



# Consumer choice in context: Developing further understanding of organic buyer's switching behaviour

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## Abstract

The organic food market continues to grow yet market share remains low. The majority of consumers in this market tend to switch between organic and conventional food products rather than being heavy users of organic branded products. The purpose of this research is to present a deeper investigation of the factors that can lead to the purchase or non-purchase of organic food in order to gain a better understanding of this switching behaviour. A qualitative grounded theory approach was utilised involving in-depth interviews with 21 participants in Australia. These were primary shoppers who switch between organic and conventional food. An emergent conceptual framework was developed from the data which identifies factors that influence whether or not organic food is bought. This framework includes three layers: consumer context; choice of retail outlet; and point-of-purchase. Depending on the specific situation, these factors influence buyers to different extents and hence their collective impact determines whether the individual purchases organic food on a given shopping event. The framework may be used by organic food marketers as a checklist for developing an understanding of their consumers and a basis for developing strategy.

**Key Words:** Consumer behaviour, food marketing, organic food, Australia.

## Introduction

The aim of this research is to explore and provide insight into why, despite the significant and continuous growth in the organic food market, overall market share remains very low. The basis for this low share is the 'switching' behaviour that occurs in this market; the majority of consumers tend to 'switch' between organic and conventional food rather than consuming a diet consisting mostly of organic food. To date, this switching behaviour has not been satisfactorily explained. Existing research and marketing frameworks such as segmentation, attitudes, beliefs and motivations go some way to providing insight, but fail to provide a cohesive explanation. This paper briefly highlights current marketing knowledge in this area before offering grounded theory as a method of building upon consumer decision making processes (which include choice of retail outlet and point-of-purchase factors). The outcome is an emergent conceptual framework of organic switching behaviour which includes consumer context. This framework is based around three layers (consumer context; choice of retail outlet and point-of-purchase) that lead to

either purchase or non-purchase of organic food at a given shopping event.

### ***The Organic Food Market***

The growth in the global organic food market has continued despite challenging economic conditions. Consumer interest in organic food is reflected in global sales of US \$62.9 billion in 2012 which is an increase of US\$3.8 billion from 2010 and a growth of 170% since 2002 (Willer, Lernoud & Kilcher (eds), 2013). In developed countries, the majority of consumers buy at least some organic food. Reports indicate that this may be as high as 90% in the United Kingdom (Soil Association, 2009) through to 70% in the United States (Demerit, 2009) and 65% in Australia (Monk, et al., 2012). However, market share remains small (Aertsens, et al., 2011). In Australia it is estimated to be between 0.8 and 1.2% (Monk, et al., 2012) and around 4% in the United States (Organic Trade Association, 2011).

### ***Existing Consumer Behaviour Frameworks***

Existing marketing and consumer behaviour frameworks such as segmentation, attitudes and motivations offer some assistance in facilitating our understanding of switching behaviour in the organic food market. Each are located in the literature and their limitations in relation to assisting us to understand low market share of organic food and switching behaviour are discussed below.

Segmentation is a marketing tool aimed at dividing the market for a product or service into homogenous segments of consumers with similar characteristics, needs and behaviours (Kotler, et al., 2012). These segments can then be used as a basis for developing targeted marketing communication. In the organic food market, the organic consumer has been examined in detail through the lens of segmentation (see, for example, Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2002; Lockie, et al., 2002; Storstad & Bjørkhaug, 2003; Lea & Worsley, 2005) with the majority of research using demographics as a basis (Henryks & Pearson, 2011). However, with the exception of segmentation on the basis of gender, results are inconsistent and consequently demographic variables are not a very useful predictive tool of who is and who is not an organic consumer. As Zepeda, Chang, & Leviten-Reid (2006, p.392) pointed out "... focus group study confirms that only looking at gender, income, education, and family/household size may yield contradictory results because people's motivations are complex". It is for this reason that we need to look elsewhere in order to understand the organic consumer.

Behavioural segmentation would be another way of attempting to understand consumption patterns in this market. Unfortunately, within the organic category, frequency of purchase is difficult to measure, and how it is measured varies in different studies (Magnusson, et al., 2001). While studies consistently report that most consumers buy organic food occasionally, around 65% of the time (Monk, et al., 2012), this can range from buying a large amount of organic food irregularly, to buying a small amount irregularly. In other words, although a sizeable percentage of consumers buy organic food, there are inadequate consistent data to enable meaningful interpretation. Although it alerts us to the critical fact that a significant number of consumers are occasional buyers of organic products, that is, they switch between purchasing organic and conventional products, it does not explain why this may be the case (Pearson, et al., 2013). Factors other than behavioural segmentation need to be examined in order to understand this switching behaviour.

Although as mentioned, the majority of the literature concerns itself with demographics as a segmentation variable, some studies have examined other types of market segmentation (Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2002; McEachern & McClean, 2002; Monk, et al., 2012) including psychographic and lifestyle. Whilst the various segments were interesting and provided some insight into the consumer behaviour in this market, they too fail to explain 'switching' behaviour, which as previously identified is a key feature of the organic market. Consequently, in the organic food market, segmentation as a marketing tool, with its reliance on correlation between consumption behaviour and stable characteristics of consumers, offers little insight into the majority of consumers that switch between organic and conventional food. It therefore is not useful for determining how marketers could best target these consumers.

#### ***Attitudes, Motivations and Barriers to Purchase***

Understanding attitudes and associated motivations helps provide a rational framework for the reasons consumers may or may not buy organic food; however, in the case of switchers, attitudes do not explain the switching behaviour. For example, consumers can be positively disposed and give reasons as to why they do purchase organic food (taste, health and environment, social responsibility, quality and food safety (McEachern & McClean, 2002; Lockie, Halpin & Pearson, 2006; Pearson & Henryks, 2008; Pearson, Henryks & Jones, 2011 Nasir & Karakaya, 2013;), yet still switch between organic and conventional food.

Amongst the substantial group of consumers that do buy organic occasionally (and presumably for those who do not buy it), there are three major barriers to purchasing more of it: price, availability, and appearance. Certified organic food carries a price premium relative to non-organic food. Any study that considers barriers to organic consumption mentions price (Lockie, et al., 2002; McEachern & Willock, 2004; Shepherd, Magnusson & Sjöden 2005). The major argument for lowering prices is that consumers claim that organic food is unaffordable; however, price as a barrier warrants closer attention. The average Australian spends just over A\$20 per week on fresh fruit and vegetables and over A\$80 on alcohol, soft drinks, takeaway food and confectionary (ABS, 2011). This suggests that it is not an affordability issue alone but one of choice for many consumers. An Australian study found that lower income was not a barrier to commitment to organic food purchasing behaviour (Newspoll, 2008) further suggesting it is choice, and not affordability, that is the issue for the majority of consumers. In addition, two studies that looked at co-op shoppers found that, despite low incomes, there was substantial willingness to spend more on organic food (Jolly, et al., 1989; Goldman & Clancy, 1991).

Studies have found that although consumers complain about the price differential, when asked to elaborate as to what it actually is, they are either unclear (Chang & Zepeda, 2005) or incorrect (Lampkin, 2002). Studies into (conventional) supermarket shopping have also found that "a sizeable percentage of consumers buy products without knowing their price... (which) does not necessarily imply that consumers do not care about price" (Grunert, 2007, p. 170). So, although price is often cited as a barrier for reasons of affordability, closer examination reveals a complex issue: consumers that value organic food pay for it, whilst those who don't, complain.

The second most cited barrier to the purchase of organic food is availability. Organic food

is not as easily available as conventional food and consumers often need to alter their shopping behaviour if they are seeking to purchase organic food. Studies that cited price as a barrier also cite availability (Lockie, et al., 2002; Zanolli & Naspetti, 2002; McEachern & Willock, 2004; Shepherd, Magnusson & Sjöden 2005). The lack of easily available organic food results in it requiring more effort and being less convenient for some consumers. However, as Lyons, Lockie & Lawrence (2001, p.204) pointed out, “unavailable” means “not easily available from the supermarkets where I shop”.

A third cited purchase barrier pertaining to organic food, specifically fresh fruit and vegetables, is appearance. Organic food has not always had the same appearance as conventional food because without chemicals to kill pests, organic food will sometimes contain bug holes and other blemishes. However this has been reduced over recent decades as many organic producers have been able to improve the appearance of their products. Consumers are accustomed to the appearance of perfect-looking fruit and vegetables, consequently the imperfect appearance of some organic produce is a potential barrier for a number of consumers (Thompson & Kidwell, 1998; Fearn, 2008). Others, however, may see pest markings as a sign that the food is organic (Henryks & Pearson 2010).

Price and availability are the two most commonly-cited barriers to the purchase of organic food: however, upon closer examination of these two factors it is possible that they are simply convenient, logical post hoc rationalisations provided by consumers when they are asked why they do not purchase organic food.

The question then arises: how are the attitudes, motivations and barriers discussed above related to organic switching behaviour? Why do they ‘kick in’ on some occasions and not on others? While purchase motivations pertaining to organic food may go some way to aiding us in understanding why some people buy organic food and others do not, they fail to shed any light on the switching behaviour that occurs in this market.

### ***Gaps in Our Understanding***

One of the marketing challenges with organic food is that it is difficult to define as a discrete category that consumers belong to and are loyal to, as the majority of consumers ‘switch’ in and out of buying organic products. A consumer may one week buy organic bread and the next week conventional bread. Another consumer may consistently buy organic fruit and vegetables but other categories of organic food sporadically or not at all. Further, not all consumers buy in each organic category for the same reasons or motivations. McEachern & Willock (2004) considered consumer motivations for purchasing organic meat (animal welfare amongst others) which can potentially be very different to motivations for purchasing organic vegetables (for example, taste) (McEachern & Willock 2004). This presents a further marketing challenge.

Given the behaviour in question pertains to consumer ‘switching’ behaviour, the literature on switching has also been explored for relevance to this challenge. This body of literature predominantly examines service relationships (such as banks, insurance or telecommunications) where a binary relationship tends to exist – consumers change service providers rather than continually switch between brands (for example, Oyeniya & Joachim Abiodun, 2010; de Matos, Henrique, & de Rosa, 2013; Kaur, Sharma, & Mahajan, 2012). This is not the case with organic food, where consumers continuously move between conventional and organic food, and no relevant insights were gained.

Despite a considerable body of literature exploring organic food buyer behaviour, we are unable to explain the fundamental question: why do so many consumers switch between organic and conventional food? Recent research by the authors has explored this question from two perspectives: the choice of retail outlet (Henryks & Pearson, 2011) and the point-of purchase (Henryks, Cooksey & Wright, 2013). The aim of this paper is to build upon these perspectives and provide a framework for addressing this question.

## Methodology

Consumers who switch between organic and conventional food were the focus of this research as they comprise a large segment of the food market. As noted, the context in which this group of consumers bought (or did not buy) organic food was missing from existing research. A grounded theory approach was chosen as it focuses on building theory from the data and is an inductive approach (Glasser, 1998). This approach allowed for participants' stories to emerge from the data, inform the emergent theory and be incorporated back into further interviews until saturation was reached and no new data emerged. The overall intention was to gain a deeper understanding of the complexities and contexts involved in the organic food buying process.

Selected participants for this study were the primary shopper for their household and, to ensure that they were switchers, needed to be purchasing at least 3 organic items per week but not the majority of their food as organic. This was to ensure that they were switchers and not 'heavy' or 'non-consumers' of organic food. Further, as the aim was to uncover a diverse range of perspectives in order to increase the chances of developing a well-rounded theory, participants were chosen to enhance demographic diversity and a range of stages in the family lifecycle. This selection criterion is shown in the table below and served to provide diverse context for the stories and perspectives that emerged from the data. A modified snowball sampling technique was used whereby informants, known to the researcher, were asked for their assistance in putting potential participants in touch with the researcher (Minichiello, Aroni & Hays, 2008).

Applying theoretical sampling, the collection of empirical information was deemed to be complete when no new information emerged from the participants. This saturation point was reached after 19 interviews. As a further check on whether or not the saturation point had been reached, two additional interviews were conducted, and neither yielded any new insights. The final sample consisted of 21 participants and pseudonyms were assigned to protect their identities (see Table 1).

Participants were from two Australian cities: Armidale (population 20,000) in New South Wales and Canberra in the Australian Capital Territory (population 350,000) in order to examine if there was a difference between the urban and rural perspectives. (With the exception Canberra participants having access to farmers' markets, no notable differences were found; however, participants are identified by their location in order to maintain consistency and transparency.) Both these cities supported a range of retail outlets that stocked organic food including supermarkets (small and large), health food stores and food co-operatives. Although, as mentioned, at the time of this research, only Canberra had established weekly farmers' markets.

A grounded theory method gives clear structure to data analysis. The 'bones' of data analysis consisted of two practices: coding and memos. Coding in the present study

followed the guidelines set down by Charmaz (2006). In her approach, coding is a two stage process where initial open coding is followed by selective coding. Additionally, memos were composed and used for the duration of the project in order to aid reflexivity.

**Table 1. Summary of final sample.**

Household demographic	Armidale participants (n= 8)	Canberra participants (n=13)
Couple with no children living at home	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Henry (retired)</li> <li>• Gabrielle (children have left home)</li> <li>• Dorothy (children have left home)</li> <li>• Conrad (never had children)</li> <li>• Betty (about to have children)</li> </ul>	
Couple with young children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Elizabeth (1 preschool and 2 school aged children).</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sam (2 primary school aged children).</li> </ul>
Single person with older children	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anna (2 primary and 2 high school children)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Queenie (family with 1 child in primary and 1 in high school).</li> <li>• Rose (family with high school children).</li> </ul>
Single person living alone	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Felicity (working full time)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kate (working full time)</li> <li>• Jenny working full time)</li> <li>• Ursula (working full time)</li> </ul>
Single person in a share household		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lexi (children have left home);</li> <li>• Olivia (university student in a share student household);</li> <li>• Isabelle (house sitting and sharing)</li> <li>• Penny (working full time)</li> <li>• Meena (working full time)</li> </ul>
Single parent with part time responsibility for children		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Natalie (2 primary school aged children).</li> </ul>
Single Parent with full time responsibility for children		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tanya (1 primary and 2 high school aged children)</li> </ul>

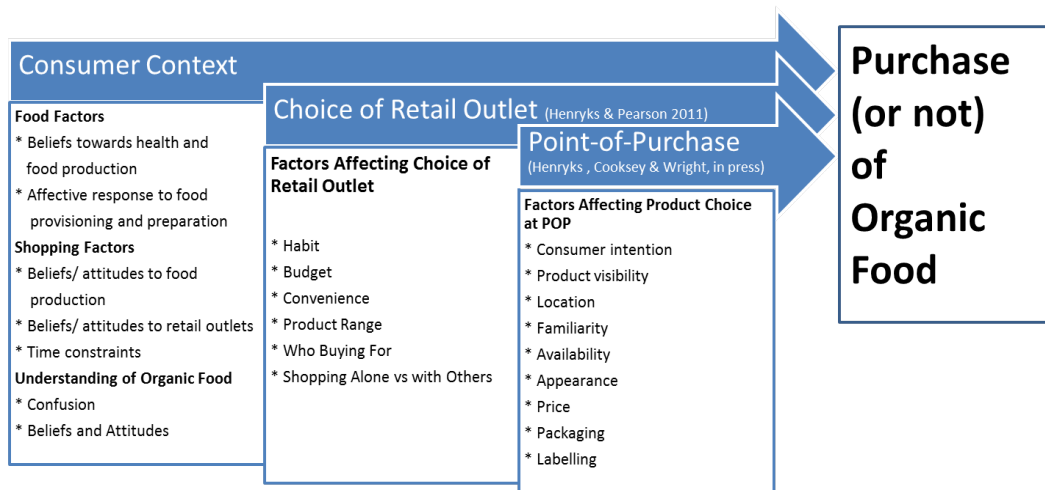
## Results

### *The Emergent Conceptual Framework*

Based on the analysis of the data, a conceptual framework of switcher buyer behaviour was developed and is illustrated Figure 1. It represents consumer switching behaviour for a given shopping event. All three layers of the framework are interrelated and consequently result in many different stories. This conceptual framework builds upon previously published papers on two of the three layers: choice of retail outlet (Henryks & Pearson, 2011) and point-of-purchase factors (Henryks, Cooksey & Wright, 2013) and adds the final layer 'consumer context'. The resultant switcher buyer behaviour framework maps the various factors that can be considered when developing marketing strategy for an organic product.

### **Consumer Context: Factors influencing the purchase of organic food**

Food shopping and food consumption are affected by the way consumers feel about food and the meaning that it has in their lives. The first layer of the switcher buyer behaviour conceptual framework consists of three contextual factors that can influence consumers' organic food choice: Food; Shopping, and Understanding of Organic Food. It is important to note that these various contextual factors pertaining to a shopping event can influence the other key components of the organic food buying framework. Consequently while each layer has been identified and separated from the overall buying process, it does not operate in isolation but as a synergistic part of the framework.



**Figure 1. Switcher buyer behaviour conceptual framework.**

### **Food as Factor of Consumer Context**

Food as a contextual factor affects organic purchase decisions in two main arenas: beliefs towards health and food production, and affective responses to food provisioning and preparation. Health was intrinsically linked to food for all participants; however, the way in which it was linked meant different things to different people. For some it was as insurance policy:

*I guess I have a personal belief that giving my kids healthy food is like our health insurance and their health insurance, if I can raise them up on a good healthy diet then I've set them up nutritionally hopefully for life and set them with good food habits. Tanya, Canberra, p.3.*

*I think you can buy really cheap food and probably get sick ... I don't see the point in buying cheap, rubbish food. Sam, Canberra, p.4.*

For others it was about the importance of avoiding additives and chemicals found in conventional food:

*I'm not putting food into my system that's pumped full of ... sprayed with chemicals and God knows what. And not knowing what effect various things have on my system ... Felicity, Armidale, p.7.*

*It seems to me that having no or less chemicals has got to be good for our systems I hate to think about all the stuff we're breathing in and that we're eating and consuming in all different manner of ways chemicals etc. Kate, Canberra, p.6.*

The second arena influencing consumer behaviour was the affective response to food provisioning and preparation. For some it was viewed as a source of stress and for others, pleasure. The perspective was dependent upon the time available and the context for the event. Those with children found it to be more of a chore, despite its perceived importance, whereas those preparing for social gatherings or who had time found it to be a more pleasing experience.

*It can be a bit of a chore if I'm rushed or during the week it's a bit of a hassle... sometimes when I have all the girls, there's three of them... sometimes it's a bit of a push. Natalie, Canberra, p.2.*

*... and I like the experience of getting something that's really raw. I suppose cutting it, chopping it and putting things with it to make it really delicious. Olivia, Canberra, p.5.*

Beliefs towards food production also impact on Consumer Context across two of the Contextual Factors, Food and Shopping. The majority of participants were keen to have some sort of connection to the source of their food; this could be through knowledge of the production process or a relationship with the grower.

*If I can have a sense of where the food comes from, that's important ... that there's the personal involvement in it. One would hope that if you know something about where your fruit and veg is coming from or if you can talk to the people that are selling it, who have grown it, that those people are also being looked after better. Felicity, Armidale, p.5.*

*I really like it when apple season and I go to Mr C (orchardist) and can ask him..... about apple season.....it's a ritual and... I like the realness of it and that exchange of climate, the weather and cockatoos. Anna, Armidale, p.3.*

Animal and environmental concerns also dominate participants' beliefs about food production. Organic food was considered to be better for the environment as well as to have superior standards of animal welfare.

*...well I guess there's the whole political option... I feel like I'm feeding my kids right, and trying to use my money to support to buying food that's hopefully costing the planet less. Tanya, Canberra, p.7.*

*what I resent (about supermarkets) – the over packaging, the waste, the non-pureness of processing... it's just the physical environment, the light, the air and not generating all that waste. Anna, Armidale, p.4.*

*...these factory feed lot sort of things I find pretty horrific... I don't feel strongly enough that I'd want to be a vegetarian, but I do feel strongly enough that the animals should have a decent life before they get turned into food for us. Elizabeth, Armidale, p.7.*



### **Shopping as Factor of Consumer Context**

The second component of the context layer is the consumers' view of shopping. Food provisioning fulfils many needs for people from the basic need to eat, and feed the family for some, through to a more abstract health insurance policy. Three aspects of shopping impacting upon consumer choice are: beliefs and attitudes to food production; beliefs and attitudes to retail outlet; and time constraints.

Various food production concerns can impact upon attitudes towards and choice of retail outlet whether this is a local food co-op, farmers' market or supermarket.

*I like food to be healthy to know where it's come from, that it's supporting other people's enterprise, that it's not damaging the environment, not sprayed and the social context of the co-op does matter... it is building connection between people ... Anna, Armidale, p.4.*

Participant's views on retail outlets were influenced by the type of outlet. Those who shopped at the farmers' market felt that it provided a unique shopping experience that was not attainable in any other food retail outlet. The farmers' market experience comprised a combination of meeting social needs, high quality of fresh, healthy food and an extensive product range. Similar views were held about the food co-op; however, supermarkets were considered to be a 'necessary evil'. They provided a good range of products at affordable prices and were open at convenient times but had questionable practices.

*I really enjoy it (farmers' market), it's more than just shopping... it's relaxing and ...I'll get a coffee and have a look at what's there and try things they have for tasting. I don't just go there to shop. I like the atmosphere of it. Ursula, Canberra, p.2.*

*What do you get from the co-op? – it (Armidale food co-op) has got those elements about being part of being a movement. I can't crack what it is but I can sense it but it feels like a bit like anarchy, (it) feels like it is being true to my value. I like the community, I like the purity... the simplicity, it takes away the clutter. I like the pureness. Anna, Armidale, p.4.*

*Well the supermarket you basically aim to get in and out as quickly as you can. It's an entirely different experience because there's no love in a supermarket. Isabelle Canberra p. 5*

Time is the final aspect of shopping context. Mothers in particular felt that if they had more time to shop then their shopping experience would be different. The competing demands on their time meant that shopping had to be fitted in amongst other chores and consequently it was not always possible to shop at their preferred outlets. Sam would have preferred to shop at the farmers' markets more often but was rarely free when they were open and Elizabeth's enjoyment of food shopping was marred by a lack of time.

*If I had time to go to the markets (I'd enjoy shopping).... Sam, Canberra, p.7.*

*It just depends on how rushed I am and how many other things I've got to do. Elizabeth, Armidale, p.3.*

### **Consumer Understanding of Organic Food as Factor of Consumer Context**

Consumer understanding of organic food comprises the final element of the contextual layer and affected participants' organic food purchase behaviour to various degrees. This understanding encompasses the confusion that exists amongst consumers in relation to organic food and attitudes and beliefs towards organic food. By understanding 'what' consumers believe about organic products, it is possible to address these beliefs in the marketing of organic products. The three main areas of belief held by participants about organic food (health, taste and the chemical free nature of organic food) were consistent with the literature previously discussed on consumer beliefs pertaining to organic food.

*It's healthier and often it tastes better to me it tastes more like food used to taste when I was a kid when we used to grow the vegetables. Kate, Canberra, p.4.*

*The critics say look, there's no difference between organic food and conventionally grown food, and of course there is. You know, either chemically or taste wise, there is, although in some cases it's not as easily discernible. Henry, Armidale, p.9.*

Despite the beliefs held about organic food, a great deal of confusion also existed. This arose from several sources including recognising organic food in retail outlets and how the food was actually grown. Jenny's words captured the general confusion about what constituted organic food:

*I like the concept, I like not having all the pesticides I guess one of the problems is having a definition of what exactly is organic ...Jenny, Canberra, p.9.*

Another area of concern which affects the purchase of organic food is that participants often assumed that food sold at the farmers' market was organic. Interestingly, when Ursula and Rose reflected upon the issue during their interview for this study, they realised that it may not always be the case.

*...thinking about it now I realise that the farmers' market might not always be organic, even though it's locally produced and that sort of thing. It will depend on which stalls you choose from, which ones are organic and which are not. Ursula, Canberra, p.8.*

*...when I think of it I just assumed it was all organic but I hadn't looked, to be honest, to see if it was labelled organic or not. Rose, Canberra, p. 10.*

These three Consumer Context areas: food factors, shopping factors, and understanding of organic food, all impact and influence consumer choice and decision making at the next layer of the conceptual framework - the choice of retail outlet.

### **Choice of Retail Outlet**

Choice of retail outlet has been explored in detail in previously published research (Henryks & Pearson, 2011) thus is only briefly described here in terms of implications that relate to the Switcher Buyer Behaviour Conceptual Framework (Figure 1). Choice of retail outlet can dictate whether or not an organic product is chosen in a given shopping event. Hence the choice of outlet can impact the final behavioural outcome of purchase or non purchase of organic food. In any given shopping event factors such as habit, budget,

convenience, product range, who they were buying for, whether shopping alone or with others, all served to impact on decision making pertaining to the choice of retail outlet which in turn could impact upon the purchase (or not) of organic food.

***Point-of-Purchase Factors influencing purchase of organic food***

The point-of-purchase is the final hurdle in determining whether a consumer purchases (or does not purchase) organic food on a given shopping event. It has also been explored in detail in previously published research (Henryks, Cooksey & Wright, 2014) thus is only briefly described here in terms of implications that relate to the Switcher Buyer Behaviour Conceptual Framework (Figure 1). Point-of-purchase issues that influence purchase of organic food are: whether or not the consumer went into the outlet with the intention to purchase organic food; visibility; location; consumer familiarity; product availability; appearance; price; packaging; and labelling.

**Discussion and Implications**

Organic food and its consumers is a much researched group (Pearson, Henryks & Jones, 2011) yet continues to capture low market share. As noted, the behaviour of a significant group of organic consumers presents a challenge to the organic food industry as they continue to ‘switch’ between organic and conventional food. This paper has presented a conceptual framework which contributes to our understanding of these consumers by expanding the range of factors that can impact upon the purchase (or not) of organic food. This framework includes three layers: the Consumer Context (food, shopping and consumer understanding of organic food); the Choice of Retail Outlet; and Point-of-Purchase factors. Although previous research has considered many of these factors in isolation, they have not been previously been considered in a cohesive framework.

The Switcher Buyer Behaviour Conceptual Framework (Figure 1) identifies factors which heavily influence and contribute to explaining consumer switching buyer behaviour in the organic food market and hence enhance understanding that is gained from other approaches to understanding buyer behaviour, such as the decision process model of buyer behaviour (Kotler, et al., 2012). For instance, a switcher may have chosen a retail outlet for a given shopping event based on their proximity to the outlet while attending a child’s sporting match (convenience). This choice of retail outlet will in turn determine availability of organic produce (for example the closest green grocer may not carry an extensive range of organic produce) and consequently can lead to the non-purchase of organic food for that given shopping event. This example demonstrates the contextual sensitivities of the Switcher Buyer Behaviour Conceptual Framework in that it provides keys to understanding switching behaviour. Furthermore, this Framework is inherently dynamic. It seeks to characterise the web of factors that result in behavioural change.

The challenge remains that the importance of factors identified in the Framework can and do change from one shopping event to next. Hence the choices made by a consumer on each occasion can vary according to the priority afforded to each factor at that time (for example, convenience) or by factors outside their control (such as product availability and price).

Being branded as organic is what brings together the wide range of products in the organic food market. However, consumers are not presented with one brand. Rather it is complicated as the ‘organic’ brand comprises many sub brands and labelling is not

always clear to consumers (Henryks, et al., 2013). In the Australian market, consumers need to be familiar with seven certification logos if they are to be confident they are buying organic food as Australia does not have a national certification mark. Not surprisingly, research shows that these labels are not easily identified and result in some confusion (Newspoll, 2008; Henryks & Pearson 2010). Until the introduction of a national logo in Germany, the situation was similar to Australia where the large number of labels resulted in consumer confusion and uncertainty (Soyez, Francis & Smirnova, 2012).

In part, this confusion is also due to the credence nature of organic food (Darby & Karni, 1973; Grunert, 2002). That is, the 'organic' attribute of the food product is part of the production process and invisible to consumers at every stage of the buying and consumption process. Consequently, consumers rely on heuristics and information to ascertain that a product is organic and certification labelling is a significant component of this identification process. Thus a step in strengthening the organic brand can be ensuring consistency and clarity in labelling and communicating this to consumers. This example of stronger branding relates to every stage of the conceptual framework. For instance, in the Consumer Context layer, assisting consumers with a clearer understanding of organic food through strengthening their beliefs and clarifying confusion; at the Choice of Retail Outlet layer through ensuring that consumers are positively predisposed to choosing a retail outlet that stocks organic food; and finally in the Point-of-Purchase layer, increasing consumer intention to buy organic and promoting familiarity with organic logos and/or packaging.

The Switcher Buyer Behaviour Conceptual Framework discussed in this paper contains factors which impact and influence consumer behaviour in relation to organic food purchases. These factors can be used as a 'checklist' by organic food producers and marketers for gaining an understanding of their customers as well as be used to develop marketing and marketing communication strategies that focus on facilitating switchers choosing organic food over conventional more often.

The purpose of presenting results in the form of a framework is to provide the factors in a useful schematic; however, it should be noted that further research is required to investigate whether there is a hierarchy of importance, or a logical sequence, that buyers follow. As with many studies, the limitations of this research are opportunities for future research. One clear opportunity is to design a longitudinal study to explore the differences in attitudes and behaviours over a longer time period. Given the increasing interest in the environmental impacts of our food choices, important trends may be defining and changing consumer behaviour in this market. Another opportunity for further research emerges from the observations that some switchers may be in a state of transition, either gradually increasing their consumption to becoming dedicated organic food buyers, or on a path to exiting from purchasing any organic food. A further limitation is that the data was limited to participants' recollections, which may have been partially forgotten over time, or not be an accurate match with actual behaviour. For example, evidence suggests some participants may have inadvertently claimed to be purchasing organic food when they were buying conventional food and vice versa (Henryks, Cooksey & Wright, 2013).

An additional complication with researching organic food as a category is that there are numerous organic food products, and consumers may hold and exhibit different beliefs,

attitudes and behaviours towards different categories such as bread versus dairy or specific products such as honey versus jam. Further research could be designed to explore the framework through specific food categories to see if additional differences can be found. And finally, although the large number of contextual variables present in this Switcher Buyer Behaviour Conceptual Framework would pose a challenge for modelling, it is worth pursuing this as a direction in gaining further awareness and knowledge of the consumer behaviour that operates in the organic food arena.

This research has contributed to our understanding of switcher behaviour in the organic food market and of the associated attitude behaviour gap. It has provided insight into areas that require further research. This Switcher Buyer Behaviour Conceptual Framework has potential applications to other areas of consumer buyer theory where switching behaviour occurs. One such example is that of health where consumers consistently express their desire for a healthy diet and lifestyle but fail to deliver upon this by making consistent behavioural change to achieve the desired results. Consequently we believe the Switcher Buyer Behaviour Conceptual Framework provides scope for further research in a variety of consumer choice contexts which are of concern to industry, government and the not-for-profit sector.

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