

Influential factors in the consumption of organic products: The case of Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials

Factores influyentes en el consumo de productos ecológicos: el caso de los millennials ecuatorianos y peruanos

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Abstract

This paper identifies the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that influence consumers to purchase organic products, and also determines the barriers that sometimes prevent university student millennials from purchasing this type of product. The research had a qualitative approach and the information was collected through semi-structured interviews, thirty-two university student millennials from Ecuador and Peru participated in the study and the data was coded using the Grounded Theory. The findings determined that intrinsic factors (environmental knowledge, environmental awareness, habits, health and values) and extrinsic factors (family influence, social influence, fear of COVID-19 infection), are the main factors that motivate the consumption of organic products. The study also determined that factors such as availability, price, and skepticism are occasional barriers to the purchase of this type of product. Regarding the originality value, the main contributions of this study are to be one of the first studies in Ecuador and Peru using the Grounded Theory to determine the conceptualisation that millennials have about organic products, as well as learning the influential factors and the existing bar-

Resumen

Este artículo identifica los factores intrínsecos y extrínsecos que influyen en los consumidores para adquirir productos orgánicos, además determina las barreras que en ocasiones impiden que los millennials universitarios adquieran este tipo de productos. La investigación tuvo un enfoque cualitativo y la información fue recolectada por medio de entrevistas semiestructuradas; treinta y dos millennials universitarios de Ecuador y Perú participaron en el estudio y los datos fueron codificados utilizando la teoría fundamentada. Los hallazgos determinaron que los factores intrínsecos (conocimiento ambiental, conciencia ambiental, hábitos, salud y valores) y extrínsecos (influencia familiar, influencia social, miedo al contagio de COVID-19), son los principales factores que motivan el consumo de productos orgánicos. El estudio también determinó que factores como la disponibilidad, el precio y el escepticismo son barreras ocasionales para la compra de este tipo de productos. En cuanto al valor de originalidad, los principales aportes de este estudio son convertirse en una de las primeras investigaciones en Ecuador y Perú que utilizó la teoría fundamentada para determinar la conceptualización que tie-

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riers in the purchase behaviour of organic products in Ecuador and Peru.

Keywords: Organic products, millennials, intrinsic factors, extrinsic factors, barriers, grounded theory.

nen los millennials sobre los productos orgánicos, y conocer los factores influyentes y las barreras existentes en el comportamiento de compra de productos orgánicos en estos dos países.

Palabras clave: productos orgánicos, millennials, factores intrínsecos, factores extrínsecos, barreras, teoría fundamentada.

■ Introduction

Unconscious consumption on a global scale and irresponsible waste generated by many consumers have led to problems such as global warming, waste generation and environmental pollution (Jaiswala & Kant, 2018; Kim & Lee, 2023; Nagaraj, 2021; Nekmahmud et al., 2022), generating an accelerated increase in the rates of environmental degradation in recent years (García et al., 2023; Qi et al., 2020; Yela et al., 2022; Yuhan et al., 2019).

During the 1960s, due to protests by various social groups identified with environmental protection, the term “environmental pollution” became popular (Carrión & Arías, 2022; Kumar & Pandey, 2023). Notwithstanding the levels of discontent in opposition to environmental pollution became stronger in the 1970s. Thus, in order to address issues related to environmental pollution, in June 1972, in the city of Stockholm, the United Nations (UN) held an assembly, where members designated 5 June as World Environment Day, and identified 196 measures to be implemented by governments in order to reduce the deterioration of water, soil and air (Carrión & Arias, 2022; Carrión et al., 2023; Cavite et al., 2022; Jaiswala & Kant, 2018).

As part of the new sustainable development agenda, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) incorporated the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which deliver a universal call to society to act in terms of ensuring peace, prosperity, poverty eradication and environmental protection (Hou & Sarigöllü, 2022; Larranaga & Valor, 2022; Sun et al., 2019). One of its goals, related to responsible production and consumption, states that it is necessary to reduce environmental impact by changing production and consumption methods (Kumar &

Pandey, 2023; Yela et al., 2022). One of the main tools to achieve responsible consumption is to increase the purchase of environmentally friendly products, also known as organic products (Kim & Lee, 2023). Organic products are those that are grown without the use of pesticides, synthetic fertilisers, sewage sludge, genetically modified organisms and ionising radiation (Carrión & Arias, 2022; Carrión et al., 2023; Hoyos et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2019).

In the context of organic product consumption, it is essential to consider two categories that generally have a significant influence on consumer decisions: (a) intrinsic factors, and (b) extrinsic factors (Qi et al., 2020). Intrinsic factors refer to the inherent characteristics of organic products, such as their quality, taste, nutritional value, and health benefits; these characteristics allow consumers to form their own judgments in assessing the purity of food, the absence of pesticides, and environmental considerations (Alí et al., 2023). On the other hand, extrinsic factors encompass external elements that impact consumer perception and motivate behaviour adoption, these conditioning elements can include price, availability, advertising, social trends, and contextual factors (Duong et al., 2023; Katt & Meixner, 2020; Lavuri, 2022).

In the area of organic consumption, consumers who have positive attitudes towards organic food believe that buying organic products is important and a good choice (Aertsens et al., 2011; Dahm et al., 2009; García et al., 2023; Gravelines et al., 2022; Jaiswala & Kant, 2018; Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Khan et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2019; Rodríguez et al., 2020). Although several research studies have proven that attitudes influence consumers to adopt intentions to purchase organic products, many of these inten-

tions do not always lead to an actual purchase (Carrión & Arias, 2022; Joshi & Rahman, 2015). This shows a gap in this field of study, where it is still not known with certainty which factors promote or hinder the consumption of organic products by people who declare themselves to be consumers who identify with the environment (Carrión & Arias, 2022; Kim & Lee, 2023; Nguyen & Dung, 2023; Schleenbecker & Hamm, 2013; Yang et al., 2023).

Numerous literature reviews have identified that the dominant theories in the study of ecological consumption are the Theory of Reasoned Action, the Theory of Planned Behaviour, and the Theory of Consumption Values (Carrión & Salinas, 2021; Carrión et al., 2023; Groening et al., 2018; Hazaea et al., 2022; Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Liobikiene & Bernatoniene, 2017; Sharma et al., 2022). This highlights the importance and necessity of integrating these frameworks into the theoretical explanations of research in this area. However, the academic literature has emphasised that despite the explanatory power of the variables that make up these theories, the knowledge gap centres on the lack of correspondence between what consumers declare and what they actually do (Carrión & Arias, 2022; Joshi et al., 2021; Nguyen & Dung, 2023).

The academic literature shows that several studies on green consumption have applied quantitative methods and used surveys with closed-ended questions to determine their research findings, which may limit participants in expressing their true motivations, barriers, and perceptions with regards to purchasing green food products (Aliman & Astina, 2019; Nguyen & Dung, 2023; Qi et al., 2020). Likewise, the literature review highlights the scarcity of research on the consumption of green products in Ecuador and Peru, studies that have also been developed through quantitative research approaches and that have used self-reported questionnaires for data collection (Álvarez-Risco et al., 2017; Andrade & Ayaviri, 2018; Bonisoli & Blacio, 2023; Carrión & Arias, 2022; Carrión et al., 2023; García et al., 2023; Hoyos et al., 2023; López et al., 2020; Moreno et al., 2023). In this regard, several literature review articles have

indicated that several studies within the field of green consumption base their results on the application of self-reported questionnaires (Hazaea et al., 2022; Joshi & Rahman, 2015).

Although an extensive range of quantitative research on green consumption has been validated by the scientific community, many scholars have determined that there is a mismatch between what consumers claim and what they do (Carrión & Arias, 2022; Nguyen & Dung, 2023), highlighting possible controversies between consumers' claims and their actual behaviours (Kim & Lee, 2023). For this reason, for several years various authors have invited the academic community to study real consumers of green products (Kim & Lee, 2023; Nguyen & Dung, 2023; Sharma et al. 2022; Taufique & Vaithianathan, 2018; Woo & Gug, 2019).

Research interest in the consumption of green and certified products has increased, evidenced by studies that point to a significant gap between purchase intention and actual behaviour towards green products (Carrión et al., 2023; Hoyos et al., 2023; Joshi & Rahman, 2015; Nekmahmud et al., 2022; Ricci et al., 2018; Sarai-reh, 2023). This has made the green consumer an emerging and relevant topic within the marketing field (Amalia et al., 2020; Carrión & Arias, 2022; Sharma et al., 2022; Sikandar et al., 2023).

On the other hand, there is consensus in the academic literature on the need to explore the factors affecting actual purchase behaviour in order to mitigate the observed inconsistencies in green purchasing (Joshi & Rahman 2015; Kim & Lee, 2023; Nguyen & Dung, 2023; Taufique & Vaithianathan, 2018; Testa et al., 2019; Woo & Gug, 2019; Yadav & Patak, 2017). This underscores the importance of a thorough understanding of the behaviours of consumers of green products, the reasons behind the decision to purchase these products (Larranaga & Valor 2022), and the factors that determine which consumers actually consume organic products (Nguyen & Dung, 2023).

In order to close this knowledge gap, this study seeks to learn how millennials conceptualise organic products and what factors influence their actual consumption of organic products.

Therefore, the research objectives proposed in the study are: (a) to discern the conceptualisations of organic products; (b) to learn which intrinsic factors motivate the purchase of organic products; (c) to learn which extrinsic factors motivate the purchase of organic products; and (d) to discover which barriers hinder the purchase of organic products.

Taking into consideration Sharma et al. (2022), who proposed the need for an in-depth study to understand the behaviour of consumers of organic products, and Nguyen and Dung (2023) who suggested the need for studies using in-depth interviews to identify the determinants that influence consumers who consume organic products. The present study employed the Grounded Theory as a data collection technique to thoroughly explore consumer behaviours. According to Qi et al (2020), unlike other theories, the Grounded Theory is crucial for qualitative studies as it enables researchers to systematically and profoundly explore both the internal and external perceptions, experiences, and motivations of consumers, extracting codes that identify patterns of behaviour. Therefore, the research questions addressed in the study were: (a) How do millennials define organic products? (b) What are the intrinsic factors that influence organic purchasing behaviour? (c) What are the extrinsic factors that influence organic purchasing behaviour? and (d) What are the barriers to purchasing organic products?

The paper's contributions are as follows. First, given that previous research has been mostly quantitative, a qualitative methodology was applied here to establish a deep understanding of the research phenomena. Second, the Grounded Theory is used to explain purchasing behaviours. Third, various practical implications were identified. Finally, this study addresses environmental issues that have been exacerbated over the last years.

■ Methodology

This study was developed employing a qualitative approach and used in-depth interviews supported by semi-structured questionnaires.

Hernández et al. (2014), reported that qualitative research focuses on a broad understanding of the research phenomena, considering the perspective of participants within their natural environments or contexts. These authors determined that “semi-structured interviews are based on a guide of issues or questions and the interviewer is free to introduce additional questions to clarify concepts or obtain more information” (p. 403).

This study included seventeen consumers of organic products from Ecuador and fifteen from Peru. The participants were millennials pursuing undergraduate and graduate studies. The authors considered this group of consumers because according to Amalia et al. (2020), young university students are more prone and sensitive to environmental issues. In addition, Ndfirepy and Matema (2019) determined that “it is worth studying the purchase preference of university students” (p.3). Therefore, the selection of participants for this study was based on two key factors: (a) students are a rich source of information about organic products because they are more concerned about environmental problems, and (b) students are perceived as opinion leaders and agents of change in many communities (Carrión & Arias, 2022).

The authors sent emails to 134 university student millennials who participated in a previous study in which they mentioned being frequent consumers of organic products in Ecuador and Peru (16 Ecuadorian millennials and 16 Peruvian millennials). Thirty-two of them agreed to participate in the research and were invited to a Zoom virtual meeting, where each was interviewed for approximately 30-40 minutes. A semi-structured questionnaire composed of four questions was used as the basis for the interview. The main topics covered were (a) conceptualisation and perception of green products; (b) identification of intrinsic drivers that stimulate purchase; (c) identification of extrinsic drivers that stimulate purchase; and (d) identification of barrier factors that prevent them from buying green products.

The Speech notes programme was used to transcribe the semi-structured interviews. This

programme allows moving from voice-typing-dictation-to key-typing seamlessly. The results obtained were coded using the Grounded Theory. This theory involves the construction of hypotheses and theories through the collecting and analysis of data and involves the application of inductive reasoning. The use of this type of research allowed us to pose key and flexible questions for a better understanding of the point of view of each participant. According to Goulding (2000), the Grounded Theory allows to (a) generate theories, (b) explain behaviours, (c) improve theories, (d) implement it in practice, (e) provide insights into behaviours, (f) provide a style for studies in the area of behaviour, and (g) provide crucial categories to be verified in further studies.

Initially, the coding of the data was developed manually, in order to identify the saturation of the information and determine the closure of the interview process. From the interviewer's point of view, it was identified that the codes began to be repeated from interview fourteen for Ecuadorian millennials and interview fifteen for Peruvian millennials. However, it was decided to complete 16 interviews for each group in order to verify the saturation point and move on to the coding and categorisation stage.

The information obtained in the interviews was categorised and coded through the following criteria: (a) interview segments: section in which the transcription of the responses of each interview is presented and where the information that allowed the subsequent coding of the data was highlighted, (b) open coding: section where certain segments were labelled with a word or short phrase, this allowed the generation of initial categories of meaning and the elimination of redundancies in each interview, and (c) axial coding: the different codes per question obtained through open coding were taken as a basis and codes with greater importance (central code) were established, to finally make a first approach to the hierarchy of categories in the integration of the findings to the research questions posed in the study.

After manual coding, the answers of the interviews were re-coded through the use of Atlas/TI

9.0, where for the determination of the aprioristic categories the codes resulting from the manual coding process were taken as a basis. Based on the established codes and using the code manager of Atlas/TI 9.0, the coding processes were developed again, in order to highlight the existence of not coded quotes and then move on to the generation of semantic families or networks.

■ Results

In order to include all subpopulations of millennials, Table 1 shows that the study adopted the research criteria that has determined millennials as a population cohort that begins in 1979 and ends in 1995 and is subdivided into three sub cohorts (Carrión and Arias, 2022; Carrión et al., 2023; Hoyos et al., 2023; Palomino & Barcellos, 2024; Wang et al., 2018).

Table 1. Demographic characteristics

Population cohort	Participants		Born
	Ecuador	Peru	
Older millennials	6	6	(1979-1988)
Mid millennials	5	6	(1989-1994)
Younger millennials	5	4	(1995-2000)

The research results were classified in four research questions: (a) RQ1: conceptualisations of organic products; (b) RQ2: intrinsic factors that motivate the purchase of organic products (c) RQ3: extrinsic factors that motivate the purchase of organic products; and (d) RQ4: barriers that hinder the purchase of organic products. Each of the findings is explained in more detail below.

■ Conceptualisations of organic products (RQ1)

In order to answer RQ1, participants were asked to determine their own definition of organic products. It was noted that their conceptualisations focused on healthy, natural, and organic; thus, the authors decided to ask the participants to say two or three simple words that come to their minds when they hear the word "organic product". Table 2 shows the words mentioned

by the participants and the categorisation developed by the authors.

Table 2. Coding of the conceptualisations of organic products (RQ1).

Simple words	Number of mentions		Generated codes
	Ecuador	Peru	
Natural	13	11	
Chemical free	11	12	
Healthy	15	12	
Nutritious	2	9	Natural Health
Energy	8	3	
Life	1	0	
Defences	5	9	

Intrinsic factors that motivate the purchase of organic products (RQ2)

In order to answer this research question, participants were explained what an intrinsic factor is and then were asked what types of factors influence them when selecting an organic product. The answers given by participants were similar to the health-related definitions they gave for the first research question. However, the participants gave other answers such as healthcare, habits, environmental awareness, environmental knowledge, environmental attitudes and values. Table 3 shows the words mentioned by the participants and the categorisation developed by the authors of the study.

Health

One of the resulting codes that had the greatest impact on the codification of intrinsic factors was the aspect related to health. Twenty-three participants gave answers related to health issues (healthcare, wellness in health). It is known that consumption of traditional products has a significant impact on public health and people's health. Thus, organic products have become a responsible consumption alternative because they are aligned with environmental protection.

Habits

A habit is defined as a process by which a stimulus generates an impulse to act as a result of a learned stimulus-response association. This factor was one of the most frequently described in the participants. Twenty-three millennials determined that their eating habits lean towards the consumption of products aligned with the environment. Based on the fact that this study focused on college millennials, it was determined that this group of consumers is the one that most identified with the consumption of organic products, and this is clearly supported by the academic literature.

Environmental awareness

Environmental awareness was the most frequent factor mentioned in the interviews. Expressions such as environmental awareness, environmental knowledge, and environmental concern were mentioned twenty-eight times by Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials. It is clear that this is one of the factors that usually promotes the consumption of organic products in millen-

Table 3. Coding of the conceptualisations of intrinsic factors (RQ2)

Simple words	Number of mentions		Generated codes
	Ecuador	Perú	
Health, healthcare, wellness in health	12	11	Health
Habits	12	11	Habits
Awareness	14	14	Environmental awareness
Knowledge	12	14	Environmental Knowledge
Attitudes	12	11	Attitude
Values	9	8	Environmental values

nials identified with organic consumption, which is fully supported by the literature. These findings determinate that environmental concerns towards organic products are issues that current generations regard as individual responsibilities.

Environmental Knowledge

Another of the intrinsic factors most frequently mentioned by those interviewed was environmental knowledge. This expression was mentioned twenty-six times by Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials, which shows that the knowledge that this group of consumers has about the environmental problems generated by consumption leads them to adopt consumption behaviours aligned with environmental protection. This finding sustains that environmental knowledge is one of the drivers that promotes cognition in consumers as it allows them to learn about the impact that humans generate on the environment as a result of unregulated consumption and that conscious consumption depends on the level of knowledge consumers have regarding the environmental impact of consumption.

Attitude

It was noted that attitude is a relevant factor within the intrinsic factors that promote the consumption of organic products, because expressions related to attitude were mentioned twenty-three times by Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials. Despite the fact that the word “attitudes” was the least mentioned by participants, it was concluded that this factor influences actual purchase behaviours regarding organic products. This confirms that attitude is one of the predictors that influences organic buying behaviour. For millennials, attitude is also a motivating

factor for the consumption of organic products. This factor is a consequence of consumers’ environmental concerns, which motivates them to buy environmentally friendly products.

Values

The research results identified that environmental values are another factor that stimulates millennials’ purchasing behaviour. Expressions related to values were mentioned seventeen times by Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials. This shows that respect, tolerance, kindness and solidarity with the environment guide the actions and decisions of this group of consumers in terms of helping to protect the environment and improve society. This finding supports the position that values enable consumers to help protect the environment through their purchasing behaviours. Hence, environmental values revolve around two main aspects: conscious concern and the careful use of resources. That is, there is a high probability that an individual with consumer values will purchase organic products and thus be more environmentally conscious.

Extrinsic factors that motivate the purchase of organic products (RQ3)

To answer this research question, participants were explained what an extrinsic factor is and then were asked what types of factors influence them when selecting an organic product. The factors that emerged from the answers given by each of the participants were family influence, social influence, and COVID-19. Table 4 shows the words mentioned by the participants and the categorisation developed by the authors.

Table 4. Coding of the conceptualisations of extrinsic factors (RQ3)

Simple words	Number of mentions		Generated codes
	Ecuador	Peru	
Familiar influence: Parents, siblings, spouses.	15	13	Subjective norms
Social influence: Friends, colleagues.	11	10	COVID-19
Risk factors: COVID-19	15	9	

Subjective norms

Based on the answers given by each of the participants, it was found that twenty-eight Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials determined that family influence (parents, siblings, spouses), is an important factor for their green purchasing behaviours. On the other hand, twenty-one interviewees indicated that social influence (friends, co-workers, and colleagues) influence the purchase of organic products. These findings supported that Subjective Norms also known as social norms are conceived as the influence exerted by an individual's environment and society on the development of a certain behaviour where the influence of family members, friends and work colleagues influence the adoption of organic purchasing behaviour.

COVID-19

One of the relevant findings within the present study was the additional presence of COVID-19 among the extrinsic factors influencing organic purchasing behaviour. Twenty-four Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials stated that they started or increased their consumption of organic products as a consequence of COVID-19, and that the need to improve their eating habits and increase their body's defences led them to consume or increase their consumption levels of organic products. This finding determined that consumers started and increased organic product consumption, as a measure of protection and prevention of COVID-19. Therefore, this epi-

demically caused consumers to be shocked, motivating them to improve their consumption habits and thus counteract the health effects that a virus can cause.

Barriers that hinder the purchase of organic products (RQ4)

To answer this research question, participants were explained what a purchase barrier is and were asked what types of barriers sometimes prevented them from buying organic products. The codes generated from the answers given by each of the participants were as follows: high prices, availability and skepticism. Table 5 shows the words mentioned by the participants and the categorisation developed by the authors.

Prices

The high prices of organic products are considered barriers to the purchase of organic products. Thirty Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials stated that price or its synonyms (costs and monetary values), were barriers that sometimes stopped them from purchasing organic products. Price is a factor clearly defined by the academic community as a complication that hinders purchase behaviour. According to the findings, despite the environmental concerns mentioned by the consumers, they may not engage in green purchasing behaviour due to perceived barriers. Therefore, the study determines that millennials are not willing to pay more for products committed to the environment because one of

Table 5. Coding of purchase barriers (RQ4)

Simple words	Number of mentions		Generated codes
	Ecuador	Perú	
Prices	12	11	
Costs	1	2	
Monetary values	2	2	
Lack of products	13	10	1. Prices
Shortage of products	2	3	2. Availability
Doubt	5	1	3. Skepticism
Certifications	11	5	
Product appearance	1	3	
Distrust	0	2	

the factors that prevents green consumption is the price of products.

Availability

Another barrier that participants reported as an obstacle to purchase was product availability in the market. Twenty-eight Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials stated that availability or its synonyms (lack of products or shortage of products), were barriers that sometimes stopped them from purchasing organic products. According to the interviewees, sometimes they have the intention of buying a certain organic product, however, the shortage of this product in the markets forces them to buy traditional products.

This finding determined that availability is one of the factors that hinders the intention of buying organic products and leads millennials to continue consuming traditional products. Even when consumers have a high motivation to buy organic products, product availability represents a barrier to purchasing them. On the other hand, the study determined that the incentive to make a first-time purchase comes from the availability of organic food in a store, which also has a significant impact on repeat purchases of such products. Therefore, the availability of organic products and food, is one of the important factors that can explain pro-environmental behaviour towards vegetables.

Skepticism

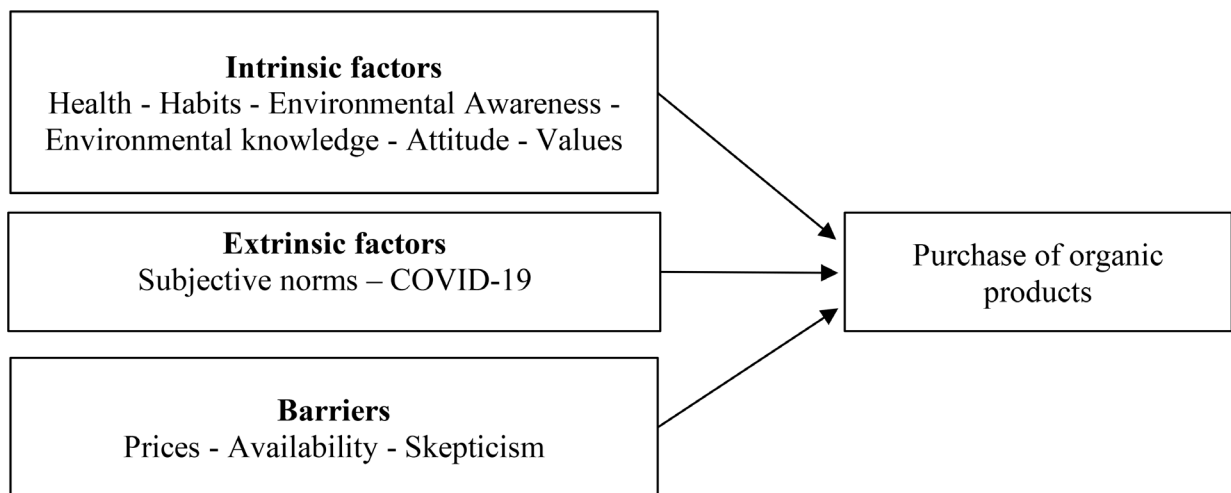
The results of the study showed that twenty-eight Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials determined that skepticism or its synonyms (doubts, certifications, product appearances, and distrust), were barriers that sometimes stopped them from buying organic products. This shows that millennials are skeptical towards certain products that are deemed organic, which generates resistance and limits their consumption of this type of products. Skepticism is a cognitive response that varies according to the context and content of the communication, and is occasionally revealed by the consumer.

The study shows that skeptical consumers may unconsciously give up the opportunity to help the environment by buying truly organic products. Although organic consumers have a clear understanding of the benefits of consuming eco-friendly products, they are sometimes hindered from purchasing an organic product due to skepticism about a particular. Eco-labels have become a tool through which companies communicate the environmental quality of their products to consumers. However, the little acceptance of the term “environmental truth” in consumers has created a widespread skepticism about the promotion of organic products.

Study findings

Figure 1 shows the influential factors and barriers when buying organic products.

Figure 1. Influential factors in actual purchases of organic products



I Discussion

Considering that studies on the consumption of organic products by university student millennials are scarce in developing countries, the results of the study can be considered of importance. The data collected throughout the study supports the following: First, the definitions given to organic products focus on healthy products developed with natural raw materials and without chemical intervention. These definitions coincide with several authors who defined organic products as foods that are grown naturally without chemicals, which are safe and healthy for consumers (Carrión et al., 2023; Dahm et al., 2009; Nguyen et al., 2019).

Second, regarding intrinsic factors, the findings determined that factors that motivate Ecuadorian and Peruvian university student millennials to consume organic products are health, habits, environmental awareness, and environmental knowledge. These findings are consistent with other researchers who determined that consumers purchase this type of products for health (Andrade & Ayaviri, 2018; García & Rondón, 2022; Petrescu et al., 2017; Wang et al., 2019), for habits (Bedard & Tormie, 2018; García & Rondón, 2022), for awareness (Aliman & Astina, 2019; Carducci et al., 2021; Hansman et al., 2020; Yuriev et al., 2020), and for knowledge (Ghazali et al., 2017; Gravelines et al., 2022; Hameed et al., 2018; Panopoulos et al., 2023; Song et al., 2019; Sun et al., 2019). Additional research supports the other two intrinsic factors (attitudes and values), sustaining that some authors determined that attitude is one of the predictors that most influences organic purchasing behaviour (Amalia et al., 2020; Carrión & Arias, 2022; Carrión et al., 2024; Hoyos et al., 2023; Kaur et al., 2023; Nguyen et al., 2019; Rodríguez et al., 2020; Taufique & Vaithiniathan, 2018), and that consumer values increase the willingness to buy organic products (Murali et al., 2019; Roh et al., 2022; Swetarupa et al., 2022; Woo & Gug, 2019).

Third, in the case of extrinsic factors, findings showed that subjective norms are factors that influence the consumption behaviour of organic products of Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials. In other words, family and the social envi-

ronment influence purchase behaviour. These findings are supported by the academic literature which found that family members, friends, and colleagues influence the consumption of organic products (Carrión & Arias, 2022; Cavite et al., 2022; Hoyos et al., 2023; Taufique & Vaithiniathan, 2018).

On the other hand, an interesting finding is the effect that COVID-19 had on the increase of consumption of organic products. The participants stated that they engaged in this purchasing behaviour to improve their body's defences and to have minor effects in case of contracting the virus. This finding supports the study of Qi et al., (2020), who found that consumption of organic products by Chinese consumers increased after the emergence of the COVID-19. The results also respond to the assumptions that COVID-19 may have been one of the factors that influenced the increase of real consumers of organic products (Carrión & Arias-Bolzmann, 2021; Su et al., 2022).

Finally, it was determined that price, availability, and skepticism are factors that have become occasional barriers to buying organic products for university student millennials in Ecuador and Peru. Therefore, these findings are similar to research conducted in other countries where consumers see these barriers as impediments to move from purchase intent to actual purchase (Carrión et al., 2023; Hoyos et al., 2023; Luo et al., 2020; Nadery & Van, 2018; Witsel & Agaard, 2014).

Theoretical, practical and social implications

This study provides theoretical, practical and social implications. From a theoretical point of view, the study provides empirical support that highlights the factors that influence the actual purchasing behaviour of consumers of organic products, thus providing a response to research that determined that it is necessary to develop in-depth qualitative studies that explore the actual purchasing behaviour of products identified with environmental protection. The findings corroborate that intrinsic factors affecting purchasing behaviour (health, habits, environmental awareness, environmental knowledge, attitude,

and values), extrinsic factors (family influence and social influence) and barriers (price, availability and skepticism) are the main drivers that influence or restrain organic purchasing behaviour, results that resemble and support the various findings that have been presented by the academic community through quantitative research models. Moreover, the identification that COVID-19 promoted the consumption of organic products provides a new finding to the field of green consumption knowledge, as it underscores that risk factors occurring extrinsically can shape consumer behaviour, and new studies should consider such factors within their hypothetical research models.

Regarding the practical implications, the study provides information to the organic food production industry in Ecuador and Peru, so that through the results they can identify that consumers in these countries have similar purchasing behaviour, and above all that price, product availability and skepticism are the factors that sometimes hinder purchasing behaviour. In view of this, companies must reorient their marketing strategies and offer a diversity of organic products to consumers, adapt their price strategies according to economic capacity, and adopt distribution channel strategies that allow consumers to have access to this type of product. On the other hand, the study reveals that skepticism is another factor holding back purchasing behaviour, so companies need to improve their communication strategies and enable consumers to reduce this skepticism through the implementation of advertising messages or the use of eco-labels.

Finally, from a social point of view, it is evident that organic products continue to be one of the alternatives to curb environmental impact, which makes it necessary for governments and academia to implement programmes to raise awareness of the risks involved in the excessive consumption of traditional products, thus strengthening the knowledge and environmental awareness of consumers and motivating them to adopt purchasing behaviour that favours environmental protection.

■ Conclusions

This qualitative study focused on university student millennials in Ecuador and Peru and identified the underlying influences on this consumer group's preference for buying organic food. Emphasising that consumers in these countries share similarities in their behavioural traits, except for the skepticism factor, where Ecuadorian millennials are shown to be more exceptional than Peruvians.

Based on the results, the authors identified that the intrinsic factors that influence the consumption of green products are environmental awareness, attitude, habits and health; while the extrinsic factors that stimulate college student millennials to consume these products are family, co-workers and friends. One of the factors influencing the consumption of organic products was the presence of COVID-19. This proves that the fear of health conditions influences consumers to take preventive measures to improve their immune system and increase their body's defences by buying organic products. Based on the participants' responses, the authors identified that consumers were increasing their consumption of organic products while others were initiating their consumption for the first time.

The price factor continues to be a barrier to purchasing organic products, and despite the intention to support the environment and consume healthier and more natural products, the economic situation of consumers has been a constraint that forces them to buy products according to their income. In addition, availability is a factor that prevents those intentions of purchasing organic products from becoming actual purchases. Many participants in the study stated that they go to grocery stores with the intention to buy these products, but most of the time there is no diversity of this type of food. Finally, the skepticism regarding organic products sometimes does not fully convince consumers, leading to the rejection of this type of products and the selection of conventional ones. Thus, credibility is another factor that affects the purchase of organic products.

Future research

This study is one of the first investigations in Ecuador and Peru to use the Grounded Theory to determine the influencing factors and barriers to the purchase behaviour of organic products in Ecuadorian and Peruvian millennials. Therefore, there are still gaps that need to be considered by other researchers in order to enrich knowledge within this field of study. Future research should also consider other age groups such as Generation X, Baby Boomers and centennials. This would allow for comparison and analysis of the behaviours of the different age groups. It is also necessary for future research to continue to use qualitative research methods and through semi-structured interviews to explore in depth the values that influence consumers who identify with the consumption of organic products as well as inconsistencies in purchasing and with these results to propose research models that seek to generalise the behaviours through quantitative research.

Gratitude declarations

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Conflict of interest declarations

The authors declare that they have no conflict of interest.

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■ Appendix 1

Research questions

- a) How do you define organic products?
- b) What are the intrinsic factors that influence your organic purchasing behaviour?
- c) What are the extrinsic factors that influence your organic purchasing behaviour?
- d) What are the barriers that prevent you from buying organic products?