



What motivates consumers to buy organic food in the UK?

What motivates consumers to buy organic food?

Results from a qualitative study

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Abstract *The aim of the overall project is to understand in depth the behavioural process of parents with respect to organic food. Its main objectives are to identify: beliefs, with respect to organic food, of parents who buy and do not buy organic food; the positive as well as negative attitudes towards organic food of those who buy and do not buy organic food; the impact of those attitudes on food choice for parents who buy and do not buy organic food; and to model the food choice behaviour of parents with respect to organic food. Employs both qualitative and quantitative methods. Reports the results of the second qualitative phase of the project which involved 40 laddering interviews, which were conducted in Reading, UK. The means-end chain approach was used. The key idea is that product attributes are a means for consumers to obtain desired ends. Participants were parents with children aged 4-12 years old, who were responsible for food purchases in their families and belonged to ABC1 class. The life values which were revealed mainly fall into three main broad categories. Consumers' human, animal and environment centred values form the key motivating factors for organic food purchase. Both laddering and focus group interviews have generated certain hypotheses that are tested through the quantitative phase of the project, which uses a sample survey.*

Introduction

Organic food is one of the fastest growing areas of the food market in Europe, Northern America, Australia and Japan with sales being in excess of \$114.5 billion in 1999. Although organic food sales still account for only around 1 per cent of the total food market, many countries are showing growth of 20 to 30 per cent annually (Leatherhead, 2000). The UK market is expanding rapidly with a 30 per cent annual sales increase, although it remains currently underdeveloped in comparison to some other European countries (Mintel, 1999).

Several attempts have been made to examine consumers' perception of organic food, factors that have facilitated or prevented the organic food choice, consumer attitudes and reasons for purchase/non-purchase (Soil Association, 2000; Makatouni, 1999; Davies *et al.*, 1995; Grunert and Juhl, 1995; Roddy *et al.*, 1994; Hutchins and Greenhalg, 1997; Latacz-Lohmann and Foster, 1997).

According to existing research, organic food is perceived as food without "chemicals" and "growth hormones", food that is "not intensively" produced and is grown as "natural" (Soil Association, 2000; Makatouni, 1999; Davies *et al.*, 1995). Consumers purchase organic food mainly for health reasons; in view of being better for the children because of lower pesticides and fertiliser residues (Soil Association, 2000; Makatouni, 1999; Latacz-Lohmann and Foster,



1997; Morris, 1996; Davies *et al.*, 1995; Tregear *et al.*, 1994). Moreover, better taste, being like home-grown, being free from BSE, genetic modification and food additives are motivations for buying organic food. According to the Soil Association (2000), Grunert and Juhl (1994), Grunert (1993), and Sparks and Shepherd (1992), the trend towards increased consumption of organic food can be linked to a broader concern about environmental issues. Ethical and moral reasons for buying organic food are also apparent in other studies (Worcester, 2000; Morris, 1996). The main reasons that prevent consumers from buying organic food are: high price, lack of availability, satisfaction with conventional food, lack of trust, the limited choice and lack of perceived value (Soil Association, 2000; Makatouni, 1999, Mintel, 1999; Morris, 1996; Davies *et al.*, 1995; Roddy *et al.*, 1994; Tregear *et al.*, 1994).

Although many consumers have expressed interest in organic food, the food choices of relatively few people have been affected. Therefore, expressed interest in organic food does not play a significant role in organic food purchase and a discrepancy between positive attitude and behaviour is apparent. Therefore, knowledge of consumers' cognitive structures and their impact on the purchase decision will inevitably shed light on consumers' organic food purchase decisions.

Purpose

The present paper is part of an overall study which employs a plurality of methods (qualitative and quantitative approaches) to obtain an in-depth understanding of consumer purchasing behaviour with regard to organic food. More specifically, it attempts to explore the beliefs and attitudes of both organic and non-organic food buyers and to detect their impact on purchase behaviour.

The present paper presents the results of laddering interviews, which form the second qualitative phase of the project. The interviews aimed to explore further issues that were derived during the focus groups so as to obtain a greater insight into the belief structures of consumers with regard to organic food.

Means-end chain theory and laddering

The means-end chain theory is one among several theories that have developed in cognitive psychology so as to understand how consumers perceive self-relevance consequences of products (Gutman, 1982). The main idea behind the means-end chain theory is that consumers' involvement in a product depends on the psychological linkages which the consumers make between themselves and the actual products (Olson, 1989). Means-end chain theory builds on work of psychologists (Tolman, 1932) and economists (Abbott, 1955) who believed that products are bought and consumed not for their own sake, but because they mean something to the consumer (Reynolds and Gutman, 1988). In other words, consumers buy a product because that product represents something for themselves.

In means-end chain theory, products are seen as means through which consumers obtain value ends. According to this theory, consumers choose products because they believe that the specific attributes of the product can help them to achieve desired values through the consequence or benefits of product use (Reynolds and Gutman, 1984). According to the means-end chain model, every product has attributes that lead to benefits and values and this attribute-consequence-value sequence model is the focus of the model (Valette-Florence and Rappacchi, 1991).

In the current study, laddering interviews were chosen so as to uncover consumers' means-end chains. More specifically, the objectives of the interviews were to:

- identify the attributes of organic food that are perceived as important by consumers who regularly buy organic food;
- identify the type of consequences and personal values which motivate interest in these attributes of organic food;
- assist in the development of the questionnaire which will form the next stage of the study.

Methodology

The study employs a qualitative research design with respondents that are parents with children, between the ages of 4 to 12 years, and buy organic food regularly. Respondents were all responsible for buying food in their families and all belonged to the ABC1 socio-economic class. Age was not a criterion, since most participants belonged to the same age group because they had children 4-12 years old. All interviewees had to consume at least two out of eight named organic food products in the screening questionnaire. Participants were recruited in supermarkets and an organic home-delivery company based in Reading also agreed to put a leaflet into its bags to attract organic buyers. Participants were offered a cash incentive to participate. A total of 40 laddering interviews were conducted in the area of Reading during June, July and August 2000.

Eight different conventionally produced food products were presented to the respondents (on cards), who were then asked to rank them according to their likelihood of buying the organic version.

- (1) apples;
- (2) carrots;
- (3) chicken;
- (4) beef;
- (5) bread;
- (6) pasta;
- (7) eggs;
- (8) yoghurt.

Previous research has shown that measurement of consumer attitudes and belief structures becomes more reliable and predictive of consumer behaviour when the focus is on specific products rather than in broad product categories in general (Bredahl, 1998). These particular products were selected because they are all widely consumed everyday food products and are among those products that children either like or are encouraged to eat. Furthermore, each of them was expected to elicit different attributes.

With regard to coding, all data were categorised into attributes, consequences and values. There was a common coding for all products involved into the laddering interviews. The coded data were entered into Laddermapping, a computer program that aided in the analysis of the laddering response. The first stage in the analysis of laddering data was a content analysis of the means-end chains as obtained from individual respondents. The content analysis of the 40 interviews resulted in 402 idiosyncratic concepts which were categorised under 87 codes. Each code was identified as an attribute, consequence or value.

Laddermapping generated an implication matrix which serves as a method of bridging the gap between the qualitative and quantitative aspects of the laddering interviews. A hierarchical value map (HVM) was then produced based on the results of the implication matrix. A hierarchical value map gives a graphic presentation of all the most frequently mentioned attributes, consequences and values and it consists of a series of nodes, connected by lines, representing the aggregate of the respondents' ladders. Separate hierarchical value maps were also created for the most frequently used attributes during the interviews and focus groups.

The cut-off criterion determines which connections should be included in the hierarchical value map. A cut-off point of 3 was chosen for this study (9 for the overall HVM), which means that a link is drawn between two concepts if at least four respondents have mentioned the concept as a direct or indirect consequence of another concept. This accounts for 75-80 per cent of the relationships. By selecting a cut-off point of more than one the complexity of the results is reduced and therefore the clarity of the HVMs is increased, as only those links that are mentioned more often are represented in the map.

Results

Having conducted the analysis of the laddering interviews, it was decided that the results should be presented under two different sections; the first section was based on all the elicited attributes, consequences and values represented in overall HVM, whereas the second section was an attribute-based analysis and resulted in several different HVMs which include only selected attributes and their linkages with consequences and values. For the purpose of this paper, only the overall HVM will be presented as well as the HVMs of the most frequently mentioned concepts in the overall HVM.

Figure 1 illustrates the respondents' most common means-end chain regarding organic food, which, for the purpose of this research, were the eight different food products.

Figure 1 demonstrates that, with a cut-off point of 9, which represents 43 per cent, *pesticides* as an attribute, *like eating it* as a consequence, and *responsibility for family and self well-being and health* as a value tend to be the most popularly mentioned concepts during the laddering interviews. More specifically, as many as 38 of the respondents mentioned *pesticides* as attributes, 34 mentioned *like eating it* as consequence, and 36 mentioned *responsibility for family and self well-being and health* as a value.

The map consists of various main parts; the first part is centred around responsibility for family and self well-being and health. This part of the map represents what could be termed as the health factor. The second part of the map is centred around (not) like eating, which represents the hedonistic factor. Additionally, there is also the part which is centred around happier animals as well as the part that is around destruction of the environment which represents the ethical factor.

Discussion

The life values which were revealed in the current phase of the project mainly fall into three main broad categories;

- (1) values that are centred around the human being (Figure 2);
- (2) values that are centred around animals' well-being (Figure 3); and
- (3) values centred around the environment (Figure 4).

Regarding the first category, values that refer to human health, well-being, and feelings and desires are included, such as responsibility for health and well-being of self and family, feel relaxed and satisfaction, nostalgia, longer life,

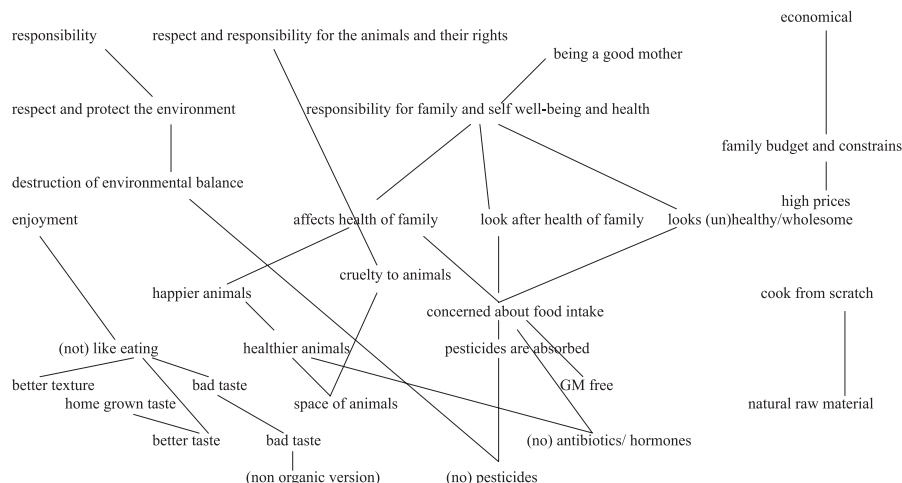


Figure 1.
Overall HVM for all
types of organic food,
cut-off = 9 (43 per cent)

Figure 2.
HVM for “health”,
cut-off = 3 (75 per cent)

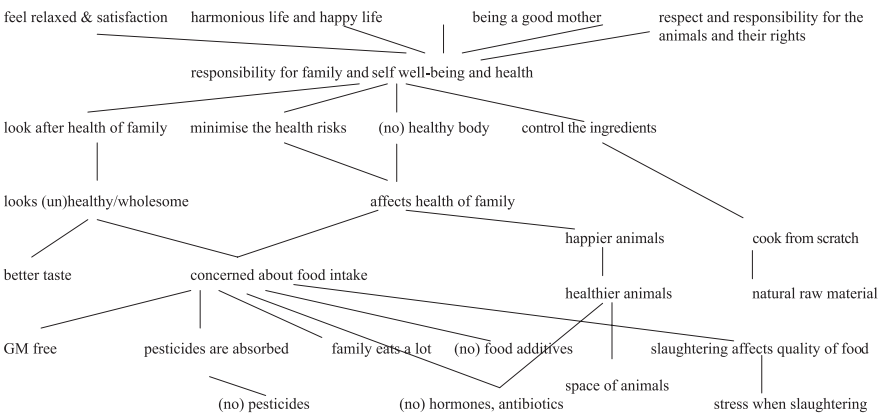


Figure 3.
HVM for “animals”,
cut-off = 3 (72 per cent)

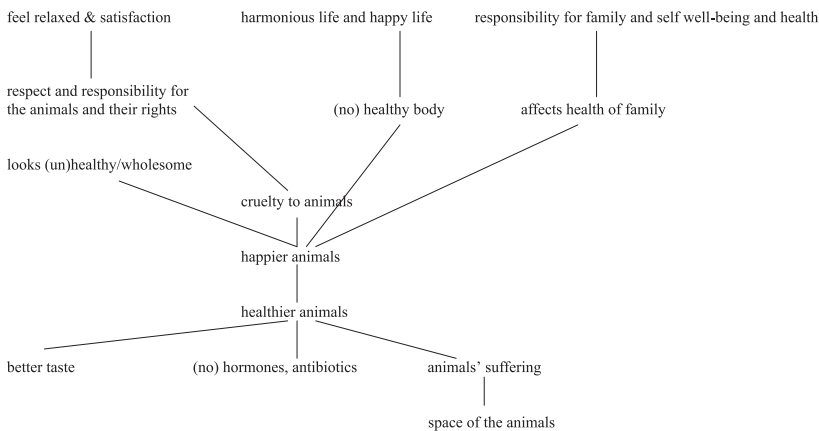
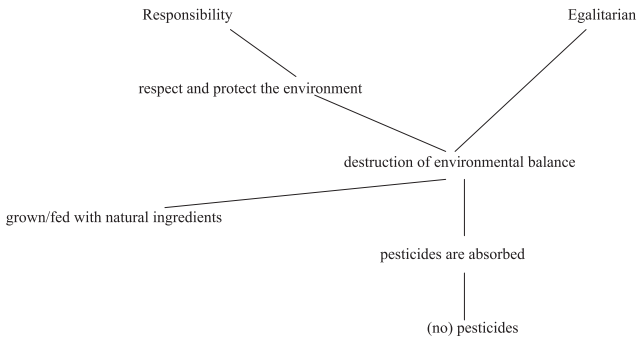


Figure 4.
HVM for “environment”,
cut-off = 3, (71 per cent)



happy life. Moreover, these values can focus either on the individuals (longer life, feel relaxed and satisfaction) or on the family unit (responsible for family health and well-being) or on the society unit as a whole (egalitarian). In this category the most frequently mentioned value was that referring to the health-

related factor and, in particular, for being responsible for health and well-being for self and family, which appears to be in the primary/central position in almost all the HVMs. More specifically, with the exception of few attributes (hedonic), all the attributes form ladders that include this health-related value. This supports the focus group results and the relevant literature that presents the health factor as the main motivation for the purchase of organic food.

The second most frequently mentioned value centred around animals. At this point it is wise to distinguish between life values related to animals *per se* (health, human feelings/beliefs about animals) and life values related to animals that have an impact on human beings (health, and human feelings, desires about life in general excluding those feelings/ beliefs about animals). This can be interpreted as the animals' lives and human life being highly correlated, not only due to animal welfare issues, but mainly due to the impact that the animals' life can have on human health. The concepts "you are what you eat" and "happy animals produce healthy products" perfectly reflect the relationship between animals and health and seem to be the reference point in the purchase of meat and livestock products.

The study also showed that there are also values related to the environment, especially when the effects of pesticides and the consequences of the imports of organic food are concerned. Therefore, responsibility and protection for the environment comes just after the animal welfare issues in terms of frequency. It should be mentioned that, according to previous research, worries about the environment was one of the most frequently mentioned issues. Moreover, by protecting the environment, parents believe that they protect their families' well-being as they want their children to be brought up on a "healthy" planet and later inherit it. This supports their beliefs that any destruction of environmental balance will have effects in terms of human well-being and well-living.

Summary and conclusions

The main conclusion from the analysis of the laddering interviews is that, for this group of British consumers, certain types of consequences of organic food have self-relevance. These consumers perceive organic food as a means of achieving individual and social values, of which the most important is centred around the health factor for either themselves or their families. Values centred around the environment and animal welfare are also considered to be important, although their impact on the health factor seems to be the most significant motive for choosing organic food.

Both focus groups and laddering interviews have aided in the generation of a number of hypotheses that will be tested during the quantitative phase of the projects.

The relation between concern about health of humans and animal welfare issues needs to be further investigated as well as the overall nature of the concern about animal welfare issues (impact of high animal welfare standards and health of humans). It would be also interesting to uncover if possible, the means-end chains of non-organic food buyers and compare the results with the results of the current study.

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