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## **GENERATION Z ATTITUDES TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD: A REVIEW**

**Abstract:** The global food market is continuously undergoing rapid and complex changes, creating a dynamic environment that demands constant adjustments and responses. Thus, the food industry has been increasingly popular nowadays as a research topic. Furthermore, academic researchers are notably interested in analyzing greater demand for organic food, particularly in developed countries. Despite the barriers that consumers encounter in the market, a growing percentage of them are currently shifting to organic purchases. Consequently, most of the research studies aim to understand consumer behavior since it is crucial for businesses and policymakers seeking to promote sustainable food systems. Consumer choices concerning food have a significant impact on the environment, as they are drivers of agricultural production. Despite the fact that Generation Z consumers will be the head of their households in the near future, little is known about their behavior. Therefore, the subject of this paper is organic food, with a special emphasis on Generation Z attitudes. The research gap is particularly concerning given that Generation Z is likely to embrace a lot of new trends on the market. Thus, this paper aims to define recommendations for further research on the topic in order to minimize the noticed research gap. Through a systematic literature review, the paper examines a total of five empirical studies published in the last four years.

**Keywords:** generation Z, consumer behaviour, organic food.

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

Over the last two decades, there has been a significant rise in the consumption of organic food worldwide, while leading the way are the United States, Germany, France, and Australia (Pawar et al., 2022). In accordance with ecological standards, organic agriculture is deemed the most favorable form of farming nowadays (Palić et al., 2019.) Except for the health-related motives, organic food consumption is mostly associated with individuals who are open to new experiences.

The specified characteristic is commonly related to Generation Z (Gen Z), also known as Post-Millennials. Thus, this young generation has been identified as a promising market segment for sustainable strategies (Su et al., 2019). The emerging generation is expected to have a crucial influence on the political, economic, and social landscapes of nations in the foreseeable future (Aydemir et al., 2023). Therefore, the subject of this paper is organic food, with a special emphasis on Gen Z attitudes.

Since the consumers' attitudes are formed through the multiplication of beliefs with evaluations (Aertsens et al., 2009), it is possible to predict Gen Z's behavioral intention toward organic food consumption. However, a systematic literature review has identified the research gap. The research gap is alarming given that Gen Z consumers are currently developing their decision-making processes by moving out from their parent's homes (Kymäläinen et al., 2021). Thus,

this paper aims to define recommendations for further research on the topic in order to minimize the noticed research gap.

Hence, the first part of the paper starts with an introduction that presents a detailed explanation of the subject, problem, and aims. Furthermore, the second part gives an overview of the relevant domestic and foreign literature, aimed at supporting the theoretical explanation of the topic. The subsequent parts focus on a systematic approach to analysis and comparative analysis of research frameworks. The research findings, limitations, and recommendations for further research on the topic are presented in the conclusion section.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The world is currently facing a major threat in the form of environmental degradation and climate change. In the context of the food market, this situation requires the collective effort of all stakeholders and policymakers to transform the food system sustainably. Therefore, policies that encourage consumers to make more sustainable choices have been implemented (Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2017). In line with the food industry facing a dynamic environment, the global food market has been going through a lot of changes trying to keep up with the developments (Vukasovič, 2013). The authors Schleenbecker & Hamm (2017) have noticed a discernible trend toward organic positioning, with a growing number of consumers increasingly expecting companies to place a high priority on sustainability across all aspects of their operations and product offerings. This shift in consumer demand is a positive indication of a heightened awareness of the importance of environmental responsibility.

The term "organic" was recognized in the 1990s, as the system for producing food by propulsion of certain governments. As a result of rising consumer awareness, it has gained prominence in the food industry years later (Rana & Paul, 2020). The authors Scalco et al. (2017), define the term "organic" as an environmentally friendly agricultural system that uses sustainable energy sources, considers the well-being of animals, and preserves the soil. In other words, organic production processes are unique sets of practices that prioritize the use of natural methods to produce food. These methods include the restriction of veterinary medicine, growth regulators, artificial pesticides, etc. Additionally, these methods include the improvement of livestock diversity, their rotation, energy/material recycling, etc. (Brantsæter et al., 2017). Thus, the scientific literature identifies several terms that are often associated with organic products: fresh, local, natural, pure, etc. (Rana & Paul, 2017). As per the findings of Kushwah et al. (2019), organic food is recognized by consumers as a form of eco-innovation or sustainable innovation on a global scale.

According to the authors Chen & Antonelli (2020), consumers' food purchasing habits are influenced by various factors such as physical activity levels, biological needs, lifestyle, but also the natural environment. Consequently, there is a noticeably greater demand for organic food products around the world (Li et al., 2020). Also, consumers' food preferences have a substantial influence on the environment, as they are instrumental in driving agricultural production (Kamenidou et al., 2019). Therefore, the scientific community is interested in analyzing the positive as well as the negative impacts on consumers' purchase intentions (Kushwah et al., 2019). The comprehension of factors that impact consumers' decision-making process has the potential to aid producers, processors, and sellers in creating effective marketing strategies and better approaches to the target groups (Massey et al., 2018).

The authors Monier-Dilhan & Bergès (2016) state that health-related factors are majorly the primary motive for choosing organic food, mostly followed by deep concern about the environment and taste. In line with that, the author Bryla (2016) has found that organic food buyers are much more frequently impacted by product safety and product taste, while non-organic food buyers are much more frequently impacted by advertising and curiosity. However, the authors Husic-Mehmedovic et al. (2017) state that self-identity motivators also play a significant role in consumers' decisions. The concept of self-identity motivators suggests that a person's identity impacts their food choices. In other words, organic food consumption can help them identify themselves as environmentally responsible consumers (Lazaroiu et al., 2019). Also, the authors Djokic, et al. (2018) have observed that organic food consumers are primarily individuals who are classified as "adventurers" based on their lifestyles. Although this production system has gained global recognition for its numerous benefits, consumers still encounter specific obstacles when it comes to purchasing (Kushwah et al., 2019).

The authors Katt & Meixner (2020) state that organic labeled products are usually much more expensive than conventional. Also, the authors Kutnohorská & Tomšík (2013) state that the high price barrier is followed by limited product offers, consumers' satisfaction with non-organic food, and the lack of perceived value. Even though described motives and barriers to organic purchasing have been mostly analyzed in the global food market, socio-demographic factors are also affecting food choices. Thus, the authors Aydemir et al. (2023) state that it is crucial to important to determine the food preferences of age groups.

Generation Z (Gen Z) has been becoming the most significant lately, but the scientific literature also identifies several generations that coexist: Boomers, Generation X, Millennials, and Generation Alpha (Manghiuc & Petrescu, 2020). Gen Z consumers are born in the mid-to-late 1990s and the early 2010s (Kymäläinen et al., 2021). They are characterized by a seeking for a high level of education, technological proficiency, and a strong commitment to the community (Su et al., 2019). Also, Gen Z consumers are renowned for their inclination toward creativity, innovation, and for demonstrating exceptional proficiency in online searches and research. They possess an enviable ability to gather information on

diverse topics with ease, which makes them an invaluable age group in today's information-driven world (Grigoreva et al., 2021). Therefore, Gen Z is far more informed about sustainable living than prior generations (Su et al., 2019). Research attention should be especially given to Generation Z consumers since most of them are starting their family-independent life arrangements and creating new consumption habits (Kamenidou et al., 2019).

### 3. A SYSTEMATIC APPROACH TO ANALYSIS

Given the research gap, this paper examines a total of five empirical studies published in the last four years (Nguyen & Vo, 2023; Julianty et al., 2021; Bhutto et al., 2023; Vehapi & Sabotic, 2021; Vehapi & Mitić, 2021). Each of the five empirical studies has shown a tendency to be highly ranked according to different criteria and journal scores in Foundations of Management, 2nd International Seminar of Science and Applied Technology (ISSAT 2021), PLOS ONE, Marketing, and Ekonomika poljoprivrede journal.

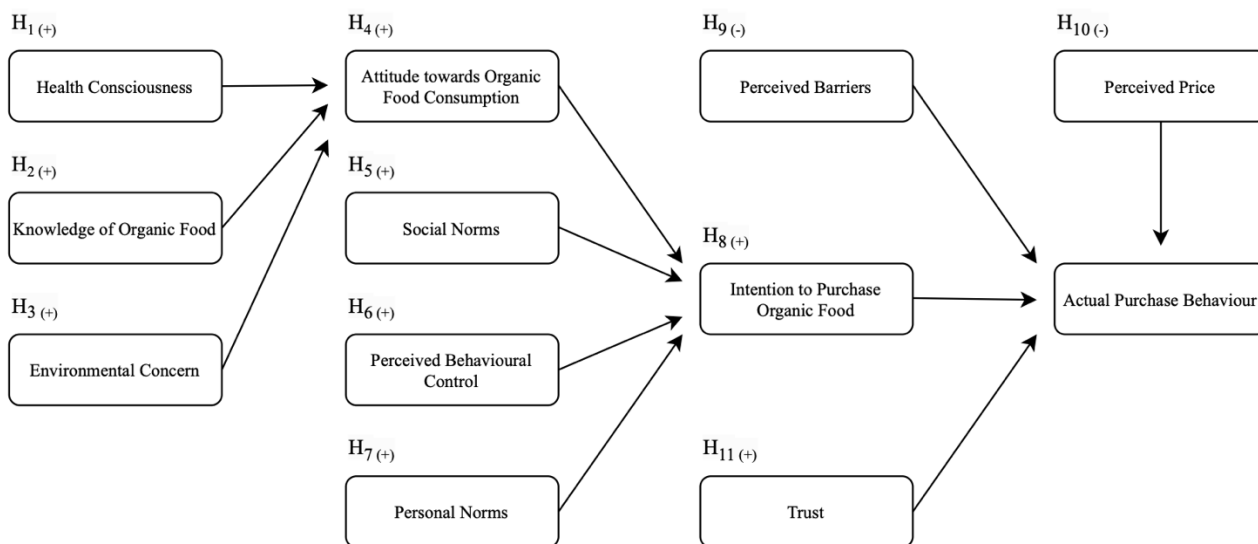
Regarding the aim of this paper, the following keywords have been investigated: generation Z, consumer behavior, and organic food.

For further comparative analysis of Generation Z attitudes towards organic food research frameworks, these studies have been reviewed by the content, methodology, and major findings.

### 4. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FRAMEWORKS

In the first empirical study, the authors Nguyen & Vo (2023) investigated “the predictors of purchase behavior of Generation Z in the Vietnamese organic food sector. A research framework was proposed by extending the theory of planned behavior (TPB) with the motivation–opportunity–ability (MOA) framework to address the gap between purchase intention and behavior in the organic food market. An online questionnaire was conducted in the three biggest cities of Vietnam, and after 426 respondents filled it in, the data were analyzed in SmartPLS software to test proposed hypotheses.” (p. 35)

**Illustration 1: Research framework 1**



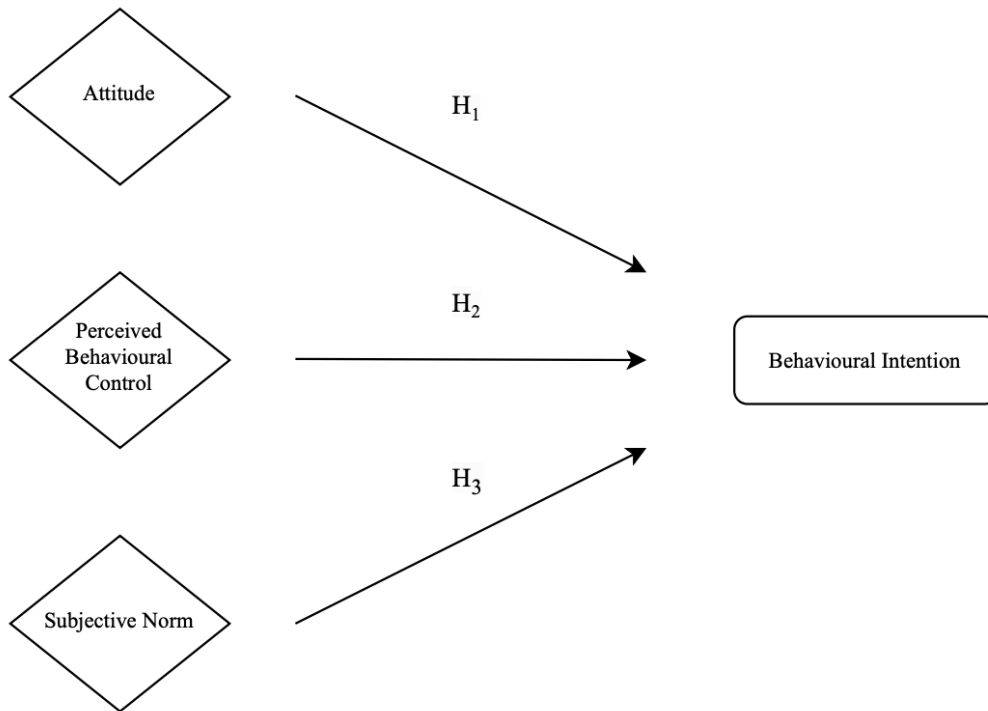
**Source:** The authors' research based on Nguyen & Vo, 2023.

The authors found that “trust is the most crucial factor affecting the purchase behavior of Gen Z in the Vietnamese organic food sector. Also, they discovered that perceived barriers had a reverse impact on the purchase behaviors of young consumers. Regarding the MOA model, the study confirmed that ability (e.g., attitude, intention, social norms, and personal norms) and motivation (e.g., trust) are more important predictors of purchase behavior than the opportunity (e.g., perceived price)” (p. 46)

In the second empirical study, the authors Julianty et al. (2021) investigated “Generation Z's behavioral intention towards organic food consumption in Indonesia through an online questionnaire. The respondents had to be young people between 15 and 24 (Gen Z) and had consumed organic foods at least once in the last three months. A total of 250 responses were collected and analyzed by a quantitative approach using PLS-SEM to achieve the study's objectives. In

PLS-SEM, two stages were performed sequentially: the first stage was to measure the reliability and validity of the construct variables, while the second stage was to test the structural model.” (p. 595)

**Illustration 2: Research framework 2**

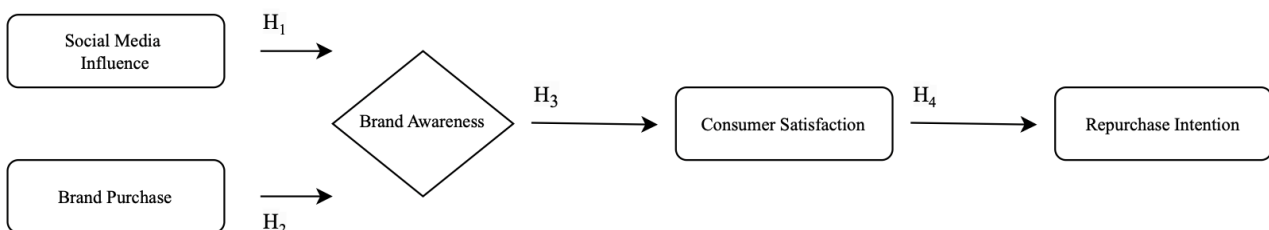


**Source:** The authors’ research based on Julianty et al., 2021.

The authors found “three notable findings responding to the study’s objective. First, the attitude of Indonesian Gen Z is positive and significant towards their behavioral intention on organic food consumption. This finding implies that Indonesian Gen Z has favorable behavior towards organic foods, so producers shall continually build Gen Z attitudes through various promotional media to get their positive attitude and intention towards organic foods. Second, Indonesian Gen Z exhibits the positive influence of perceived behavioral control on behavioral intention. This finding implies that it is not difficult for Indonesian Gen Z to perform behavior related to organic food consumption, so producers maintain good environments that can be perceived positively by the target customers. Third, Indonesian Gen Z subjective norms positively impact behavioral intention to consume organic food. It implies that Gen Z has an internal desire to act as others think related to organic foods as they are influenced by social environments. This finding proposes that producers of organic food are required to educate their customers to have a favorable subjective judgment on consuming organic foods.” (p. 597)

In the third empirical study, the authors Bhutto et al. (2023) investigated “the repurchase intention of organic food products among Generation Z consumers. An online questionnaire was conducted in Islamabad, Pakistan, and after 400 respondents filled it in, the data were analyzed using the PLS-SEM approach.” (p. 1)

**Illustration 3: Research framework 3**

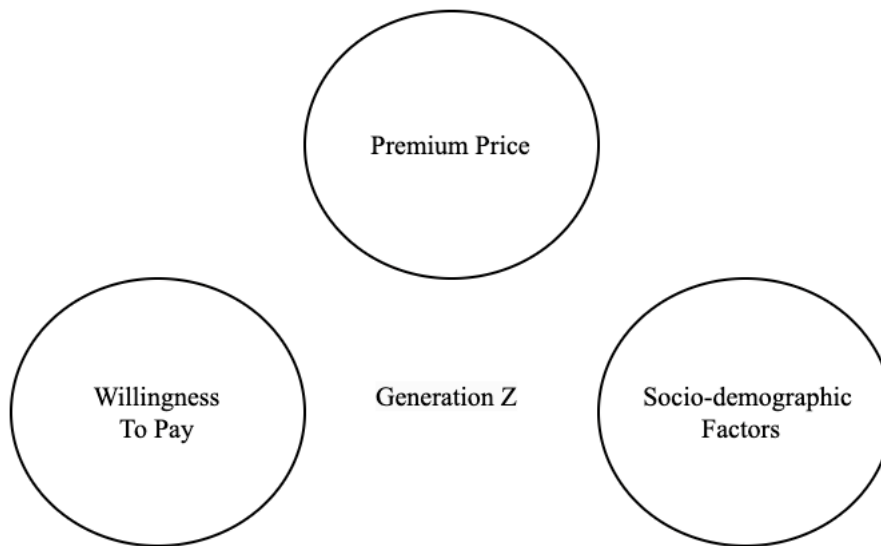


**Source:** The authors’ research based on Bhutto et al., 2023.

The authors found that “social media influence and brand purchase impact brand awareness and consumer satisfaction. Moreover, it is also found that consumer satisfaction positively impacts the repurchase intention of organic food. Also, they discovered that Gen Z has a strong social media influence, so marketers’ managers must consider and address the issues when consumers consider social media for their concerns and suggestions.” (p. 1)

In the fourth empirical study, the authors Vehapi & Sabotic (2021) investigated “the extent to which Generation Z consumers are willing to pay a premium price for organic food and to identify the socio-demographic factors which impact their willingness to pay. The study was carried out on a sample of 213 students in the Republic of Serbia, an emerging organic food market, via a structured questionnaire.” (p. 258)

**Illustration 4: Research framework 4**



**Source:** The authors’ research based on Vehapi & Sabotic, 2021.

The authors found that “more than 2/3 of the respondents who purchase organic food would pay a premium price of between 1% and 40%. Only 8% of the respondents are not willing to pay more for organic food products. The Chi-squared test for independence was used to analyze the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents and their willingness to pay; it was determined that smaller households (1-3 members), as well as households in bigger cities, show a greater willingness to pay premium price for organic food.” (p. 258)

In the fifth empirical study, the authors Vehapi & Mitić (2021) investigated and identified “the main motives and barriers for purchasing organic food in the Generation Z market segment in Serbia. A quantitative study was conducted through a survey questionnaire filled out by 213 students from three universities. The results were based on descriptive statistics, the independent samples t-test, and the analysis of variance.” (p. 985)

**Table 1:** Research items 5

	<b>Motives</b>	<b>Barriers</b>
1	Quality	High price
2	Health protection	Lack of information
3	Absence of pesticides and GMO	Limited availability
4	Freshness	Limited offer
5	Taste	Mistrust in organic labels
6	Safety	Lack of interest
7	Support for the local/small farmers	Less appealing appearance
8	Environmental protection	
9	Animal welfare	
10	Preserving resources for future generations	

**Source:** The authors’ research based on Vehapi & Mitic, 2021.

The authors found that “quality and health protection and improvement are identified as the primary motives for purchasing organic food, proving that egoistic motives prevail over altruistic ones. The most important barriers hindering organic food consumption are high prices, lack of information, and limited availability. Also, they confirmed that the willingness of Generation Z members to accept high market prices for organic food depends on their monthly household income.” (p. 985)

## 5. CONCLUSION

The rising concerns of consumers regarding environmental sustainability and their health have led to an increased interest in organic products. This trend is primarily driven by the growing awareness of the negative impact of conventional farming practices on both the environment and consumers' health. The use of harmful pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and growth hormones in conventional farming poses a threat to the ecosystem and the health of consumers. As a result, they have gradually embraced organic products as a safer and healthier alternative. This trend is expected to continue as consumers become more informed and environmentally conscious (Massey et al., 2018).

Despite the organic trend consumers in the Republic of Serbia lack sufficient awareness regarding this topic, even though the domestic food is of high quality (Palić et al., 2019). However, Generation Z is the most informed generation regarding sustainable living which makes them a promising market segment. Also, they are beginning to live independently and develop new food consumption patterns (Kamenidou et al., 2019).

Even though Generation Z behavior plays a significant role in promoting supporting friendly practices and sustainable growth (Tigan et al., 2021) through a systematic literature review an empirical gap was observed. This paper aimed to analyze research frameworks of Generation Z attitudes towards organic food research studies.

In the first empirical study, the authors Nguyen & Vo (2023) found that trust is the greatest factor influencing Gen Z's purchasing behavior in the Vietnamese organic food market. In the second empirical study, the authors Julianty et al. (2021) found that Indonesian Gen Z has favorable behavioral intentions towards organic foods, impacted by perceived behavioral control and subjective norms. In the third empirical study, the authors Bhutto et al. (2023) found that Gen Z's consumer satisfaction and brand awareness in Pakistan are influenced by social media and brand purchase impact. In the fourth empirical study, the authors Vehapi & Sabotic (2021) found that only 8% of the respondents are not willing to pay more for organic food products in the Republic of Serbia, while more than 2/3 of the respondents who purchase organic food would pay a premium price of between 1% and 40%. Finally, in the fifth empirical study, the authors Vehapi & Mitić (2021) found that the most important barriers to purchasing organic food are high prices, lack of information, and limited availability, while quality and health protection and improvement are identified as the primary motives.

In the context of the topic, the limitation of this paper reflects the fact of the lack of empirical studies in both domestic and foreign literature. However, this review can also contribute the academic knowledge by providing a theoretical background of the topic and guidelines for further research.

Accordingly, the main recommendation for further research is conducting an empirical study on the attitudes of Generation Z towards organic food, based on a sample of a different socio-demographic profile. Thus, future research should provide unique insights into Gen Z consumers' behavior filling with additional findings the noticed research gap. Furthermore, the insights should be valuable for stakeholders and policymakers in the processes of transforming the food system sustainability.

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