Purchasing Behavior of Organic Food among Chinese University Students

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Abstract: The consumption of organically produced food is gaining ground around the world due to growing consumers' concerns for personal health. Nevertheless, researchers addressed the intention-behavior gap pertaining to buying organic food and called for more studies on consumers' actual purchasing behavior. In order to understand this disparity, the current study examined the relationship among health consciousness, pricing policy, consumer trust, personal attitude, and purchasing behavior of organic food among university students. In addition, this research examined the moderating impact of word of mouth (WOM). This research adopted a quantitative method and employed convenience sampling to administer survey questionnaires to buyers of organic food in five Chinese universities between November 2020 and February 2021. A total of 335 questionnaires were collected and used for data analysis. Structural equation modeling results revealed that purchasing behavior is positively related to health consciousness and negatively influenced by pricing policy, while personal attitude and consumer trust had an insignificant association with students' buying behavior of organic food. Further, WOM had a positive moderating impact on the relationship between health consciousness and purchasing behavior; and was found to strengthen the negative relationship between pricing policy and organic food purchasing behavior. This study presents some critical implications for researchers and organic food retailers and marketers.

Keywords: organic food; purchasing behavior; attitude; consumer trust; pricing policy; health consciousness; WOM; university students

1. Introduction

The demand for organic food has witnessed a gradual and extensive growth [1,2] with worldwide sales of USD 90 billion in the last two decades [3]. Increasing consumers' concerns for personal health and sustainable food have triggered the need to undertake more research on the consumption of organic food [4]. Further, the outbreak of COVID-19 led to changing consumers' mindsets and triggered the need for a healthy lifestyle [5,6]. Consumers care and value organic food production and maintain a stronger preference for organic food [7–10]. This can be determined by demographic changes, ever-increasing life expectancy, and striving for improvement of the quality of life.

Research on organic food consumption focused mainly on developed countries [11], however, countries with developing or emerging economies maintain a nascent market for organic food [12,13]. Most organic food is produced in developing countries, however, approximately 90% of its consumption occurs in developed countries [14]. China has the largest organic food market in Asia and ranked as the fourth largest in the world with 3.1 million hectares of organic farmland and a sales volume of 8.59 billion USD [3]. The sales of organic food in China reached 465.7 billion Yuan in 2019 with a 2.2% sales growth compared to 2018 [15].

Young people with a high level of education are described as representatives of society, future consumers, and more concerned with social and environmental problems [16] and
maintain positive attitudes toward green consumption [17]. Nevertheless, the majority of studies focused only on consumers’ purchasing intention with limited research addressing actual purchasing behavior particularly in the context of university students. Chinese young people have more money to spend on consumer goods and services than the older generations as they benefit from six sources of disposable income gained from their parents and grandparents. This generation is often called “rich second generation” (富二代 fuerdai), “spoilt generation,” or “privileged generation” [18]. Therefore, this research focused on investigating organic food consumer behavior among university students in China as a well-educated and young representative market segment.

Identifying antecedents of organic food consumption allow the producers and marketers of organic food to better understand consumers’ motives and develop successful marketing strategies to increase sales and achieve customer satisfaction [19]. While the literature has emphasized the increasing consumption of organic food, identifying the motives that drive its actual consumption is still a knowledge gap [20], more specifically in the context of emerging economies [21]. Instead, research focused on understanding consumer’s attitudes and purchasing intention of organic food, which may not reflect consumer’s actual consumption behavior [22]. Many scholars posited that intentions may be a preceding factor to actual consumption and may not fully explain consumers’ decision-making processes for organic food items [23–25]. The proliferation of studies focusing on attitudes and stated intentions resulted in an attitude–intention gap in the extant literature and advocated conducting further research on investigating antecedents of consumers’ buying behavior of organic food [26]. Accordingly, researchers highlighted the need to fulfill this gap by exploring motives or factors that promulgate consumer’s actual consumption [23,24,26]. In this regard, some researchers argued that testing additional constructs and articulating existing sophisticated theoretical frameworks can provide significant insights to understanding the actual consumption of organic food consumers [12,24,27,28].

Researchers presented various consumers’ motives for buying organic food such as ecological sustainability [29], healthy lifestyles [13]. Extant literature focused on understanding various reasons to consume organic food [9,30,31], and the motives behind a consumer’s behavior [32]. Research presented different antecedents with significant impact on increasing buying behavior of organic food, including environmental concerns [23], and health consciousness [33]. In addition, literature focused on organic food products’ attributes such as product accessibility [34], price barriers/sensitivity [35], and subjective norms and attitudes [36]. Other studies found that purchasing intention of organic food is influenced by various factors such as health consciousness, quality, price, taste, notations, availability, and food safety [37,38]. Organic food providers need to pay attention to young consumers with personal motives related to valuing healthy food and willing to pay for them [39].

Recognizing the significant role of WOM in influencing consumer’s purchasing decisions; firms need to develop an effective marketing strategy to initiate positive WOM [40]. Companies use electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM) as a vital marketing instrument [41,42]. This research advocated the significance of WOM (verbal and electronic) in reinforcing or discouraging decisions of buying organic food especially for students who are actively involved in using social media and the emergence of eWOM as an influential platform.

Hence, the fundamental question of this study is: what are the major determinants of buying organic food products among university students? This research makes three contributions: (1) it proposes the extension of TPB to better explain organic food consumption behavior by adding WOM as a moderating variable; (2) it extends the scholarship on the antecedents of actual buying behavior in particular among a less researched consumer group (university students); and (3) it offers some managerial implications to organic food retailers and marketers to better understand university students buying behavior and improve their performance. The remainder of this paper is structured as follows: Section 2 presents the theoretical background and extensive literature review. Section 3 explains the research methodology adopted to fulfill the research objectives. Section 4 introduces the
findings of the preliminary study followed by the structural equation modeling results. Section 5 provides the discussion of research findings in relation to existing literature, draws some concluding remarks and managerial implications.

2. Literature Review and Hypothesis

This research builds on the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) to explain university students’ behavior toward organic food. Buying behavior is defined as a dynamic process undertaken by a consumer to select and purchase a specific product based on his/her own measures of resource constraints and level of satisfaction. Numerous studies have utilized the theory of planned behavior to explain consumer behavior of organic food [2,23,28,32,43–45]. Scholars employed various elements of TPB such as attitude, subjective norms, and behavioral control to explore consumer’s purchasing intention and decision of organic food [2,28,43,44]. TPB posits that attitudes play a vital role in predicting behavioral intentions [46]. This study intended to extend TPB pertaining to explaining university students purchasing behavior of organic food based on their perceived attitude, health awareness, consumer trust, and pricing policy. Further, this research argues that WOM may strengthen or weaken the impact of attitude, health awareness, consumer trust, and pricing policy on buying behavior of university students. Electronic WOM has emerged as a key marketing instrument that can be used by companies and consumers. Cheng et al. [47] indicated that TPB has the potential to measure consumers’ negative WOM communication based on their attitude, perceived behavioral control, and subjective norms. This research tended to increase the TPB’s predictive behavior by assimilating supplementary constructs [28]. This study contributes to scholarship by examining the impact of health consciousness, pricing policy, personal attitude, and consumer trust buying behavior with emphasis on the moderating role of WOM in the context of university students.

Consumers’ health consciousness evaluates their individual readiness to decide on health-related actions. Health consciousness consumers have a favorable attitude toward organic food consumption [21] and high purchasing intention [27]. Basha and Lal [13] reported that Indian consumers’ health consciousness had no significant association with creating favorable purchase intentions toward organic food. Health awareness and lifestyle are significantly shaping consumers’ attitudes and purchase intention [13]. Rizzo et al. [10] argued that the premium price for organic food is determined based on the contribution to health attributes. In Spain, Küster-Boluda and Vila [48] found that young consumers’ purchase intention of low-fat foods is stimulated by health perceptions.

Many researchers found a positive significant relationship between health consciousness and purchase intention of organic food [14,49–52]. Extant literature revealed that health consciousness is significantly related to predicting consumer purchase intention pertaining to organic foods [16,50,51]. In the Kenyan and Tanzanian context, Wang et al. [53] found that purchase intention of organic food is significantly related to personal attitude and health consciousness. Numerous studies showed that health attribute is a major determinant driving organic food consumption [54,55]. The actual buying behavior of organic food is significantly associated with product-specific attitude, perceived availability, and willingness to pay [23]. Chinese consumers maintain high concerns for food safety issues pertaining to personal health [56]. Guided by such argumentations, the first hypothesis is addressed as follows:

**Hypothesis 1 (H1).** Health consciousness is positively related to organic food consumers’ buying behavior.

Previous studies posited that price is a strategic barrier deterring consumers from purchasing green products [57,58]. Organic food re-purchasing intention is closely related to perceived value [59]. The purchase decision of green products is driven by consumers’ perceived benefits and awareness of price [60]. Price awareness is negatively associated with consumers’ attitudes toward buying organic food in particular for price-conscious
consumers [61]. Contrarily, Essoussi et al. [52] revealed that green products’ consumers are interested in paying premium prices.

The interest in buying organic food and paying premium prices is influenced by product types and the combination of perceived benefits [62]. The price of organic food is high as its production is 16–50% more costly than conventional food [61]. In their research on the factors affecting the purchase of organic food in the Indian context, Singh and Verma [25] argued that the perceived price was positively related to purchase intentions while Suh et al. [63] reported a negative impact of organic food price and consumer purchase behavior in South Korea and USA.

Price is described as a fundamental factor affecting consumers’ purchase decisions as it often determines the value and quality of a product or service. Various studies found that consumers are willing to pay higher prices for organic foods [64,65]. Paying premium prices for organic food makes consumers happy and excited and has a positive impact on their utilitarian and hedonic buying attitudes [65]. The premium price is the fundamental barrier to buying organic food products [55]. This study examined the relationship between pricing policy and purchasing behavior of organic food through the following hypothesis:

**Hypothesis 2 (H2).** High price policy is negatively associated with purchasing behavior of organic food.

Many consumers maintain doubts about claims offered by organic food providers [66], thus trust plays a vital role in driving consumers’ decision to buy organic food items [67]. Consumers’ trust was found to positively influence the attitudes and behaviors of Vietnamese young consumer’s toward green-labeled products [68]. Consumers expect organic food to be free from mineral fertilizers and chemical pesticides, healthier than conventional food and contribute to protecting the environment [69]. Consumers’ attitudes and purchasing intentions are influenced by their trust toward organic foods [70]. Consumers’ trust is established before and positively related to purchasing behavior [37]. The purchasing behavior of organic food is affected by consumers’ trust factors [71] and trust in the health contents [45]. Chen et al. [56] found that the purchase intention of organic food is influenced by food safety, government regulations, and correct labeling in Mainland China.

Many researchers advocated consumer trust in organic food producers, marketers, and labels as a determinant of purchasing behavior. For instance, Zhang et al. [72] argued that consumers would maintain a higher propensity to buy organic food products when they trust organic labels. Nuttavuthisit and Thøgersen [73] suggest that consumers’ trust in organic food producers and marketers create and enhance their buying intentions. Carfora et al. [74] showed that consumers’ trust in organic milk farmers was positively related to their buying decision and not significantly associated with their trust in government, manufacturers, and retailers. Consumers consider certification and labeling as secondary cues to enhance their trust pertaining to organic food [75,76]. Other studies focused on retailer trust in driving consumers’ intention to buy organic food [17,77]. Therefore, the third hypothesis is stated as follows:

**Hypothesis 3 (H3).** Consumer trust has a significant positive impact on consumer behavior.

Attitude toward organic food is one of the fundamental factors influencing purchase intention [72] and buying behavior [78]. Prior research revealed that favorable attitudes are positively related to increased purchase intention of organic food [28,79]. A favorable attitude toward organic food is strongly linked with increased buying intention [80] and buying behavior [2,73]. Wang, Pacho, Liu, and Kajungiro [53] identified personal attitudes and health consciousness as significant determinants of purchase intention in Tanzanian and Kenyan contexts. Extant literature presents a consensus on the positive association between buying attitudes and buying behaviors [45,81,82]. Further, individuals with a positive attitude toward environmental concerns and eco-social benefits are actively involved in buying green products [83]. Nevertheless, Tandon, Dhir, Kaur, Kushwah, and
Salo [9] found that Indian consumers’ buying behavior is not significantly associated with their attitudes toward organic food. In this regard, Ajzenand Cote (2008) [84] proposed that attitudes could be an indecisive factor for predicting consumer behavior. With regard to organic food, Koklic et al. [85] found that purchasing intention of organic food is significantly driven by customers’ positive attitude toward organic food. In developing countries context, consumers’ attitude is considered the fundamental determinant of purchasing behavior of green products [27]. The following hypothesis was developed to test the relationship between personal attitude and organic food purchasing behavior:

**Hypothesis (H4). A favorable attitude toward organic food is positively related to purchasing behavior.**

Research describes eWOM as a prominent online marketing tool [86,87]. The spread of COVID-19 has strengthened the importance and reliance on social media; enhanced the reliance on eWOM information [88,89]. Le-Hoang [89,90] called for more research on investigating eWOM as a platform. While most studies focused on the impact of WOM on driving consumers to purchase organic food were conducted mainly in developed countries [7,91,92], this phenomenon has received limited attention in developing nations [86]. This research adds word of mouth as a significant moderator in influencing university students’ buying decisions of organic food. WOM increases consumers’ trust in organic food retailers and positively influences consumers’ purchasing intentions [86]. In their research on customers’ revisit intentions at fast-food restaurants, Rajput and Gahfoor [93] indicated that WOM had no moderating impact on the relationship between customer satisfaction and revisit intentions.

Curina et al. [94] defined WOM as customers’ positive or negative about a product or a company using online or offline channels. This research builds on Curina et al.’s WOM definition as organic food users are likely to get access to WOM information via online channels such as social media platforms; and offline channels such as communication with parents, relatives, and colleagues.

Online WOM maintains a significant on shaping consumers’ product evaluation, choices, and purchase intentions [95]. Scholars argued that consumers use eWOM to share opinions and experiences pertaining to a company or a product which can generate or weaken consumer trust and affect potential new customers purchasing decisions [96–98]. This study used WOM as a potential moderating variable that may motivate or discourage students from buying organic food. Therefore, the fifth hypothesis is set as follows:

**Hypothesis 5a (H5a). WOM has a significant moderating impact on the relationship between health consciousness and purchasing behavior of organic food.**

**Hypothesis 5b (H5b). WOM has a significant moderating impact on the relationship between consumer trust and purchasing behavior of organic food.**

**Hypothesis 5c (H5c). WOM has a significant moderating impact on the relationship between consumers’ attitude and purchasing behavior of organic food.**

**Hypothesis 5d (H5d). WOM has a significant moderating impact on the relationship between pricing policy and purchasing behavior of organic food.**

### 3. Materials and Methods

This research used an online survey questionnaire to collect data from university students who buy organic products. Researchers requested assistance from many professors and lecturers in respective universities to reach students who buy organic products. Students were offered small gifts to reinforce their willingness and conveniently asked to complete the questionnaire. Researchers contacted students via WeChat. The use of WeChat and online survey allowed researchers to reach many respondents in various
universities located in many provinces. It was evident that limited numbers of university students buy organic food regularly. This research is a quantitative and a survey-type descriptive study and employs a structured questionnaire. A non-probabilistic convenience sampling technique was used to collect primary data from 335 consumers of organic food (university students). The survey was divided into two parts. The first part requested students to reveal their socio-demographic information like age, gender, income, place of purchasing organic food. The second part assessed students’ responses based on scale items on personal attitude, health consciousness, pricing policy, consumer trust, WOM, and buying behavior of organic food using a five-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

This study employed a convenience sampling technique to invite higher education students to five reputable Chinese universities: Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Fudan University, University of Science and Technology of China, Zhejiang University, and Nanjing University. Online questionnaires were administered and collected using the WeChat survey tool. The survey questionnaire was initially designed in English and translated into Mandarin (simplified Chinese). WeChat is a well-known and commonly used Chinese platform providing a convenient and friendly virtual place [99].

4. Preliminary Survey

A preliminary study was conducted to determine the influential factors affecting university students’ buying behavior of organic food. Guided by relevant literature, we identified 10 fundamental factors related to consuming organic food: attitude, subjective norms, perceived health value, environmental concern, product attributes, consumer trust, health consciousness, pricing policy, awareness of organic food, and behavioral control. Later, we distributed a preliminary questionnaire and asked students to rank these factors. University students were selected as the target population. Students have similar ages with common values and similar consumer behavior. Designing a market strategy based on target consumers’ generation is more effective than age group as same generation consumers maintain the same cultural, historical, political, and social life which influence their behavior [100]. For instance, Millennials (also known as generation Y born between 1982–2000) were reported to have common characteristics such as environmental concern, similar social and health values, worrying about income and sustainability [28,101,102]. Further, they are highly and actively involved in using social media, seeking further education, displaying high efforts towards society, and green products, in particular sustainability and food safety [101–103]. Most research on Millennials’ organic food consumer behavior is undertaken in the western context with limited research in the Asian context [27,28]. WeChat survey tool was employed to invite university students who buy organic food at least once per month to participate in this study. Symbolic gifts were offered to encourage students to fill in and return questionnaires. Researchers requested assistance from some faculty members and student group administrators in distributing and collecting questionnaires.

The other part or preliminary questionnaire requested students to indicate the extent to which they consider WOM (verbal or electronic) when deciding to buy organic food products. Findings revealed: health consciousness, consumer trust, personal attitude, and pricing policy were ranked as the top four factors of buying organic food with reported mean scores 4.3, 4.1, 3.9, and 4.4. Accordingly, these four factors were used as major determinants of university students’ buying behavior of organic food. Further, university students posited that they consider WOM when buying specific organic food products with a reported mean score (M = 4.3). Based on such initial findings, this research aimed to fill the research gap in establishing the relationships between health consciousness, pricing policies, consumer trust, and personal attitudes towards buying organic food among Chinese university students and examining the potential moderating impact of WOM.

The first section of the survey questionnaire requested university students to identify their gender, income, types, and purchasing frequency of organic food products. Students were requested to reveal their aggregate income including the money gained from their
parents and/or part-time jobs. Purchasing frequency or organic food products was divide into a usual purchase (1–3 times a week), occasional purchases (one time per week), and seldom purchase (once in a month). A pilot study to identify the reliability of the survey questionnaire was undertaken using a total of 35 complete questionnaires. Findings revealed that all constructs were reliable with the exception of WOM. Therefore, item number 3 (WOM3): “My family/friends provide me with positive ideas about a specific organic food brand” was excluded to ensure construct reliability.

The survey questionnaire was first developed in English and translated to Chinese (simplified Mandarin) by a bilingual scholar of business and management studies, and back-translated into English by another bilingual scholar specializing in the same discipline. This procedure allows researchers to make required adjustments and maintain a reliable questionnaire.

4.1. Measures

Study variables measurement scale were duly adopted from the extant literature. Appendix A presents the survey questionnaire. Health consciousness was measured using three items adapted from Asif et al.’s scale [14]. Personal attitude toward organic food was measured using Tandon et al.’s scale [9] was duly adopted. Consumer behavior for organic food was measured using four items developed by Lin and Huang [104]. Pricing policy was measured using two items adapted from Anselmsson, Burt, and Tunca [105]. Product trust was measured with three items adapted from Choe et al.’s scale [106]. Word of mouth is measured with five items developed by Cham et al.’s scale [107].

4.2. Results

Table 1 summarized the respondent’s profile. Findings revealed that 58% of valid samples buying organic food were female students.

| Table 1. Respondents’ Profile. |
|-------------------------------|
|                               | Frequency | %   |
| Gender                        |           |     |
| Male                          | 141       | 42  |
| Female                        | 194       | 58  |
| Income (Yuan)                 |           |     |
| Less than 2000                | 44        | 13  |
| 2001–4000                     | 97        | 29  |
| 4001–6000                     | 137       | 41  |
| More than 6000                | 57        | 17  |
| Organic Food Products         |           |     |
| Fruits and Vegetables         | 94        | 28  |
| Organic Dairy products and drinks | 128     | 38.2|
| Snacks and Nuts               | 91        | 27.2|
| Rice, Grain, Meat             | 17        | 5.1 |
| Others (please specify)       | 5         | 1.5 |
| Purchasing Frequency          |           |     |
| Usually                       | 104       | 31  |
| Occasionally                  | 171       | 51  |
| Seldom                        | 60        | 18  |

Note: 1 USD = 6.5 Yuan.

For income level, 41% of respondents have income level ranging between 4001–6000 Yuan followed by 29% with income level ranging between 2001–4000 Yuan. Further, 38% of respondents buy organic dairy products and drinks, followed by 28% buying organic fruits and vegetables, and 27% buying snacks and nuts. Such findings are inconsistent with [54].
who reported that Fruits, vegetables, and honey are the most frequently purchased organic items, followed by dairy products and processed meat. Finally, 51% of respondents maintain occasional purchases, followed by 31% with usual purchases of organic food products.

4.3. Assessment of Measurement Model

The data analysis process followed a two-step approach pertaining to evaluating and testing the measurement model [108]. In this respect, the first phase ensured the reliability and validity of the six constructs employed in this research. The second phase presented hypotheses testing using the SEM approach as an effective causal modeling technique to evaluate relationships of moderation [109].

Upon conducting a preliminary study to identify antecedents of buying organic food perceived by university students, this study examined the impact of health consciousness, pricing policy, consumer trust, and personal attitude on purchasing behavior of organic food with an emphasis on the moderating impact of word of mouth. Table 2 summarizes constructs’ reliability and validity. The proposed research model was assessed based on the results of construct reliability and validity tests. The reliability condition was fulfilled as all constructs had Cronbach’s alpha values more than 0.7 with items loading values above 0.70 [110].

Table 2. Constructs Reliability and Validity.

| Construct | Items | FL | CA | CR | AVE |
|-----------|-------|----|----|----|-----|
| HC        | HC1   | 0.853 |     |     |     |
|           | HC2   | 0.886 | 0.894 | 0.903 | 0.83 |
|           | HC3   | 0.819 |     |     |     |
| PA        | PA1   | 0.745 | 0.857 | 0.879 | 0.787 |
|           | PA2   | 0.869 |     |     |     |
| CT        | CT1   | 0.828 |     |     |     |
|           | CT2   | 0.792 | 0.814 | 0.825 | 0.861 |
|           | CT3   | 0.774 |     |     |     |
| PP        | PP1   | 0.887 | 0.857 | 0.8 | 0.811 |
|           | PP2   | 0.841 |     |     |     |
| WOM       | WOM1  | 0.798 |     |     |     |
|           | WOM2  | 0.757 | 0.863 | 0.879 | 0.82 |
|           | WOM3  | 0.724 |     |     |     |
|           | WOM4  | 0.719 |     |     |     |
| PB        | PB1   | 0.822 | 0.886 | 0.897 | 0.872 |
|           | PB2   | 0.838 |     |     |     |
|           | PB3   | 0.81  |     |     |     |
|           | PB4   | 0.86  |     |     |     |

Convergent and discriminant validity are commonly used to assess construct validity. Convergent validity is achieved when the reported construct’s average variance extracted (AVE) is higher than the 0.50 threshold and its composite reliability (CR) is higher than the 0.70 threshold. AVE and CR findings revealed that all constructs have CR values higher than 0.70 and AVE values higher than 0.50. Discriminant validity was measured using Fornell and Larcker criterion as shown in Table 3. Findings revealed that discriminant validity is confirmed as the reported square roots of AVE values were higher than their respective inter-construct correlations.
Table 3. Discriminant Validity.

|     | HC  | T   | PA  | PP  | WOM | PB  |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| HC  | 0.830 |     |     |     |     |     |
| PP  | 0.476 | 0.861 |     |     |     |     |
| CT  | 0.368 | 0.531 | 0.787 |     |     |     |
| PA  | 0.418 | 0.511 | 0.472 | 0.811 |     |     |
| WOM | 0.381 | 0.241 | 0.339 | 0.446 | 0.820 |     |
| PB  | 0.519 | 0.463 | 0.453 | 0.536 | 0.591 | 0.872 |

HC = health consciousness, PP = pricing policy, CT = Consumer Trust, PA = personal attitude, WOM = word of mouth, PB = purchasing behavior.

Further, potential common method bias in PLS-SEM was assessed using a collinearity assessment test as recommended by Kock [111]. Common method bias is a major concern when the reported values of inter-construct variance inflation factors are higher than 3.3. The common method bias has not existed as all the reported values are less than 3.3 thresholds as shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Results of Common Method Bias Test.

|     | HC  | PA  | T   | PP  | WOM | PB  |
|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|
| HC  | -   | 2.105 | 1.658 | 1.751 | 1.296 | 1.863 |
| PA  | 1.838 | -   | 1.933 | 1.692 | 1.619 | 1.712 |
| T   | 1.932 | 1.397 | -   | 1.719 | 1.821 | 2.116 |
| PP  | 1.695 | 1.681 | 1.837 | -   | 1.784 | 1.673 |
| WOM | 1.158 | 1.694 | 1.597 | 1.775 | -   | 1.699 |
| PB  | 1.631 | 1.397 | 1.592 | 1.801 | 1.499 | -   |

Note: HC = health consciousness, CT = Consumer Trust, PA = personal attitude, PP = pricing policy, WOM = word of mouth, PB = purchasing behavior.

4.4. Results of the Structural Model

Table 5 presents the results of the structural model. The key measures of reporting results of the structural model are path coefficients (regression weights), t values, and p values for assessing the significance of t statistics. Path coefficient values were obtained using bootstrapping.

Table 5. Results of Hypotheses Testing.

| No. | Path Relationship | Estimate | t-Statistics | p Value | Results |
|-----|-------------------|----------|--------------|---------|---------|
| 1   | HC → PB           | 0.210    | 2.152        | 0.032   | Supported |
| 2   | PP → PB           | −0.306   | 2.519        | 0.012   | Supported |
| 3   | CT → PB           | 0.142    | 1.142        | 0.254   | Not Supported |
| 4   | PA → PB           | 0.032    | 0.266        | 0.790   | Not Supported |
| 5a  | HC × WOM → PB    | 0.293    | 2.204        | 0.028   | Supported |
| 5b  | PP × WOM → PB    | −0.195   | 2.234        | 0.026   | Supported |
| 5c  | CT × WOM → PB    | −0.172   | 1.715        | 0.087   | Not Supported |
| 5d  | PA × WOM → PB    | −0.058   | 0.498        | 0.618   | Not Supported |

Note: HC = health consciousness, CT = Consumer Trust, PA = personal attitude, PP = pricing policy, WOM = word of mouth, PB = purchasing behavior.

Figure 1 presents the regression weights. The reported coefficient of determination (R²) indicated that value is used to describe the amount of variation in the dependent variables generated by independent variables. Higher R² values indicate the predictive capacity of the structural model. However, the strength of R² values depends on the sophistication of the research model and the form of discipline [110]. For example, R² values of 0.75, 0.50, and 0.25 are considered to be substantial, moderate, and low in social sciences.
The first hypothesis predicted a positive significant impact of health consciousness on organic food buying behavior of university students. Findings showed that health consciousness has a significant positive impact on buying behavior ($\beta = 0.210; t = 2.152; p = 0.032$). Based on such findings, the first hypothesis was accepted. The second hypothesis tested the influence of organic food pricing policy on students’ buying behavior. Findings reported that the pricing policy of organic food was negatively related to students’ buying behavior ($\beta = -0.306; t = 2.519; p = 0.012$). Consequently, the second hypothesis is supported. The third hypothesis tested the relationship between consumer trust and buying behavior of organic food among university students. The research findings revealed that buying behavior had no significant association with consumer trust ($\beta = 0.142; t = 1.142; p = 0.254$). Therefore, the third hypothesis is declined. The fourth hypothesis suggested that students’ attitude toward organic food has a significant impact on their buying behavior. Regression results indicated that students’ personal attitudes had no significant impact on their buying behavior of organic food ($\beta = 0.032; t = 0.266; p = 0.790$). Consequently, the fourth hypothesis is rejected.

Hypothesis 5a proposed that WOM would moderate the relationship between health consciousness and organic food buying behavior of university students. The moderation analysis findings revealed that the interaction between WOM and health consciousness had a significant impact on buying behavior ($\beta = -0.293; t = 2.204; p = 0.028$). Therefore, Hypothesis 5a is accepted. Hypothesis 5b predicted that WOM would moderate the relationship between pricing policy and students’ buying behavior. Research findings indicated that WOM had a negative moderating impact on the negative relationship...
between pricing policy and buying behavior ($\beta = -0.195$; $t = 2.234$; $p = 0.06$). Accordingly, Hypothesis 5b is supported. Hypothesis 5c tested the moderating impact of WOM on the relationship between consumer trust and buying behavior of organic food. Findings revealed that WOM had an insignificant influence on the positive impact of personal attitude on buying behavior ($\beta = -0.172$; $t = 1.1715$; $p = 0.087$). This leads to rejecting Hypothesis 5c. Finally, Hypothesis 5d proposed that WOM would have a significant moderating influence on the relationship between personal attitude and students’ buying behavior. Results showed that the negative impact of pricing policy on buying behavior was not affected by the presence of WOM ($\beta = -0.058$; $t = 0.498$; $p = 0.618$). Consequently, Hypothesis 5d is declined.

Finally, we tested the potentially significant impact of students’ gender and income on their buying behavior. The research findings revealed that there is no significant influence of university students’ gender and income on their organic food buying behavior ($\beta = -0.109$; $t = 0.216$; $p = 0.593$), and ($\beta = -0.083$; $t = 0.129$; $p = 0.657$).

Figures 2 and 3 visualize the moderating impact of WOM. Findings showed that the interaction between WOM and health consciousness positively influences buying behavior of organic food. Further, WOM strengthens the negative relationship between pricing policy and students’ buying behavior of organic food.
5. Discussion and Conclusions

The hypothesized model suggested that health consciousness, consumer trust, pricing policy, and personal attitude are significantly associated with university students’ buying behavior of organic food with an emphasis on the potential moderating impact of WOM. Findings revealed that buying organic food was positively related to health consciousness and negatively associated with pricing policy. This indicated that students maintaining a healthy lifestyle are likely to buy organic food. However, students may decrease their buying behavior based on their perceived pricing policy of organic food items. Such findings underlined that students perceive that the pricing policy of organic food products is high and results in decreasing the frequency and quantity of buying organic food items. The findings of this study imply that students who care about their health buy organic food but consume other food. Chinese consumers pay more attention to social/ethical cues than environmental cues [112]. Surprisingly, research findings revealed no significant impact of students’ attitudes toward organic food on their purchasing behavior. Such findings are compatible with Ajzen and Cote’s [84] proposition that attitude is not necessarily an influential determinant for consumers’ behavior. In addition, this finding was consistent with Tandon et al. [9] who reported an insignificant association between Indian consumers’ attitudes toward organic food and their purchasing behavior. Therefore, such finding actual purchase behaviors of organic food might be affected by supplementary factors such as health consciousness and consumer trust rather than a positive attitude.

Some scholars argued that purchasing intention not necessarily leads to actual purchasing behavior and called it the intention-behavior gap [2,23,77], or “green gap” which represents a remarkable challenge to organic food marketers [11]. Despite the presence of an intention behavior gap concerning organic food consumption [66], limited studies examined the actual purchasing behavior of organically produced food items [28,45]. Health and environmental problems triggered researchers’ and practitioners’ interest in identifying antecedents of organic food consumption [113]. Le-Anh et al. [114] revealed that perceived value and attitude are associated with purchase intention significantly.

This research extends the TPB in explaining consumers buying behavior of organic food by adding WOM as a moderating variable. Results of this study indicated that WOM strengthens the positive relationship between health consciousness and buying behavior of organic food. On the other hand, WOM was found to strengthen the negative relationship between pricing policy and buying behavior of organic food.

This research offered some important implications on university students’ buying behavior of organic food. Future research may employ a larger sample size in different contexts to identify the major factors affecting university students’ consumer behavior of organic food. Although an important factor in literature, the personal attitude had no significant association with purchasing behavior among Chinese university students. Research findings revealed that stimulating university students’ to increase frequencies of buying organic food can be achieved by emphasizing fair price, enhancing product trust, ensuring health benefits and positive attitudes. In addition, positive WOM especially about trust and pricing policy is essential to reinforce university students’ buying behavior. The findings of this study can help managers to increase the likelihood of university students’ buying organic foods through emphasizing a competitive pricing policy, enhancing trust, targeting students with health consciousness, promoting a positive attitude, and favorable WOM in their strategic marketing management. To retain existing and recruit new young consumers, organic food retailers and marketers may need to revise their current pricing policy or justify reasons for charging premium prices. In addition, they need to distinguish the nature of organic food from green or other conventional food products in the mind of young consumers.

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Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to [permission requested from the Project supervisor: Prof. Hao and other organic food retailers].

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Appendix A

Table A1. Questionnaire.

| Construct                | Items                                                                 |
|--------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Health Consciousness     | HC1 I choose food carefully to ensure good health.                     |
|                          | HC2 I consider myself a health-conscious consumer.                     |
|                          | HC3 I often think about health-related issues.                         |
| Personal Attitude        | PA1 Consuming organic food is good.                                    |
|                          | PA2 Consuming organic food is pleasant                                  |
| Consumer Trust           | CT1 The traceability system provides objective information on agro-products sufficiently. |
|                          | CT2 Information provided by the traceability system is trustworthy,    |
|                          | CT3 I expect the traceability system to provide accurate information trustfully |
| Pricing Policy           | PP1 I get good value for my money.                                     |
|                          | PP2 The relationship between the price and quality is good.            |
| Word of Mouth            | WOM1 My family/friends positively influence my attitude towards a specific organic food brand. |
|                          | WOM2 My family/friends mention positive things I had not considered about a specific organic food brand. |
|                          | * WOM3 My family/friends provide me with positive ideas about a specific organic food brand. |
|                          | WOM4 My family/friends positively influence my evaluation of a specific organic food brand. |
|                          | WOM5 My family/friends help me make the decision in selecting a specific organic food brand. |
| Purchasing Behavior      | PB1 I often buy organic food products.                                  |
|                          | PB2 I always try to buy organic food with green labeling marks         |
|                          | PB3 I buy organic food products even if they have a higher price,      |
|                          | PB4 I recommend organic food products to my relatives and friends      |

Note: * WOM3 was removed from the questionnaire.

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