relied upon to overcome the price barrier in an emerging market.

These findings suggest that trust and quality play a major role in purchase intentions, but the price sensitivity should also be taken into account, particularly in the South African context. So, in the example of the organic food business setting, the quality of products and their reliability should be discussed and the price issue should be addressed better.

7.2 Recommendations

The findings of the research in this study have a profound practical implication on the companies in the organic foods industry in South Africa and other related emerging markets. The existing study can also contribute to the current and previous body of literature in that it presents novel results on how the connection between trust, perceived quality and price sensitivity are related to the consumption of organic food. Although these factors have been investigated separately in the past, some of them are put within a single framework, especially in emerging markets like South Africa.

7.2.1 For practitioners

Perceived quality towards the product alone does not lead to consumers engaging in purchase behaviour. Economic factors such as price sensitivity were statistically significant for consumers to engage in this behaviour even when they have perceived quality towards the product and trust is present in labels and producers. Retailers and marketers can adopt strategies to increase market penetration by shifting focus from price-focused to quality-based marketing (Bhardwaj et al., 2024). Retailers aim to motivate consumers by having certifications in place; however, the onus is on the consumer to utilise and benefit from the information (Li et al., 2023). The theory of planned behaviour confirmed this, stating that behaviour is determined by intention, which is determined by

three variables: attitude towards the behaviour, subjective norms regarding the behaviour, and perceived control over the behaviour" (Ajzen, 1991).

Experts have found that perceived quality, trust, and price sensitivity is important to help consumers purchase. Bhat et al., 2024; Busch et al., 2024; Cao et al., 2022. Furthermore, concerning affordability, consumers must be educated on value-for-money since premium price increases won't drive behavioural change when quality is perceived to be high. If businesses want to change people's behaviours for the better, they need to consider what different aspects will combine to create a change. In order for the change in behaviour to be successful, there are many considerations that have to be taken into account.

Drawing from the study's insights, marketers should prioritise attitude-based strategies to strengthen perceived quality, such as emphasizing health benefits, taste superiority, safety, and environmental sustainability (Bhardwaj et al., 2024). For example, campaigns highlighting reduced pesticide exposure or superior nutritional content can build positive evaluations, particularly among educated urban consumers who value health consciousness (Hansen et al., 2018). Trust-building through credible certifications and transparency is essential for credence goods like organic food, where consumers cannot verify attributes (Murphy et al., 2022). Retailers can invest in third-party labels or blockchain traceability to reduce skepticism in emerging markets (Li et al., 2023).

To address price sensitivity directly since trust does not buffer it implement tiered pricing, promotions, value packs, or loyalty programs to make organic food more accessible (Lavuri, 2022). Reframe premiums as investments in long-term health and sustainability to align with strong attitudes (Padel & Foster, 2005). Market segmentation considering trust and price sensitivity independently can target groups like high-trust/low-sensitivity premium buyers or high-sensitivity value-seekers (Najib et al., 2022). Policymakers can support subsidies or regulations to enhance affordability and institutional trust (Du Plessis, 2019). Overall, a holistic approach integrating quality emphasis, trust enhancement, and price mitigation will drive adoption.

7.2.2 For academics

The research objective address the casual relationship among attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control components of the planned behaviour theories. These behaviour-specific elements was not examined in detail focuses on intention only study outcome measure of behaviours which was not so but rather the correlation between intention and behaviours (Leonidou et al., 2022). The constructs were applied in the theoretical framework of planned behaviour, to test if the behaviour specific constructs of perceived quality (positive attitude), trust (extended factor) and perceived behavioural control (price sensitivity) could predict behavioural intention.

Hypotheses 1-3 were accepted as they showed perceived quality as the strongest driver. Hypothesis 4 was not supported in that trust does not have a moderating role in price sensitivity and purchase intention. The academic research problem of the cause-and-effect relationships of the three drivers, trust, perceived quality and intention has been addressed in that perceived quality was the dominant to change behaviour. The phenomenon of consumer behaviour could be explained that quality perceptions were key in TPB for an intention to be created and sustained that will result in a successful behavioural change.

Reflecting on this, the study's extension of TPB with trust highlights its value for credence goods in emerging markets, where attitudes dominate despite economic constraints (Carfora et al., 2020). The non-moderation suggests TPB's additive model holds, with no interactions in resource-limited contexts (Nguyen et al., 2023). This contributes to understanding boundary conditions for TPB, emphasising contextual adaptations.

Lastly the existing study can also contribute to the existing body of literature in that it presents novel results on how the connection between trust, perceived quality and price sensitivity are related to the consumption of organic food. Although these factors are investigated separately in the past, for this study they were studied in a single framework especially in the emerging markets like South Africa.

7.3 Limitations

The research had a sample size of 255. Larger sample size may be used in further research to provide a deeper insight. The moderation analysis may not detect small interaction effects because this study may have not had a large enough sample size (Lakens, 2022). In this particular study, the data collection was cross-sectional and data were collected during a certain point in time in the respondents' environment. The moderation analysis may not detect small interaction effects because this study may have not had a large enough sample size (Lakens, 2022).

Hypothesis 2, urban middle-income consumers were the main respondents, aged 25-44 years, which could explain why perceived quality was dominant, as this group prioritises health and sustainability (Mhlophe, 2022). The data was generalised across urban areas as participants from Johannesburg, Pretoria, Cape Town, and Durban could complete the survey. For hypothesis 3, price sensitivity had a moderate negative effect, relevant for urban consumers (Labiad, 2024).

An online survey was used to collect data, preventing participants from elaborating on their responses. A mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection, could have allowed for more comprehensive findings. Participants may have given responses that were influenced by their current circumstances rather than how they usually feel about the questions.

A limitation observed during the data analysis stage was that variables related to trust, both trust and perceived quality, were somehow interrelated. Trust components of certification and transparency were closely tied to quality perceptions, which explains why there was no moderation for hypothesis 4 (Watanabe et al., 2021).

The convenience sampling limits generalisability to broader populations, potentially missing rural perspectives (Erasmus et al., 2020). Self-report bias may inflate intentions due to social desirability, particularly among health-conscious respondents (Danner & Menapace, 2020). As stated the urban focus excludes rural consumers, where awareness and access differ significantly (Du Plessis,

2019). Trust measurement emphasised institutional aspects, missing interpersonal trust in producers or retailers (Anisimova & Vrontis, 2024). The cross-sectional design hinders causal inferences, as consumer preferences may shift over time (Wu et al., 2021).

Additionally, subjective norms were not measured in this study, representing a limitation in the full TPB model. Social pressure from peers, family, and urban sustainability trends could add explanatory power beyond attitudes, trust, and PBC (Carfora et al., 2020). This omission leaves the model incomplete, as norms might influence intentions in social contexts like household food decisions (Hansen et al., 2018). Future research should incorporate norms to test their role in organic adoption.

Self-reports risk bias, where respondents overstate intentions without actual purchases, widening the intention-behaviour gap (Armitage & Conner, 2001). The lack of norms measurement limits theoretical completeness, as TPB's full predictive power relies on all components (Ajzen, 2011). In emerging markets, norms could interact with trust to buffer price sensitivity, a dynamic missed here (Nguyen et al., 2023). Expanding to rural or lower-income groups would test generalizability, as affordability barriers may dominate attitudes there (Mhlophe, 2022). Larger samples would enhance detection of subtle moderations, reducing type II errors (Lakens, 2022). Mixed methods could triangulate self-reports with behavioural data, like purchase records, to validate intentions (Danner & Menapace, 2020). Overall, these limitations highlight the need for refined designs to fully capture TPB in organic consumption contexts.

7.4 Recommendations for future research

The research objective addressed the casual relationship among attitude, subjective norms, perceived behavioural control components of the planned behaviour theories. These behaviour-specific elements was not examined in detail focuses on intention only study outcome measure of behaviours which was not so but rather the correlation between intention and behaviours (Leonidou et al., 2022). The constructs were applied in the theoretical framework of planned behaviour, to test if the behaviour specific constructs of

perceived quality (positive attitude), trust (extended factor) and perceived behavioural control (price sensitivity) could predict behavioural intention.

Future studies should also examine whether the theory of planned behaviour could be useful in understanding other attitudes and subjective norms, which predict purchase behaviours. This can help improve understanding of the different strategies businesses can implement to promote behavioural change.

Otundo Richard (2024) found that in Africa, organic food consumption is influenced by various factors but lacks integrated models. Addition of young adults specifically to future research is recommended to better understand to understand the purchase behaviours of young adults. This generation is more health-conscious (Sharp & Synodinos, 2023). This will allow businesses to create environments to encourage future consumers to adopt organic food.

Reflecting on these, incorporating subjective norms would complete TPB models, assessing social influences (Carfora et al., 2020). Longitudinal studies could establish causality and track intention-behaviour gaps (Leonidou et al., 2022). Product-specific analyses (e.g., fresh vs. processed) may reveal category variations (Lang & Rodrigues, 2022). Examining digital influences, like online reviews, could capture modern trends (Yeo et al., 2022). These directions would advance TPB applications in organic food consumption.

7.5 Conclusion

The study sought to clarify the links between trust, perceived quality, price sensitivity, and purchase intention for organic food, as well as the moderating effect of trust. This research sought to examine consumer behaviour by investigating the cause-and-effect correlations of components within the theory of planned conduct to enhance understanding of market dynamics and a facet of consumer behaviour. The findings indicate that consumers are driven to buy for health and sustainability when they perceive good quality and establish confidence. Two to three factors must be evaluated to formulate an intention that will lead to behavioural change; however, the interplay of these factors, as outlined in the theory of planned behaviour, must be acknowledged due to their causal relationships, which are essential for establishing a meaningful and sustainable intention for successful behavioural change. Limitations and

suggestions for future study are examined to further the understanding of the theory of planned behaviour and organic food purchasing behaviour.

Reflecting on the broader implications, this study validates TPB's use in emerging markets, with attitudes dominating amid economic constraints (Leonidou et al., 2022). The non-moderation highlights structural barriers like affordability overriding psychological factors (Busch et al., 2024). Future research could bridge intention-behaviour gaps, fostering sustainable consumption.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX A: Survey instrument

Note to the Respondent:

Thank you for your participation. This survey will take about 10 minutes to complete. Please answer the questions honestly and to the best of your knowledge. Participating in this survey is voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time without penalty. Your responses will be kept confidential with no identifying information. Aggregated data will be reported and used solely for academic purposes.

Questionnaire: All the questions from Section C will use a 5-point Likert scale. (1: Strongly Disagree to 5: Strongly Agree)

Section A: Screening Question

1. Do you reside in any of the following cities

- Durban
- Johannesburg
- Pretoria
- Cape Town
- None of the above

2. Have you purchased or considered purchasing organic food in the past 6 months?

- Yes
- No

(For this screening questions, if the answer is none of the above, the survey will not continue, thereafter if the answer is no to question 2, the survey will not continue)

Section B: Demographics

2 Age:

- Under 25
- 25–34
- 35–44
- 45–54
- 55+

3 Gender:

- Male
- Female
- Prefer not to say

4 Monthly Income:

- Under R15 000
- R15 001 – R30 000
- R30 001 – R50 000
- R50 001 – R100 000
- Above R100 000

5 Highest Education Level Completed:

- High school
- Diploma or Advanced certificate
- Bachelor's Undergraduate Degree
- Postgraduate degree

Section C: Trust in Organic Food

Adapted from (Michael &Hassan; Konuk 2018)

Statement

I trust that organic food is genuinely organic.

I believe organic food producers are transparent about their practices.

I feel confident in the integrity of the organic food I buy.

I trust the sources from which I buy organic food.

I believe that organic foods certificates are trustworthy

Section D: Price Sensitivity

Adapted from (Padel & Foster 2005; Pham et., al 2018)

Statement

I consider organic food too expensive.

Price is the main reason I sometimes avoid buying organic food.

I only buy organic food when it's on promotion.

I will switch to non-organic options if the price is too high.

I compare prices between organic and non-organic foods before deciding to purchase.

Section E: Perceived Quality of Organic Food

Adapted from (Le-Ahn & Nguyen-To 2020; Pham et., al 2018)

Statement

Organic food is healthier than conventional food.

I believe organic food tastes better.

Organic food is fresher than non-organic food.

Organic food is worth the extra cost.

I believe that organic food is produced in a safe and healthy process

APPENDIX B: Breakdown of missing values

Breakdown of Missing Values per Variable			
variables	types	missing_count	missing_percent
Please select the city that you reside in	character	0	0.00
Have you purchased or considered purchasing organic food in the past 6 months?	character	1	0.24
Age	character	155	37.80
Gender	character	155	37.80
Monthly Income	character	158	38.54
Highest Education level completed	character	155	37.80
I trust that organic food is genuinely organic.	ordered	163	39.76
I believe organic food producers are transparent about their practices	ordered	162	39.51
I feel confident in the integrity of the organic food I buy.	ordered	162	39.51
I trust the sources from which I buy organic food.	ordered	161	39.27
I believe that organic foods certificates are trustworthy	ordered	161	39.27
I consider organic food too expensive.	ordered	166	40.49
Price is the main reason I sometimes avoid buying organic food.	ordered	165	40.24
I only buy organic food when it's on promotion.	ordered	166	40.49
I will switch to non-organic options if the price is too high.	ordered	165	40.24
I compare prices between organic and non-organic foods before deciding to purchase.	ordered	246	60.00
Organic food is healthier than conventional food.	ordered	167	40.73
I believe organic food tastes better.	ordered	166	40.49
Organic food is fresher than non-organic food.	ordered	167	40.73
Organic food is worth the extra cost.	ordered	166	40.49
I believe that organic food is produced in a safe and healthy process	ordered	246	60.00
I intend to buy organic food regularly	ordered	171	41.71
I will recommend organic food to others.	ordered	171	41.71
I plan to switch to organic food as my main food source	ordered	171	41.71
I am willing to pay more for organic food if I trust its quality.	ordered	170	41.46
I am likely to choose organic foods when shopping, if it is available	ordered	246	60.00

APPENDIX C: Shapiro Wilk Test of Normality

Shapiro Wilk Test of Normality Test Results	
Factor 1: Trust	<0.0001
Factor 2: Price Sensitivity	<0.0001
Factor 3: Perceived Quality	0
Factor 4: Purchase Intent	0.0012