

Purchase Intention Towards Organic Food: Evidence from Generation Z in Colombo District, Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Globally, organic food consumption has experienced a significant increase as consumers become increasingly concerned about the environmental and health implications of their purchasing decisions. On the contrary, the domestic organic food market in Sri Lanka remains underdeveloped. Therefore, the present study examines the purchase intention of consumers in Generation Z toward organic food using an extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework. A semi-structured questionnaire survey was conducted among 300 respondents of aged 18–27 years in the Colombo District of Sri Lanka in 2024. Data were analyzed using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) to assess the influence of attitudes, subjective norms, perceived behavioral control (PBC), awareness, trust in certification, digital influence, and perceived affordability on purchase intention. The results show that attitudes, subjective norms, and PBC significantly predict purchase intention, collectively explaining 47% of the variance. Amongst, PBC emerged as the strongest determinant, highlighting the importance of accessibility, availability, and convenience in shaping sustainable purchasing behavior. The awareness had no significant influence on the attitude, which implies that knowing about a product doesn't lead to positive intentions. Trust in organic certification, social media influence and affordability perceptions did not significantly affect the relationships between TPB constructs and purchase intention. The study contributes to the literature on sustainable consumption in emerging markets by integrating psychological and contextual determinants within a generational perspective. Improving product availability, enhancing affordability, expanding retail access, and strengthening transparent and trustworthy certification communication are recommended.

Key words: Organic food, Generation Z, Purchase intention, Theory of Planned Behavior, Sri Lanka

JEL Codes: C30, D12, Q56

Introduction

Growing global concern over environmental sustainability and public health has substantially reshaped food consumption patterns in recent decades. Demand for environmentally responsible products has expanded as consumers increasingly evaluate the ecological and health implications of their purchasing decisions (Yadav & Pathak, 2016). Within this broader transition toward sustainable consumption, organic food has emerged as a prominent category, often perceived as both environmentally beneficial and nutritionally safer (Chen, 2009). The consumption of organic food is on the rise across the world (Chekima et al., 2019). However, organic food consumption in developing countries is still relatively low (Iqbal, 2015). Nevertheless, the pace and extent of organic food adoption differ significantly across countries and demographic groups. Cultural norms, income levels, institutional credibility, and market infrastructure collectively shape consumption behavior, underscoring the importance of examining context-specific determinants.

Sri Lanka has established a reputation as an exporter of certified organic commodities, including tea, spices, coconut-based products, fruits and essential oils which are primarily directed toward European, North American and East Asian markets (Export Development Board, 2024). Despite this export orientation, the domestic organic retail sector remains relatively small and concentrated in urban centers. Although awareness of organic agriculture has increased in recent years, local consumption continues to be constrained by affordability concerns, limited product availability, and questions regarding certification credibility (Narmilan & Amuthenie, 2015).

At the same time, demographic shifts may influence future consumption paths. Generation Z typically defined as individuals born between the late 1990s and early 2010s constitutes an increasingly significant consumer segment. As digital natives, members of this cohort are highly exposed to global information networks and sustainability discourses. Prior research suggests that younger consumers often integrate environmental responsibility, wellness considerations, and ethical values into their purchasing decisions more explicitly than previous generations (Espejo et al., 2024). Consequently, Generation Z is frequently viewed as a potential catalyst for expanding sustainable markets, including organic food consumption.

Despite this potential, limited empirical attention has been devoted to understanding the demand-side behavior of young consumers in Sri Lanka's organic food market. Existing studies often treat consumers as a homogeneous group, overlooking generational differences and the distinctive characteristics of digitally connected youth populations (Wijesinghe & Attanayaka, 2021). Moreover, while policy

discussions have emphasized organic production and export promotion, less emphasis has been placed on shaping the domestic purchase intentions among younger consumers mainly understanding the motives and barriers underlining its purchase intention. Therefore, the central problem addressed in this study is the limited empirical understanding of the determinants of organic food purchase intention among Generation Z consumers in Colombo District, Sri Lanka, particularly within an extended Theory of Planned Behavior framework.

Against this background, the present study investigates the purchase intentions of Generation Z consumers in Colombo District, Sri Lanka with respect to organic food. Drawing on an extended Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) framework, the analysis explores the relative influence of psychological and contextual factors in shaping purchase intention. Hence, the study is particularly important for the future expansion of the local organic market, to a considerable extent, on the purchasing behavior of emerging consumer cohorts.

Theoretical Background

Theories on consumer behavior support the systematic approach to the study and prediction of purchase intentions. The Theory of Reasoned Action (TRA) posits that voluntary behavior is directly predicted by an individual's intention to perform it. Intention is determined by two main factors: attitude towards the behavior and subjective norms (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). However, this is not always true in certain situations like in the case of organic food acquisition, where consumers face limits of price, availability, or accessibility. Complimentarily, Health Belief Model (HBM) focuses and predicts health-related behaviors by focusing on individual attitudes and belief (Rosenstock, 1974). However, it fails to explain the impact of social influence and perceived control, which restricts its applicability to socially networked groups like Generation Z. Value Belief Norm (VBN) theory explains pro-environmental behavior by values and moral imperative (Stern et al., 1999), but there are some practical obstacles such as affordability and accessibility that are especially relevant in new economies such as Sri Lanka.

The Theory of Planned Behavior is a well-established (Ajzen, 1991) and widely utilized research model for understanding consumer behavior intentions. This theory is also widely used in the context of green consumption and organic food (Bai et al., 2019; Carrión Bósquez et al., 2023). TPB aggregates attitudes, subjective norms and perceived behavioral control in making decision on purchasing behavior. Attitude toward the behavior is defined as “a person’s overall evaluation of performing the behavior” while the subjective norms are defined as an individual’s perception that

significant others consider whether he or she should or should not perform a particular behavior (Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). PBC is defined within the TPB as an individual's perception of the ease or difficulty of performing a given behavior, reflecting both internal capabilities and external constraints (Ajzen, 1991). It suggests that the direct antecedent of actual behavior is a person's intention to engage in that behavior. Whether a behavior is carried out or not is determined by intention. The main factor in the theory of planned behavior is the individual's intention to carry out certain behavior (Ajzen, 1991).

Despite the popularity of TPB as a tool to explain the intentions to purchase organic food, some researchers argue that its initial formulation might not be able to capture the complexity of ethically and sustainably oriented consumption (Primaroni and Septirosya, 2024). Thus, an extended form of TPB has been adopted with increased adoption of other psychological and situational variables to maximize the explanatory capability. Some of these extensions include environmental concerns, health consciousness, trust in certification, moral norms, self-identity, knowledge or awareness, price sensitivity, and perceived product attributes like quality and safety (Primaroni and Septirosya, 2024; Yadav and Pathak, 2016; Chen, 2007). Therefore, this study applies an extended version of TPB model considering the contextual and psychological factors. Accordingly, the key attribute that consumer consider when making purchase decision that is awareness as the antecedent variable, trust in certification, digital media influence where Generation Z cohort is more digital connectivity and the affordability as the price sensitivity variable were considered for the study.

Empirical Evidence

Empirical studies that have utilized TPB in the context of organic and sustainable food consumption have revealed a significant explanatory power to associate the psychology of consumers with the consumption behavior (Asif et al., 2023; Vermeir & Verbeke, 2008). In general, consumers with positive attitudes towards organic food are more inclined to buy organic food (Clark et al., 2019; Trivedi et al., 2018). Similar findings are reported in developing country contexts, where positive attitudes driven by perceived health benefits, environment concern and food safety significantly enhance purchase intention (Selvaraj et al., 2024). Similarly, studies that examine consumer behavioral intention to sustainable organic food products also confirm that a positive assessment of organic food always results in an increased purchasing intention (Mrihrahayu et al., 2022). Subjective norms play a vital role in the utilization and purchase intentions of young consumers for organic food (Akbari et al., 2019). Study conducted by Scalco et al. (2017) indicated that subjective norms have greater importance and positive effects on purchase intentions. Al-Swidi et al.

(2014), confirmed the significant effect of PBC on purchase intention toward organic food.

A study conducted among urban consumers in the Colombo District found that attitudes toward organic food, perceived trust, and subjective norms significantly influence organic food purchase intention, with health consciousness and information availability playing a critical role in shaping favorable attitudes (Wijesinghe & Aththanayaka, 2021). Another Sri Lankan study confirmed that subjective norms, perceived behavioral control, health consciousness, and environmental concern are significant predictors of green purchase intention for organic food products, highlighting the relevance of both social influence and perceived affordability constraints in shaping consumer decisions (Premadasa & Fernando, 2022). Similarly, research on green purchase intention in urban Sri Lanka has demonstrated that attitudes, environmental knowledge, and perceived behavioral control positively influence purchasing intentions, while subjective norms show a varying but still meaningful influence depending on consumer segment (Herath & Janz, 2025).

Awareness of organic food is initially integrated as a forerunner to attitudes. Studies have shown that increased awareness reduces uncertainty, enhances perceived benefits, and positively shapes attitudes, which in turn influences intention to buy organic products (Kamboj et al., 2023). Trust, especially in certification and labeling systems, has demonstrated a significant role in strengthening the attitude intention relationship in research on organic food, especially in developing nations where doubt of organic assertions is strong (Rana & Paul, 2017; Teng & Wang, 2015). Digital and social media serve as the main sources of information, social norms and facilitate lifestyle to Generation Z. Based on that, the use of social media is likely to make a connection between subjective norms and purchase intention moderate, and consequently increase the impact of peer and influencer endorsement on decision-making (Kaur et al., 2023). The aspect of affordability is operationalized as a separate factor to capture financial factors that drive the intention of Generation Z consumers to buy organic food. Perceived financial capacity (income) and price sensitivity and acceptance of price premiums are denoted as the construct.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is grounded in the TPB and incorporates both core and context-specific variables to explain the purchase intention of Generation Z consumers toward organic food. The core TPB constructs such as attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control are hypothesized to exert direct effects on purchase intention. In addition to these primary determinants, the model integrates several extended variables to capture contextual influences relevant to the Sri Lankan

setting. Specifically, awareness is conceptualized as an antecedent variable influencing consumer attitudes toward organic food. Furthermore, trust in certification, digital influence, and perceived affordability are incorporated as moderating variables that potentially shape the strength of the relationships between the core TPB constructs and purchase intention. The formulation of hypotheses is informed by the theoretical foundations of the TPB (Ajzen, 1991) as well as existing empirical evidence in the sustainable consumption literature.

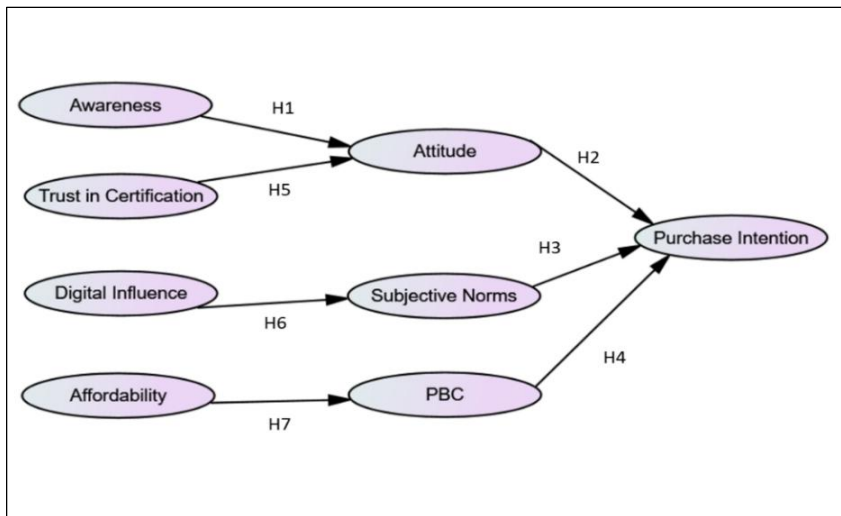


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework based on the Extended TPB

Source: Developed by Authors based on the literature review

H1: Higher levels of awareness (AW) positively influence attitudes toward organic food

Empirical evidence strongly supports the role of awareness as a cognitive antecedent to attitude formation in the context of organic food consumption (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008). Awareness of organic food is initially integrated as a forerunner to attitudes. Awareness is measured as a cognitive construct reflecting respondents' knowledge and familiarity with organic food and its general attributes. The indicators focused on understanding of organic food, awareness of health and environmental attributes, and recognition of organic food labels.

H2: Positive attitudes (AT) toward organic food significantly predict purchase intention (PI)

According to Ajzen (1991), attitude represents an individual's overall evaluation of performing a behavior and is a central predictor of intention formation. In this study, attitude was conceptualized as an affective evaluative construct reflecting Generation Z consumers' overall positive or negative evaluation of organic food consumption. Indicators were designed to capture health-related beliefs, environmental concern, lifestyle alignment, and quality and taste preferences.

H3: Subjective norms (SN) positively influence purchase intention

Within the framework of the TPB, subjective norms represent the perceived social pressure experienced by an individual to engage or refrain from engaging in a given behavior (Ajzen, 1991). Subjective norms were measured in the study as perceived social pressure from significant others to engage in organic food purchasing. Indicators focused on peer and family influence, reflecting interpersonal normative expectations consistent with the TPB.

H4: Perceived behavioral control (PBC) positively influences purchase intentions

Yadav and Pathak (2016) confirmed that PBC positively affects young consumers' green purchase intentions, highlighting the importance of perceived ease of purchase. In the context of organic food consumption, PBC represents the degree to which Generation Z consumers perceive they are capable of purchasing organic food, considering the availability of resources, accessibility, and their ability to make informed choices, independent of financial constraints where only focusing the non-monetary constraints.

H5: Trust in certification (TC) strengthens the relationship between attitudes and purchase intention.

Trust in certification is incorporated in this study as a moderating variable. In the Sri Lankan context, the organic food certification system particularly the SLS 1324:2018 standard remains relatively poorly understood among consumers, while concerns regarding the effectiveness of enforcement and monitoring persist (Narmilan & Amuthenie, 2015). Under such conditions, consumer trust becomes a critical factor in determining whether favorable attitudes toward organic food translate into actual purchase intention.

H6: Digital media influence (DI) strengthen the relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention.

For Generation Z, digital and social platforms serve as the principal sources of knowledge, peer standards, and lifestyle assistance. Consequently, social media

utilization should moderate the effect of subjective standards on purchase intention, amplifying the impact of peer and influence endorsements on decision-making (Kaur et al., 2023). Digital media influence was modeled as a separate construct capturing the informational and influential effects of online platforms on consumers' organic food purchase intention.

H7: Affordability (AF) constraints weaken the relationship between perceived behavioral control and purchase intention.

Studies in organic food contexts have shown that income and affordability conditions influence the strength of purchase intentions, reinforcing the moderating role of economic capability in consumer behavior (Chekima et al., 2016). Affordability acts as a moderating variable in the study. Affordability was measured as a separate construct to capture the financial determinants of Generation Z consumers' organic food purchase intentions. Indicators included perceived financial capacity (income), price sensitivity, and price premium acceptance.

Methodology

This study adopts a quantitative research approach within the theoretical framework of the TPB. A cross-sectional survey approach was adopted to gather data from Generation Z respondents at a single point in time. This design is suitable for examining behavioral intentions within a large sample, enabling meaningful insights and generalizable interpretations of consumer behavior patterns (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The Colombo District was purposively selected as the study location due to its distinct socio-economic and market characteristics. As the most urbanized and economically active region in Sri Lanka, Colombo provides a comparatively developed retail environment where organic food products are more accessible through supermarkets, specialized outlets, and digital retail platforms. In the sample, 52% of the respondents were from metropolitan areas within Colombo 1–15, while the remaining 48% resided in suburban areas outside Colombo city limits, such as Homagama, Piliyandala, Nugegoda, Battaramulla, Rajagiriya etc.

The sampling frame for this study comprised individuals aged between 18 and 27 years residing in the Colombo District. This age range represents the adult segment of Generation Z, who are assumed to possess independent purchasing power and the independence to make personal consumption decisions. According to the Census of Population and Housing conducted in 2012, individuals within this age cohort account for approximately 24% of the total population of the Colombo District (Department of Census and Statistics, 2012), thereby constituting a substantial and economically relevant consumer group. A non-probability snowball sampling technique was employed to select the respondents. This method is particularly useful

when targeting specific demographic groups and facilitates access to interconnected respondent networks that may be difficult to reach through conventional random sampling techniques (Etikan et al., 2016).

Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was used for the study as it allows the simultaneous examination of relationships among multiple latent constructs within a single integrated framework. The determination of sample size was guided by established methodological recommendations for SEM. Therefore, it is more suitable for testing the extended Theory of Planned Behavior model used in this study. According to Hair et al. (2019), a minimum of 10 to 15 observations per estimated parameter or measurement item is required to ensure adequate statistical power and stable model estimation. Given that the proposed model comprised 25 measurement items, a minimum sample size is 250 respondents. However, to mitigate potential clustering effects associated with snowball sampling and to enhance the diversity of the sample across gender, income, and educational categories, the final sample size was increased to 300 respondents. Primary data were collected during 2024 through a pre-tested, semi-structured questionnaire administered to Generation Z consumers residing in Colombo District. All components in the theoretical model were operationalized using validated scales derived from prior research studies (Table 1). Considering the digitally oriented nature of this cohort and the urban characteristics of the study area, data collection was primarily conducted using an online survey platform (Google Forms), distributed through academic, professional, and social networks.

Descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyze respondent characteristics and the distribution of study variables. The reliability and validity of the measurement constructs were assessed using multiple criteria. Internal consistency and convergent validity were evaluated through Cronbach's Alpha, Composite Reliability (CR), and Average Variance Extracted (AVE). The AVE, which measures the extent to which a construct explains the variance of its indicators. AVE was calculated using the following equation.

$$AVE = \frac{\sum \lambda_i^2}{n}$$

where λ_i represents the standardized factor loadings of each item and n denotes the number of items in the construct. Discriminant validity was examined using the Fornell–Larcker criterion ensuring that each construct was both reliable and distinct from the others. According to this method, the square root of the AVE for each construct is compared with the correlations between constructs.

Hypotheses were tested using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) implemented in AMOS software. Pearson's correlation analysis was done to test the correlation of the constructs. Model adequacy was evaluated using standard goodness-of-fit indices, including the chi-square to degrees of freedom ratio (χ^2/df), Goodness-of-Fit Index (GFI), Adjusted Goodness-of-Fit Index (AGFI), Comparative Fit Index (CFI), Tucker–Lewis Index (TLI), Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA), and Standardized Root Mean Square Residual (SRMR). Data analysis was conducted using Microsoft Excel, SPSS, and AMOS.

Table 1: Description of the Constructs and Indicators

Construct	Indicators	Sources
Awareness (AW)	Knowledge of organic food, Health benefits, Environmental benefits, Labeling	Karalliyadda & Kazunari (2018)
Attitudes (AT)	Health beliefs, Environmental concerns, Lifestyle values, Quality & taste preference	Bazhan (2024); Asif et al. (2023); Vermeir & Verbeke (2008)
Subjective Norms (SN)	Peer influence, Family influence	Ham et al. (2015); Al-Swidi et al. (2014); Ajzen (1991)
Perceived Behavioral Control (PBC)	Ease of access, Availability, Ability to choose organic food	Pang, (2021); Weerasiri & Cooray, (2016); Ajzen (1991)
Trust in Certification (TC)	Trust in local labels, Credibility of standards, Confidence in enforcement and verification	Priyanath & Dangalla (2022); Murphy (2022); Wu (2021).
Digital Media Influence (DI)	Influence of influencers, Online reviews, Digital communities	Samaniego-Arias, (2025); Nataraj & Shivanna (2024); Regina (2024)
Affordability (AF)	Income, Price, Premium	Hughner et al. (2007)
Purchase Intention (PI)	Likelihood of future purchase, Willingness to pay, Consistency	Asif et al. (2023); Vermeir & Verbeke (2008)

Source: Author's compilation

Results and Discussion

The study sample indicates that there is a balance in terms of gender with 51% of the respondents being females and 49% males. The age group was concentrated between 21–23 years. The educational attainment was high, with 53% undergraduates and 20% graduates, reflecting the cognitively aware, digitally connected youth segment. The distribution of income (the average amount of money respondents receives or have available to spend each month, regardless of the source) reflected that 64% of the respondents less earn LKR 100,000, while only 12% earn more than LKR 150,000, signifying affordability sensitivity. Spatially, the sample contained residents in both metropolitan and suburban Colombo, providing a comparative basis for analyzing access-driven behavioral differences.

Table 2: Summary of Descriptive Statistics of Main Constructs

Construct	Min	Max	Mean	SD	Skewness	Kurtosis
Awareness	1.00	5.00	3.61	0.78	−0.24	−0.49
Attitude	1.00	5.00	4.02	0.72	−0.69	0.11
Subjective Norms	1.00	5.00	3.75	0.81	−0.37	−0.31
PBC	1.00	5.00	3.68	0.70	−0.33	−0.45
Trust in Certification	1.00	5.00	3.84	0.74	−0.41	−0.20
Digital Influence	1.00	5.00	3.91	0.77	−0.55	−0.16
Affordability	1.00	5.00	3.49	0.82	−0.10	−0.52
Purchase Intention	1.00	5.00	3.93	0.66	−0.60	0.07

Source: Author's compilation

According to the descriptive statistics of the sample, all constructs show mean scores between 3.49 and 4.02, indicating generally favorable or moderate-to-high confirmation levels (Table 2). The lowest mean (3.49) corresponds to affordability, implying that price sensitivity remains a key issue, whereas the highest mean (4.02) for attitude reflects a positive evaluation of organic food attributes. The mean value for attitude ($M = 4.02$) suggests a strong favorable evaluation of organic food's taste, safety, and perceived health benefits. Generation Z consumers exhibit value alignment with environmentally responsible and health-conscious lifestyles, consistent with earlier findings among South-Asian youth (Sharma et al., 2023). Awareness ($M = 3.61$) indicates that while most respondents recognize the concept of organic food, fewer can accurately differentiate and recognize the organic labels. The moderate level of subjective norms ($M = 3.75$) highlights that family and peers moderately encourage organic food adoption. However, social influence may be weaker than the personal attitude or digital exposure, suggesting that urban youth

have only partly adopted sustainability values. PBC ($M = 3.68$) and affordability ($M = 3.49$) illustrate that respondents perceive some barriers in accessibility and price. Organic food is still viewed as relatively premium within Colombo's retail market, which may constrain intention behavior translation, a trend common in emerging markets. The high mean value ($M = 3.91$) indicates the strong influence of digital marketing, influencer endorsements, and social media content on consumer awareness and purchase intention. Given Generation Z's high engagement with digital platforms, these channels serve as an important strategic tool for expanding the market. Trust in certification ($M = 3.84$) shows consumers increasingly acknowledge formal labels such as SLS 1324:2018. This confidence in certification systems supports the construct's inclusion as a contextual moderator within the extended TPB model. The relatively strong purchase intention ($M = 3.93$) reveals a favorable tendency toward future buying behavior. Skewness and kurtosis values fall within ± 1.0 , confirming approximate normal distribution and validating the suitability of subsequent parametric analyses (Hair et al., 2019).

Table 3: Reliability, Composite Reliability (CR) and Convergent Validity Testing Results

Construct	Cronbach's Alpha (α)	CR	AVE	Reliability Status
Awareness	0.782	0.84	0.58	Acceptable
Attitude	0.862	0.89	0.67	Good
Subjective Norms	0.808	0.85	0.60	Good
PBC	0.826	0.86	0.63	Good
Trust in Certification	0.849	0.88	0.66	Good
Digital Influence	0.834	0.87	0.64	Good
Affordability	0.795	0.83	0.55	Acceptable
Purchase Intention	0.874	0.90	0.68	Excellent

Source: Author's compilation

The reliability and the composite reliability were measured in the constructs and all constructs exceed the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 of Cronbach's Alpha (α) and the recommended CR value of 0.70, confirming adequate internal consistency across the measurement model (Table 3). The reliability results confirm that the measurement scales used in this study are internally consistent and statistically reliable. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values were calculated for each independent latent variable in line with SEM to ensure convergent validity. Results confirm that all independent latent constructs exhibit adequate convergent validity (exceed the threshold 0.5), indicating that the indicators appropriately reflect their respective latent dimensions (Table 3).

To assess discriminant validity, the Fornell-Larcker criterion analysis was used, and the results are depicted in Table 4. These results confirm the condition that the square root of each construct's AVE should be greater than its correlations with other constructs, and this was examined for all independent latent constructs. The diagonal values for all constructs are higher than any of the corresponding inter-construct correlations. Therefore, each construct is well distinguished from each observed indicator in the model, thereby establishing discriminant validity.

Table 4: Discriminant Validity: Fornell–Larcker Criterion

Construct	AW	AT	SN	PBC	TC	DI	AF	PI
Awareness	0.76							
Attitude	0.39	0.82						
Subjective Norm	0.28	0.49	0.77					
PBC	0.35	0.55	0.37	0.79				
Trust in Certification	0.32	0.47	0.33	0.36	0.81			
Digital Influence	0.30	0.46	0.42	0.33	0.41	0.80		
Affordability	0.27	0.37	0.29	0.45	0.32	0.31	0.74	
Purchase Intention	0.36	0.67	0.48	0.58	0.43	0.49	0.42	0.82

Source: Author's compilation

Correlation analysis was conducted to examine the direction and strength of the linear relationships among the study variables. All correlation coefficients were statistically significant at the 1% level ($p < 0.01$), indicating meaningful associations and supporting the suitability of the dataset for subsequent SEM. None of the correlation values exceeded the threshold of 0.80, confirming the absence of multicollinearity and ensuring the appropriateness of the data for SEM path analysis (Table 5).

Table 5: Correlation Matrix of Main Constructs

Construct	AW	AT	SN	PBC	TC	DI	AF	P I
Awareness	1							
Attitude	0.39	1						
Subjective Norm	0.28	0.49	1					
PBC	0.35	0.55	0.37	1				
Trust in Certification	0.32	0.47	0.33	0.36	1			
Digital Influence	0.30	0.46	0.42	0.33	0.41	1		
Affordability	0.27	0.37	0.29	0.45	0.32	0.31	1	
Purchase Intention	0.36	0.67	0.48	0.58	0.43	0.49	0.42	1

Source: Author's compilation

Note: All correlations are significant at the 0.01 level with very strong statistical confidence.

Among the predictors, attitude ($r = 0.67$) and PBC ($r = 0.58$) exhibited the strongest positive correlations with purchase intention. This finding is consistent with the fundamental premise of the TPB, which posits that favorable evaluations and perceived control over behavior are key determinants of intention (Ajzen, 2020). In addition, trust in certification ($r = 0.43$) and digital influence ($r = 0.49$) demonstrated moderate positive associations with purchase intention, suggesting that institutional credibility and digital engagement play supportive roles in shaping consumer motivation. A positive correlation was observed between affordability and PBC ($r = 0.45$), implying that greater perceived price accessibility enhances consumers' sense of control over their purchasing decisions. This is particularly relevant in price-sensitive markets, where financial considerations represent a major behavioral constraint (Wijethunga et al., 2024). The awareness showed a moderate correlation with attitude ($r = 0.39$), indicating that while knowledge contributes to the formation of evaluative beliefs, its influence is comparatively weaker than attitudinal and control-related factors.

The causal relationships among constructs were measured through SEM after establishing measurement reliability and validity. Model fit indices were examined to confirm that the hypothesized structure adequately represents the data. A combination of absolute, incremental, and parsimony indices were used following Hair et al. (2019).

Table 6: Model Fit Indices for Structural Model

Fit Index	Recommended Threshold	Obtained Value	Interpretation
χ^2 / df	< 3.00	2.41	Acceptable fit
GFI	≥ 0.90	0.925	Good fit
AGFI	≥ 0.85	0.889	Marginal fit
CFI	≥ 0.90	0.946	Excellent fit
TLI	≥ 0.90	0.939	Excellent fit
RMSEA	≤ 0.08	0.062	Good fit
SRMR	≤ 0.08	0.056	Good fit

Source: Author's compilation

According to the results (Table 6) all indices meet recommended thresholds, confirming a statistically acceptable model fit. The standardized path coefficients (β), t-values, and significance levels ($p < 0.05$) were obtained to test each hypothesis (H_1 – H_7) formulated in the theoretical framework. The coefficients obtained are summarized in Table 7.

Accordingly, PBC emerged as the strongest determinant of organic food purchase intention with ($\beta = 0.47$, $p < 0.001$). This points to perceived ease, availability and

accessibility as the most facilitative elements of behavioral readiness. This is supported by Woo and Kim (2019). Respondents believed that they could easily locate and afford organic products easily had considerably higher intentions to purchase organic food. This finding is in line with the findings from various cross-national TPB applications, which report that PBC becomes salient in contexts were characterized by price sensitivity and lack of market access are high (Kaur et al., 2022). It underscores that, in developing countries, control over resources and situational access exerts a stronger behavioral influence than attitudinal favorability alone.

Table 7: Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Path	β	<i>t</i> -value	<i>P</i> -value	Result
H ₁	AW → AT	0.07	0.57	0.569	Not Supported
H ₂	AT → PI	0.44	6.82	< 0.001	Supported
H ₃	SN → PI	0.25	4.01	< 0.001	Supported
H ₄	PBC → PI	0.47	7.12	< 0.001	Supported

Source: Author's compilation

Model R² (Purchase Intention) = 0.47

The attitude has a strong and significant effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.44$, $p < 0.001$), highlighting the fact that those positive appraisal of organic food attributes of health benefits, safety, and environmental value significantly drive purchasing intention. This result is consistent with the basic assumption of the TPB that a behavioral intention is a direct consequence of the evaluative beliefs about the behavior (Ajzen, 2020). The central role of attitude in this present study is in concert with several recent studies that have identified health consciousness, environmental concern, and ethical orientation as the attitudinal antecedents that drive intention among young consumers (Kaur et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023). Within the Sri Lankan context, this finding reflects the growing alignment between consumer values and sustainability principles, particularly among educated urban youth.

Subjective norms had a significant, positive effect on purchase intention ($\beta = 0.25$, $p < 0.001$), indicating that in Colombo's generation Z population, social and peer influences are very important role in shaping behavioral motivation among them. This confirms that, according to TPB, social expectations shape personal intentions through normative beliefs about what others think one should do. The study finding is supported by Chi et al. (2019). This influence can also be elaborated in the Sri Lankan cultural context, where social interactions are strongly collectivist in

orientation, and consumer choices are influenced by peer approval and family endorsement. The R^2 value of 0.47 reveals that these three constructs together explain nearly half of the variance in purchase intention, which is comparable to or higher than what has been reported in similar TPB-based consumer studies in emerging markets (Li et al., 2023; Kaur et al., 2022). -The path from awareness to attitude was not statistically significant ($\beta = 0.07$, $p = 0.569$), indicating that basically knowing about a product does not lead to positive evaluations or intentions. This finding challenges the common assumption that increasing awareness alone will directly change behavior. In fact, this finding agrees with recent literature where, for digitally literate and socially active youth, knowledge saturation has lowered marginal utility (Ali & Bhasin, 2024).

The main TPB constructs attitude, subjective norms, and PBC significantly explain purchase intention, the explanatory ability of the model may vary depending on contextual factors. Therefore, study investigated three theoretically related moderators incorporated into the extended TPB model. Each moderation was tested using a product-indicator approach (interaction term analysis) within the SEM framework. Interaction terms were mean-centered to minimize multicollinearity and significance was evaluated through bootstrapped standard errors (5,000 samples). Each moderating model maintained an acceptable fit level, indicating that the inclusion of interaction terms did not degrade model performance and suggesting robustness of the extended structure.

However, the results of the moderation analysis revealed that none of the proposed moderating variables exerted a statistically significant effect on the respective relationships with purchase intention. Specifically, trust in certification did not significantly moderate the relationship between attitude and purchase intention ($\beta = 0.05$, $p = 0.418$). The lack of moderation from trust in certification suggests that the transformation of attitude into intention is uniform across levels of trust. This could reflect a relatively high baseline level of trust that educated youth in Sri Lanka have in the local organic labels represented by SLS 1324:2018. This pattern aligns with research indicating that certification trust operates as a foundational confidence factor rather than a behavioral amplifier in saturated digital markets (Chen & Lin, 2023).

The non-significant moderating effect ($\beta = 0.07$, $p = 0.278$) of digital influence on the relationship between subjective norms and purchase intention is similarly explained by the high level of digital normalization among Generation Z in Colombo. This generation continuously experiences social media content, influencer recommendations, and algorithm-driven information; hence, digital experiences are almost general. Because most respondents generally share generally similar levels of digital engagement, the variation required to detect a moderation effect is limited.

The hypothesized moderation of the relationship between PBC and purchase intention by affordability was not significant ($\beta = 0.06, p = 0.334$). This result reflects that affordability operates as a direct financial constraint rather than influencing the effect of PBC on intention. The finding is in line with the research finding of Castillo-Plaza et al. (2025) that suggests that price and affordability function as direct constraints rather than moderating factors in consumer behavior. In this study, PBC captured non-monetary aspects such as accessibility, availability, and the ability to choose organic products, while affordability was measured separately as a monetary consideration. As such, affordability affects behavior directly, for example by limiting or enabling purchases based on income, rather than acting as an interactive moderator.

The non-significant results of the moderating effect imply that the core TPB relationships are robust and stable across varying contextual conditions. Therefore, the core TPB components (Attitude, Subjective Norms, PBC) consistently predict purchase intention across consumer subgroups. Contextual factors such as certification trust and digital exposure act more as universal reinforcers rather than conditional determinants of organic purchasing intention. This outcome suggests that strategic efforts to promote organic food consumption among Generation Z should primarily focus on attitudinal reinforcement, perceived control enhancement, and behavioral convenience, rather than over-segmenting markets by digital engagement or income levels.

Conclusion and Policy Implications

This study investigated the determinants of organic food purchase intention among Generation Z consumers in the Colombo District using an extended Theory of Planned Behavior framework. The findings indicate that attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control significantly influence purchase intention. Among these determinants, perceived behavioral control emerged as the strongest predictor, underscoring the importance of accessibility, availability, and perceived affordability in shaping sustainable purchasing decisions. This suggests that structural and market-related conditions play a central role in enabling organic consumption among young consumers. Even when favorable attitudes are present, limitations in product availability, convenience, and purchasing possibility may constrain actual intention formation. This finding implies that demand expansion in the domestic organic market requires improvements in retail accessibility and distribution networks. Retailers could strengthen organic product visibility by expanding dedicated organic sections within conventional supermarkets and integrating certified organic products into mainstream retail channels. Furthermore, partnerships with e-commerce

platforms offering rapid delivery services may be particularly effective in reaching digitally engaged youth populations, especially in university environments and workplace clusters.

Although attitude was found to exert a significant positive effect on purchase intention, the results indicate that awareness alone does not translate directly into stronger attitudes. This suggests that conventional information-based campaigns may have limited impact among Generation Z consumers. Instead, marketing strategies should move beyond purely informational approaches and focus on experiential and emotionally engaging initiatives. In-store tasting events, interactive demonstrations, and small-scale organic fairs can provide direct product experiences that reinforce positive evaluations. Digital engagement strategies such as interactive social media campaigns and peer-based promotion may further strengthen attitudinal commitment and foster supportive social norms.

From a policy perspective, strengthening the domestic organic market requires coordinated efforts to address structural supply-side constraints. Public authorities can facilitate private investment in organic retail infrastructure to improve market penetration. Financial incentives, such as tax concessions or targeted subsidies for certified organic producers, may help reduce retail price premiums and enhance affordability. In addition, promoting public–private partnerships (PPPs) to expand certified organic production and streamline supply chains could contribute to price stabilization and improved distribution efficiency. Such interventions would not only enhance consumer access but also support the broader development of a sustainable domestic organic sector. The overall implication of these findings is that successful promotion of organic food among Generation Z in Sri Lanka requires a dual focus on motivation and capability.

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