

Consumer Perception And Buying Intention Towards Sustainable Products In The UAE

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Abstract:

Background: The UAE, recognized for having vast petroleum reserves, is prioritizing sustainability in food and agriculture. Despite the desert environment and oil-centric economy, agriculture holds significant importance. The purpose of this research is to understand consumer perception and buying intention towards sustainable products in the UAE. It focuses on the major factors that influence purchasing decisions. These variables include health consciousness, environmental awareness, trust and certification, price sensitivity, and social influence

Materials and Methods: Using a descriptive research design, the study examined these factors' influence on purchase intention as the dependent variable. Primary data was collected through structured surveys distributed to 87 participants through convenience sampling

Results: Significant correlations between the determinants and consumer purchase intentions were found through data analysis using Google Forms and Regression Analysis, which serve as a visual representation of the collected data with each slice representing a distinct category. The regression analysis showed a positive strong significant impact of affordability, Certification of product and social media on future intention to buy sustainable products.

Conclusion: Resolving present issues like high prices and limited supply can significantly affect consumers' perception and buying intention towards sustainable products in the UAE. The study's insights provide stakeholders with beneficial guidance on how to improve the accessibility and appeal of sustainable products in the United Arab Emirates.

Key Words: Consumer Perception, Buying Intention, Sustainable Products, Environmental Awareness.

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I. Introduction

In recent years, consumer interest in sustainable products has grown significantly worldwide, driven by concerns about environmental impact, health, and ethics. This trend is particularly evident in the United Arab Emirates (UAE), where rapid economic growth, high purchasing power, and government-led sustainability initiatives are shaping consumer behavior (Sagar, 2024). Despite being an oil-rich nation with a harsh desert climate, the UAE is prioritizing sustainability in food and agriculture. Sheikh Dr. Majid Al Qassimi, speaking at the Alltech ONE Dubai conference, emphasized the importance of resilient food systems to withstand future challenges. This commitment was further reinforced at the 2023 United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28), where sustainable food systems were a central theme (Trollinger, 2023).

The UAE government has launched various programs to support sustainable agriculture and food security. The Ministry of Climate Change and Environment is addressing climate-related challenges through initiatives such as the Food Loss and Waste Initiative (ne'ma), which was launched in 2022 to cut food waste by 50% by 2030. This initiative aims to redirect food waste back into the supply chain rather than landfills (Trollinger, 2023). The UAE is also fostering international collaboration to enhance agricultural sustainability. A key example is the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate (AIM), a joint initiative with the United States introduced at COP26 to tackle global hunger and climate change (Trollinger, 2023).

Additionally, consumer preferences are evolving, with a Bain and Company study revealing that 64% of GCC consumers are highly concerned about sustainability, particularly Baby Boomers and Generation Z (Sagar, 2024). This shift is evident in the food and beverage industry, where demand for locally sourced, organic, and plant-based products is rising. In response, major supermarkets in the UAE are dedicating sections to organic

goods (Letsorganic, 2023). However, for sustainability to progress in the food sector, consumer demand must align with government priorities. Initiatives such as food and ag-tech parks demonstrate the UAE's commitment to integrating technology and innovation in agriculture by fostering collaboration between producers, technologists, and policymakers (Trollinger, 2023).

This research study aims to fill the gap in existing literature by focusing on consumer attitudes towards sustainably grown food products in the UAE. By analyzing key determinants such as health consciousness, environmental awareness, trust and certification, price sensitivity, and social influence, with purchase intention as the dependent variable, this research seeks to provide insights for local development and global export potential. (Basha, et al., 2021). The existing literature lacks comprehensive studies that specifically address consumer attitudes toward sustainably grown food products in the UAE. This region is characterized by unique socio-economic factors and a significant reliance on food imports, driven by its climatic conditions. This study aims to fill this gap by offering targeted insights that can inform both local and international stakeholders in the food industry. (Hildebrandt, et al., 2021). (Hildebrandt, et al., 2021) discovered a significant gap between consumer behavior and awareness levels. Although a large number of consumers show a desire to embrace sustainable practices, they encounter barriers such as high costs, limited availability of eco-friendly products, and insufficient infrastructure. This gap highlights the importance of research like ours, which aims to explore in detail consumer attitudes and behaviors concerning sustainably grown food products. By doing so, we can offer practical insights that help tackle these obstacles and encourage sustainable consumption practices in the UAE. (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006) To address the research gap identified following objectives were identified and achieved-

- Certification of the product influences the intention to buy Sustainable products.
- Price plays a significant role in the future intention to buy sustainable products.
- There exist a significant relationship between affordability and intention to buy sustainable products.
- Friends and family influence buying decisions towards sustainable products.
- Social media and advertising have a significant impact on buying decisions

II. Review Of Literature

Sustainably grown food products prioritize environmental conservation, resource efficiency, and social justice by promoting soil health, reducing food waste, and supporting fair food systems (Çakmakçı et al., 2023; Alfaro, 2023). The agriculture industry, which consumes 70% of the world's freshwater, must adapt to meet growing food demands without exacerbating resource depletion. Organizations such as FoodTank and the Sustainable Food Trust advocate for sustainable agricultural practices through education and policy initiatives. Similarly, health consciousness plays a vital role in food choices, particularly among Generations Y and Z, who actively seek nutritious options and avoid unhealthy foods (Iqbal et al., 2021). These consumers are highly informed, relying on research and technology to guide their dietary decisions and are willing to pay a premium for food that aligns with their health and ethical values (Sarkar et al., 2023). Environmental awareness further influences consumer behavior, as individuals who recognize environmental issues tend to engage in conservation activities such as recycling and eco-friendly purchasing (Kim et al., 2023). Trust and certification also play a crucial role in consumer confidence, with scientific endorsements of organic and Fairtrade labels proving more credible than those from government bodies or producers (Wu et al., 2021). Transparency through traceability systems like QR codes enhances consumer trust, particularly in regions with frequent food safety concerns.

Price sensitivity affects sustainable consumption, as consumers with higher price sensitivity tend to choose conventional over organic products, while those less concerned with cost prioritize quality, safety, and ethical sourcing (Xing et al., 2022). Factors such as perceived product prestige and hedonic value influence this sensitivity (Deligöz and Üstünkardeşler, 2021). Additionally, social influence plays a key role in shaping consumer behavior through herd behavior—where individuals follow collective trends—and social learning, where purchasing decisions are informed by peers' experiences (Shah et al., 2023; Salazar et al., 2023). Purchase intention, which reflects the likelihood of a consumer buying a product, is shaped by multiple factors, including marketing efforts, demographics, and previous purchases (Takaya, 2019; Hanna, 2024). Businesses leverage predictive analytics to enhance marketing strategies and improve customer engagement. Theories such as the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) explain how behavioral intentions, subjective norms, and perceived control influence decision-making (Sreen et al., 2020). Social Cognitive Theory (SCT) emphasizes the interaction between individuals, their environment, and learned behaviors, highlighting social influence and reinforcement (LaMorte, 2022). The Value-Belief-Norm (VBN) model links personal values to environmental responsibility, while the Sustainability Consumption Behavior Model explores how economic, cultural, and policy factors shape sustainable choices (Milfont and Markowitz, 2016). Recent research from the UAE underscores the importance of health consciousness, environmental awareness, and trust in influencing sustainable food consumption, while also emphasizing affordability and accessibility as key determinants (Basha et al., 2021; Khaleeli and Jawabri, 2021). Studies on green marketing and consumer perceptions of sustainable food highlight the need for increased

awareness and policy interventions to bridge the gap between sustainability attitudes and purchasing behavior (Shabbir et al., 2020; Ismail et al., 2023; Basarir and Dayan, 2022).

III. Research Methodology

The research utilizes a descriptive research design, which is particularly effective in observing and recording phenomena as they naturally occur. This approach provides a comprehensive understanding of consumer perception and buying intention toward sustainable food products. By maintaining the study environment without manipulation, this design allows for the identification of patterns, trends, and relationships between key variables, offering valuable insights into consumer behavior (Singh, 2023).

A quantitative research method has been adopted to objectively measure and analyze consumer perception and purchasing behavior using numerical data. This method ensures the collection of structured, measurable information, enabling statistical analysis of factors such as health consciousness, environmental awareness, trust and certification, price sensitivity, and social influence (Sreekumar, 2023). To gather data efficiently, the study employs surveys with closed-ended questions, allowing for the collection of significant amounts of information from a diverse group of respondents (Kanika, 2024). These structured tools facilitate statistical analysis and enhance the reliability of the findings.

The study utilizes a non-probability sampling technique, specifically convenience sampling, also referred to as the snowball sampling method. This approach is selected due to constraints related to time and resources, enabling the inclusion of respondents who are readily available and willing to participate. Although this method may not provide a fully representative sample, it remains a practical choice for exploratory research and offers valuable insights into consumer perception and buying intention (Ismail et al., 2023; Nikolopoulou, 2023).

In research, the sample size is a crucial factor that influences the reliability and generalizability of the findings. In this study, 87 participants completed the survey, offering initial insights into consumer preferences regarding sustainable food products. While a smaller sample size may limit the broad applicability of the results, it serves as a foundation for future research. Expanding the sample size in subsequent studies would improve accuracy and representation, ensuring a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in the UAE (Kibuacha, 2021). Maintaining a balance between sample size, accuracy, and research feasibility is essential for producing meaningful statistical analyses. Overall, this research provides a structured and methodical approach to examining consumer behavior in the UAE's sustainable food market. Future studies could expand upon these findings by incorporating larger sample sizes and qualitative insights, further exploring the motivations and preferences that drive consumer decision-making.

IV. Results

The data is analysed statistically to identify patterns, correlations, and trends. Google Forms was used to collect the data, and the built-in charting tools was used to visualize the results. Descriptive statistics, such as means, medians, and frequency distributions, summarize the data and provide an overview of consumer perception and buying intention. Charts and graphs generated by Google Forms aid in visualizing responses for easier interpretation. Inferential statistics, such as regression analysis, is used to investigate the relationship between the dependent variable (purchase intention) and the independent variables (health consciousness, environmental awareness, trust and certification, price sensitivity, and social influence). This analysis will assist in reaching meaningful conclusions and providing insights to stakeholders. (Ismail, et al., 2023)

Demographics

Table 1: Gender					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	55	63.2	63.2	63.2
	Female	32	36.8	36.8	100.0
	Total	87	100.0	100.0	

Male survey respondents make up to 63.2% of the sample, and 36.8% of the participants are female. No responders opted not to reveal their gender. This distribution suggests that the sample is predominately male, which could have an impact on the results of the research about perception and buying intention toward food products grown sustainably that are specific to gender.

Table 2: Age

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 20 yrs	7	8.0	8.0	8.0
	21-30 yrs	17	19.5	19.5	27.6
	31-40 yrs	27	31.0	31.0	58.6
	41-50 yrs	28	32.2	32.2	90.8
	51 yrs and above	8	9.2	9.2	100.0

	Total	87	100.0	100.0	
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The survey's participants are spread out across different age ranges. The largest segment, accounting for 32.2% of the sample, falls between the ages of 41-50. This is closely followed by the 31-40 age group at 31%, and the 21-30 age group at 19.5%. The youngest segment, aged 20 and below, represents 8%, while the oldest segment spans from 51-60, making up 9.2%. Notably, there are no respondents aged 60 and above. This mix of ages suggests a good balance of young to middle-aged adults, who are usually more active in buying and often have strong views on sustainability.

Table 3: Household Income per month					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Below 10000 Aed	42	48.3	48.3	48.3
	10001-20000 Aed	24	27.6	27.6	75.9
	20000 Aed and above	21	24.1	24.1	100.0
	Total	87	100.0	100.0	

The largest segment represents 48.3% of the sample, consists of households earning below 10,000 AED. This suggests that nearly half of the respondents fall into a lower income bracket. The next significant portion, comprising 27.6%, represents households with incomes between 10,000 and 20,000 AED. 24.1% of the respondents earn 20000 AED and above. This distribution indicates that a large portion of the sample consists of lower to middle-income households, which could influence their price sensitivity and purchasing behaviour towards sustainably grown food products.

Table 4: Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Info on health benefits	87	1	5	3.75	1.091
Preference to buy	87	1	5	3.95	.975
Preference over conventional product	87	1	5	3.95	.963
Awareness	87	1	5	4.03	.933
Prefer ecofriendly product	87	1	5	3.92	1.014
Prefer sustainable product	87	1	5	4.07	.950
Look for certified food	87	1	5	3.86	.990
Purchase of Certified product	87	1	5	3.75	1.025
Price	87	1	5	3.85	1.006
Affordability	87	1	5	4.05	.999
Friend and Family influence	87	1	5	3.46	.986
Social media and Advertisements	87	1	5	3.45	1.065
Future intention to buy	87	1	5	3.84	.874
Recommend sustainable product	87	1	5	3.92	.905
Support initiatives	87	1	5	3.95	.926
Valid N (listwise)	87				

Key Observations and Interpretation:

From the descriptive table above the following interpretations could be drawn- Awareness of Eco-Friendly Products has High awareness level (4.03), Preference for Sustainable Over Conventional shows a strong inclination toward sustainable products(3.95),consumers generally prefer certified sustainable products as it has a mean value of 3.86 this shows that consumers are quite aware of sustainability and tend to prefer eco-friendly and certified products.

Considering the Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions, the following observation are drawn from the data-Health awareness is moderate to high with a mean value of 3.75, Price is a considerable factor (3.85), but affordability is slightly more important than Price(4.05),Friends and Family Influence(3.46) has some impact but not as strong as other factors, Social Media and Advertising moderately influence the buying decision (3.45)It could be inferred that Price and affordability are important, while social influences (family, social media) play a less significant role.As per the data shown consumers are likely to continue purchasing sustainable products (3.84) ,they are likely to encourage others to buy (3.92) and they showed (3.95) strong willingness to support sustainability-related initiatives.

It can be inferred that consumers are generally committed to sustainability and likely to influence others positively.

Table 5: Regression Analysis:

This regression analysis examines the relationship between Future Intention to Buy Sustainable Products (dependent variable) and five independent variables namely Certification of product while choosing a product, price while choosing a product, affordability, friends and family influence buying decision and influence of Social media and Advertising.

Model Summary^b

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics R Square Change	Durbin-Watson F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
1	.811 ^a	.657	.636	.527	.657	31.083	5	81	.000	1.977

a. Predictors: (Constant), SMandAdv, PricePDesicion, CLPDesicions, FandFinfluence, Affordability

b. Dependent Variable: Futureintention

Strong positive correlation between predictors and future buying intention. 65.7% of the variance in future purchase intention is explained by the independent variables. Adjusted value (considering the number of predictors) still explains 63.6% of the variance. Average error in predicting future intention. A lower value indicates a better fit. Durbin-Watson is close to 2, meaning no strong autocorrelation. The model is a strong predictor of future buying intention since it explains a large portion (65.7%) of the variation in the dependent variable.

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	43.221	5	8.644	31.083	.000 ^b
	Residual	22.526	81	.278		
	Total	65.747	86			

a. Dependent Variable: Futureintention

b. Predictors: (Constant), SMandAdv, PricePDesicion, CLPDesicions, FandFinfluence, Affordability

High F-value means the model significantly predicts future buying intention. Since $p < 0.05$, the regression model is statistically significant. At least one independent variable significantly influences future purchase intention.

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Coefficients ^a Standardized Coefficients Beta	t	Sig.	95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
		B	Std. Error				Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1	(Constant)	.453	.286		1.584	.117	-.116	1.022
	CLPDesicions	.155	.069	.181	2.249	.027	.018	.292
	PricePDesicion	.077	.075	.089	1.031	.306	-.072	.227
	Affordability	.300	.080	.342	3.728	.000	.140	.460
	FandFinfluence	.116	.075	.130	1.540	.127	-.034	.265
	SMandAdv	.260	.066	.317	3.935	.000	.129	.391

a. Dependent Variable: Futureintention

- CLPDesicions= Certification of product while choosing a product
- PricePDesicion= Look for price while choosing a product
- Affordability
- FandFinfluence= Friends and family influence buying decision
- SMandAdv= Social media and Advertising

Future intention to buy= is dependant variable

From the regression table above it was found that certification of product with a value of significance at 0.27 and beta value 0.181 shows the relative strength of this predictor, indicating a moderate positive effect on Future Intention, Affordability with a significant p value of .000 and a beta value of .300 has a strong and statistically significant positive effect on Future Intention and Social media and advertising with a p value of .000 and a beta value of .317 has a relatively strong effect on Future Intention to buy sustainable products. Whereas price decisions and influence of family and friends were found to be insignificant as the $p > 0.05$. It was found from the regression analysis above that Affordability, certification of products, and social media & Advertising have statistically significant effects on Future Intention to buy, whereas Friends and Family Influence and Price Decisions do not show significant relationships in future buying intentions of the consumers.

V. Conclusion

This study on consumer perception and buying intention towards sustainable products in the UAE offers valuable insights for both local development and global export potential. The demographic analysis revealed that most respondents were male, significant portion of these respondents fell into the lower to middle-income brackets and were predominantly married. The data highlighted a strong health consciousness among the respondents, with many actively seeking health benefits in their food choices and believing that sustainably grown products are healthier. Environmental awareness was also high, with a significant preference for environmentally friendly

products and a strong belief in the environmental benefits of sustainable. Trust and certification were shown as crucial factors, with many respondents expressing confidence in certified sustainable products and considering certification labels in their purchasing decisions. Price sensitivity was also apparent among the consumers, with a significant number of respondents willing to pay more for sustainably grown products, although affordability remained a critical factor. Social influence played an important role, with friends and family impacting purchasing decisions. These findings demonstrate the importance of health and environmental benefits, trust and certification, affordability, and social influence in shaping consumer perception and buying intention towards sustainable products in the UAE. The study's results can inform strategies to enhance the market for sustainable products, addressing barriers such as cost and availability, and leveraging consumer awareness and trust to promote sustainable consumption practices.

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