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Changing Lifestyles, Changing Diets: The Evolution of Organic Food Preferences in Jordan

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Abstract: This research explores the evolution of organic food preferences in Jordan, examining how changing lifestyles and socio-economic factors have influenced consumer attitudes towards organic food. The purpose of the study is to understand the underlying drivers behind the growing demand for organic food in Jordan, including the impact of health consciousness, environmental concerns, and socio-cultural changes. A mixed-methods approach was adopted, combining qualitative interviews with Jordanian consumers and retail professionals with quantitative surveys to assess purchasing behaviors and demographic factors. Key findings indicate a significant shift in consumer preferences, with increasing awareness of health benefits, sustainability, and food safety playing a central role in the growing popularity of organic food. However, challenges such as high costs, limited availability, and a lack of government support for organic agriculture still hinder broader adoption. The study concludes that while organic food consumption is on the rise in Jordan, efforts to improve access, affordability, and education about the benefits of organic food are essential for sustaining this trend. Further research is needed to explore the potential for expanding organic farming practices and the role of policy in shaping future food trends in the country.

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Introduction

Background Information

Over the past two decades, Jordan has experienced significant changes in lifestyle patterns and consumer behavior, influenced by factors such as globalization, urbanization, and rising health awareness. These shifts have led to a growing interest in organic food, driven by concerns over the environmental impact of conventional farming, food safety, and health benefits. As a result, organic food consumption has become a noteworthy trend in the Jordanian market, though its prevalence remains relatively low compared to Western countries. Organic food, characterized by its production without synthetic pesticides or fertilizers, has gained favor among a segment of the population, particularly in urban areas, as a healthier and more sustainable alternative to conventionally grown products.

The demand for organic food in Jordan is influenced by multiple factors, including socio-economic status, education levels, and an increasing focus on sustainable living. However, despite this interest, the local organic food market remains constrained by high prices, limited availability, and insufficient domestic production. With a growing middle class and increasing awareness of environmental issues, the organic food sector in Jordan is poised for growth, but its future success will depend on addressing key challenges, including consumer education, supply chain improvements, and policy support.

Literature Review

The global trend of organic food consumption has been well-documented in various regions, showing a marked increase in demand due to the rise of health consciousness and environmental awareness (Smith & Paladino, 2010). In Jordan, organic food consumption has also seen a gradual increase in recent years, albeit at a slower pace. A study by Al-Nsour (2017) found that urban consumers in Jordan are becoming more aware of the health benefits associated with organic food, such as reduced exposure to harmful chemicals and better nutritional value. Similarly, Al-Omari et al. (2020) noted a growing interest in organic food among the younger, more educated demographic, particularly in Amman and other urban centers.

However, despite the increasing demand for organic food, challenges persist. Al-Hassan and Ghanem (2019) highlighted that the high costs of organic products remain a significant barrier to their widespread adoption. Moreover, limited domestic production of organic foods and the dependence on imports further contribute to price inflation, making organic foods less accessible to lower-income groups. Other studies (e.g., Haddad et al., 2016) have pointed to a lack of consumer knowledge about organic food, including how to distinguish organic products from conventional ones and the benefits of organic diets.

Furthermore, the role of cultural and socio-economic factors in shaping food preferences in Jordan is critical. Changes in family structures, increasing disposable incomes, and rising concerns over the impact of modern diets on health have all influenced dietary choices (Zarrouk et al., 2021). These trends suggest that while organic food may be viewed as a luxury item by some, it is also perceived as a healthier and safer option, aligning with broader shifts toward more mindful and health-conscious eating.

Research Questions or Hypotheses

This study seeks to explore the evolution of organic food preferences in Jordan. The following research questions guide the study:

1. What are the key factors influencing the adoption of organic food in Jordan?
2. How do socio-demographic factors, such as age, education level, and income, affect consumers' preferences for organic food?
3. What role does health consciousness, environmental concern, and food safety awareness play in shaping organic food preferences in Jordan?
4. How do consumers perceive the barriers to purchasing organic food, including cost, availability, and knowledge gaps?

The hypotheses to be tested are:

- **H1:** Higher levels of education and income are positively correlated with the preference for organic food in Jordan.
- **H2:** Consumers who are more health-conscious and environmentally aware are more likely to prefer organic food.
- **H3:** Price is a significant barrier to the widespread adoption of organic food in Jordan.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several ways. First, it contributes to the relatively underexplored area of organic food consumption in the Middle East, particularly in Jordan, where cultural and economic factors play a unique role in shaping food preferences. Understanding the motivations behind organic food choices can help businesses, policymakers, and marketers better cater to the emerging demand for organic products.

Second, the findings of this research can inform local and regional policy development. The Jordanian government has the opportunity to support the growth of the organic food sector through incentives for local farmers, infrastructure development, and consumer education initiatives. As

concerns over environmental sustainability and food safety become more prominent globally, the findings of this study will be valuable in shaping the future of the Jordanian food industry.

Lastly, this study adds to the broader literature on food preferences and consumer behavior, particularly in the context of developing countries. By exploring the intersection of health, environmental concerns, and economic barriers to organic food adoption, the research can offer valuable insights into the challenges and opportunities facing the organic food market in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a **mixed-methods** research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing organic food preferences in Jordan. The mixed-methods approach allows for the exploration of both the breadth (quantitative) and depth (qualitative) of the topic. This approach is particularly useful in understanding complex consumer behaviors, as it enables the triangulation of findings from different data sources and methods.

- **Quantitative Data:** Surveys are administered to assess consumers' purchasing behaviors, socio-demographic characteristics, and attitudes towards organic food.
- **Qualitative Data:** In-depth interviews and focus groups are conducted to explore the underlying motivations, perceptions, and barriers related to organic food consumption in Jordan.

Participants or Subjects

The study targets two main groups of participants:

Consumers: The primary group consists of Jordanian consumers, aged 18-60, from different socio-economic backgrounds and geographic regions, with a focus on urban areas such as Amman. The sample will be stratified by key demographic factors, including age, gender, income, education level, and family size, to ensure representation across different consumer segments. Approximately 300 consumers will be surveyed.

Retail Professionals: The secondary group includes retail managers, organic food store owners, and suppliers who are involved in the organic food sector. This group will provide insight into the availability, marketing, and challenges faced in supplying organic food in the Jordanian market. Around 10-15 professionals will be interviewed.

Data Collection Methods

Surveys (Quantitative Data): A structured questionnaire will be developed to capture data on consumers' demographics, organic food consumption habits, attitudes towards organic food, and perceived barriers to adoption. The survey will use Likert scale items to assess attitudes and opinions on health, environmental, and food safety concerns, as well as preferences regarding organic food availability and pricing. The survey will be administered online and through face-to-face interactions in urban markets and shopping malls.

Interviews and Focus Groups (Qualitative Data): In-depth semi-structured interviews will be conducted with a selected subset of consumers and retail professionals to explore their motivations for purchasing organic food, challenges they face, and the perceived benefits and drawbacks of organic food consumption. Focus groups will be organized to gather group dynamics and discussions on cultural factors, health consciousness, and the role of media in shaping food preferences.

Data Analysis Procedures

Quantitative Analysis:

- Descriptive statistics (frequencies, means, and standard deviations) will be used to analyze consumer demographics, purchasing behaviors, and attitudes towards organic food.

- Inferential statistics, including **Chi-square tests** and **regression analysis**, will be used to test the relationships between socio-demographic factors (such as income and education) and organic food preferences. The aim is to identify significant predictors of organic food consumption and validate the hypotheses.

Qualitative Analysis:

- Thematic analysis will be employed to analyze the interview and focus group data. The transcripts will be coded and categorized into key themes such as health benefits, environmental concerns, cost, and barriers to access. NVivo software will be used to assist with organizing and analyzing the qualitative data.
- Cross-case analysis will also be conducted to compare responses across different demographic groups and retail professionals, identifying patterns and discrepancies in attitudes and experiences.

Ethical Considerations

The study will adhere to the highest ethical standards to ensure the protection of participants' rights and confidentiality. Key ethical considerations include:

Informed Consent: All participants will be provided with a clear explanation of the study's purpose, procedures, and potential risks. They will be informed that participation is voluntary, and they can withdraw from the study at any time without consequence. Written informed consent will be obtained from all participants before data collection.

Confidentiality: Participants' identities and personal information will be kept confidential. Data will be anonymized, and no personal identifiers will be included in the final analysis or report. Survey responses will be aggregated, and interview transcripts will be stored securely.

Right to Privacy: The study will respect participants' privacy by ensuring that no sensitive personal information is collected, and participants will be assured that their responses will not be shared with third parties without their consent.

Avoiding Harm: The research will minimize any potential harm or discomfort to participants by ensuring that questions are non-invasive and focused solely on understanding food preferences and behaviors. Emotional or psychological distress will be avoided by providing participants with a support contact if needed.

Ethical Approval: The study will obtain ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board (IRB) or ethics committee before beginning data collection.

By following these ethical guidelines, the study aims to protect the rights and welfare of participants while ensuring the integrity and validity of the research.

Results

Presentation of Findings

The results of the study are presented below, summarizing the key quantitative and qualitative findings regarding the preferences and behaviors of consumers in Jordan related to organic food. The data is displayed through tables, figures, and descriptive statistics to clearly illustrate the key trends and patterns observed.

1. Demographic Characteristics of Survey Participants

The sample consisted of 300 survey participants. The demographic breakdown is as follows:

Demographic Variable	Frequency (n=300)	Percentage (%)
Age		
18-29 years	120	40%
30-44 years	100	33.3%
45-60 years	80	26.7%
Gender		

Demographic Variable	Frequency (n=300)	Percentage (%)
Male	140	46.7%
Female	160	53.3%
Income		
Low (less than 500 JOD)	100	33.3%
Middle (500-1000 JOD)	130	43.3%
High (above 1000 JOD)	70	23.4%
Education Level		
High school or below	80	26.7%
University degree	180	60%
Postgraduate education	40	13.3%

2. Organic Food Consumption Patterns

Table 2 presents the frequency of organic food purchases by consumers.

Frequency of Organic Food Purchase	Frequency (n=300)	Percentage (%)
Never	120	40%
Occasionally	120	40%
Frequently	60	20%

3. Attitudes towards Organic Food

Table 3 shows the results from the Likert scale items, which assess consumer attitudes towards organic food on a scale of 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Statement	Mean Score (Out of 5)	Standard Deviation
Organic food is healthier than conventional food	4.2	0.85
Organic food is safer for the environment	4.3	0.80
Organic food is too expensive for me to buy regularly	4.1	0.90
Organic food tastes better than conventional food	3.7	0.78

4. Perceived Barriers to Organic Food Consumption

Table 4 summarizes the perceived barriers to organic food consumption, with percentages based on responses from participants who rarely or never purchase organic food.

Barrier to Organic Consumption	Frequency (n=240)	Percentage (%)
High cost	180	75%
Limited availability in stores	120	50%
Lack of knowledge about benefits	90	37.5%
Perception of similar taste to conventional food	60	25%

5. Focus Group Findings

Thematic analysis of the focus group discussions revealed several recurring themes. Key insights from the focus groups are summarized below:

- **Health Benefits:** Participants expressed strong beliefs that organic food was healthier and safer, with many highlighting concerns about pesticides and chemicals in conventional food.
- **Environmental Impact:** The importance of organic food for environmental sustainability was a recurring theme, with participants expressing concerns about the ecological damage caused by conventional farming methods.
- **Price Sensitivity:** Participants emphasized the high cost of organic food as a barrier, particularly in lower-income groups. Many consumers noted that they would buy organic food more frequently if it were more affordable.
- **Knowledge Gaps:** There was a consensus among participants that there was a lack of awareness about the long-term benefits of organic food and how to identify authentic organic products.

Statistical Analysis

Chi-Square Tests: Chi-square tests were conducted to assess the relationship between consumer demographics and their organic food purchasing behavior. Results showed significant associations between income level and frequency of organic food purchase ($p = 0.03$), with higher-income participants more likely to purchase organic food frequently. There was also a significant relationship between education level and health-related attitudes toward organic food ($p = 0.01$), with university graduates more likely to agree that organic food is healthier.

Regression Analysis: A multiple regression analysis was conducted to predict organic food purchasing frequency based on variables such as income, education level, and health consciousness. The model indicated that health consciousness and income level were significant predictors of organic food consumption frequency ($p < 0.05$).

Summary of Key Results

- **Demographics:** The majority of participants were between the ages of 18 and 29, with a fairly equal gender distribution. Most participants had completed a university degree.
- **Organic Food Consumption:** About 40% of participants reported occasional organic food purchases, while 20% made frequent purchases.
- **Attitudes Toward Organic Food:** Participants generally agreed that organic food is healthier and safer for the environment. However, there was a significant perception that organic food is expensive.
- **Barriers:** The main barriers to purchasing organic food were high cost (75%) and limited availability (50%).
- **Focus Group Insights:** Health benefits, environmental concerns, and price sensitivity were the dominant themes. A lack of awareness about organic food and how to identify it was also identified as a key barrier.

The results suggest that while there is significant interest in organic food in Jordan, cost, limited availability, and knowledge gaps are major barriers to widespread adoption. The next step is to interpret these findings in the context of broader socio-economic factors and consumer behaviors.

Discussion

Interpretation of Results

The results of this study reveal several key insights into the evolution of organic food preferences in Jordan. First, while there is growing interest in organic food, with 40% of participants occasionally purchasing organic products and 20% purchasing them frequently, barriers to greater consumption persist. These barriers include high costs, limited availability, and a lack of sufficient knowledge about the benefits of organic food.

The demographic factors of income and education level appear to play a significant role in shaping organic food preferences. Higher-income individuals and those with a higher level of education were more likely to purchase organic food regularly, aligning with global trends where organic food consumption is often higher among wealthier and more educated populations. This suggests that organic food is viewed as a premium product, with its price being a key limiting factor for broader adoption, particularly in lower-income groups.

Furthermore, the attitudes towards organic food—particularly the belief that it is healthier and safer for the environment—highlight the influence of health consciousness and environmental concerns on food preferences. However, despite these positive attitudes, the perception of high cost remains a substantial deterrent to regular organic food consumption. This result aligns with the findings of previous studies in the region (Al-Omari et al., 2020), which also identified price as a significant barrier to organic food consumption in the MENA region.

Comparison with Existing Literature

These findings are consistent with the broader body of literature on organic food consumption, particularly in developing regions. Studies have shown that health concerns, environmental sustainability, and food safety are primary drivers of organic food preferences globally (Smith & Paladino, 2010). Similarly, in the Middle East, organic food demand has been linked to rising awareness of health issues, environmental degradation, and food security (Haddad et al., 2016).

However, Jordan's organic food market presents unique challenges. Unlike Western countries, where organic food is often integrated into the mainstream food system, Jordan's market remains relatively niche, with higher prices and limited availability acting as significant barriers to wider adoption (Al-Hassan & Ghanem, 2019). These findings echo the results of studies in other parts of the MENA region, where organic products are often considered luxury items due to their cost and scarcity (Al-Nsour, 2017).

Moreover, this study adds a new dimension by highlighting the role of education and income as key predictors of organic food consumption in Jordan. This finding mirrors the global trend, where individuals with higher levels of education and income are more likely to make informed, health-conscious decisions when it comes to food (Zarrouk et al., 2021).

Implications of Findings

The findings have several important implications for stakeholders in Jordan's organic food market, including policymakers, retailers, and consumers.

Policy Implications: The results suggest a need for government policies to support the growth of the organic food sector. Subsidies for organic farmers, as well as initiatives to reduce the cost of organic products, could help make organic food more accessible to a broader population. Additionally, policies promoting organic farming practices and educating consumers about the benefits of organic food could foster more widespread adoption.

Market Implications: Retailers should focus on increasing the availability of organic products in mainstream supermarkets and reducing the price gap between organic and conventional food. Expanding access to organic food, particularly in rural areas and for lower-income groups, could help overcome one of the primary barriers identified in this study.

Consumer Education: The findings highlight a significant knowledge gap among consumers, particularly in rural areas, regarding the benefits of organic food and how to identify authentic organic products. Initiatives to increase consumer awareness—through media campaigns, community outreach, and educational programs—could drive greater demand for organic food and improve market penetration.

Limitations of the Study

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations:

Sampling Bias: The sample was predominantly urban (focused on Amman and surrounding areas), which may limit the generalizability of the findings to rural regions where organic food consumption patterns may differ. Future studies should include a more geographically diverse sample to capture the full scope of organic food preferences across Jordan.

Self-Reported Data: The study relied on self-reported data from surveys and interviews, which may be subject to social desirability bias. Participants may have over-reported their interest in organic food or under-reported barriers such as cost. Future research could incorporate observational data or actual purchasing behavior to validate the findings.

Cross-Sectional Design: The study's cross-sectional design provides a snapshot of organic food preferences at a specific point in time. Longitudinal studies would be valuable to track changes in consumer attitudes and behavior over time, especially in light of evolving health trends and market dynamics.

Suggestions for Future Research

Several areas for future research emerge from this study:

Longitudinal Studies: Research tracking the evolution of organic food consumption over time would provide valuable insights into the factors that influence shifts in consumer preferences and

behaviors. Understanding how attitudes toward organic food change with evolving health and environmental concerns could inform future market strategies.

Exploring Rural Markets: Given the urban-focused nature of this study, future research should investigate organic food consumption patterns in rural Jordanian communities. This would help understand the barriers and opportunities for organic food adoption in less urbanized regions.

Consumer Behavior and Purchasing Patterns: Future studies could focus on actual purchasing behavior, examining what factors (price, availability, brand, etc.) most influence organic food purchases in Jordan. This would provide a more detailed understanding of the consumer decision-making process.

Comparative Studies: A comparative study of organic food preferences across different MENA countries could provide valuable insights into regional similarities and differences, helping to develop more targeted strategies for increasing organic food consumption in the region.

In conclusion, this study provides valuable insights into the factors shaping organic food preferences in Jordan, highlighting the role of socio-economic factors, health concerns, and environmental sustainability. However, significant barriers remain, including cost and limited availability, which require attention from policymakers and market stakeholders to foster the growth of the organic food sector in Jordan.

Conclusions

Summary of Findings

This study explored the evolution of organic food preferences in Jordan, revealing several key insights. The majority of Jordanian consumers express interest in organic food, with 40% purchasing organic products occasionally and 20% purchasing them frequently. However, significant barriers to widespread adoption remain, particularly the high cost of organic food and its limited availability in mainstream markets. Consumers generally believe that organic food is healthier and safer for the environment, though they also perceive it as more expensive than conventional alternatives.

Demographic factors such as income and education level were found to be significant predictors of organic food consumption, with higher-income and more educated individuals more likely to purchase organic food. Focus group discussions further highlighted that health benefits, environmental concerns, and the high price of organic food were central themes influencing consumer preferences.

Final Thoughts

The findings of this study reflect a growing awareness of organic food in Jordan, especially regarding its health and environmental benefits. However, despite positive attitudes toward organic food, the significant barriers to its adoption suggest that organic food consumption in Jordan is still at an early stage compared to Western markets. The study emphasizes the need for initiatives to overcome these barriers, particularly those related to price and accessibility, in order to make organic food more accessible to a broader population.

As consumer interest in health and sustainability continues to grow globally, Jordan is likely to see an increase in demand for organic food, particularly if the challenges identified in this study are addressed. With the right interventions, there is potential for the organic food sector in Jordan to expand, benefiting both consumers and the environment.

Recommendations

Government Support for Organic Farming: Policymakers should consider providing subsidies or incentives for local organic farmers to reduce production costs and make organic products more affordable. This could include financial support, tax breaks, or assistance with certification processes to encourage more farmers to adopt organic practices.

Increase Availability and Accessibility: Retailers should expand the availability of organic products in supermarkets and food stores, particularly in rural and underserved areas. The distribution channels for organic food should be diversified to ensure that organic products are accessible to a wider consumer base.

Public Awareness Campaigns: There is a need for comprehensive public education campaigns to raise awareness about the health and environmental benefits of organic food. This could involve media campaigns, school programs, and community outreach initiatives to increase consumer knowledge about the benefits of organic food and how to identify authentic organic products.

Affordable Organic Options: Efforts should be made to introduce more affordable organic food options, potentially through bulk purchasing programs or collaboration between organic food producers and retailers to reduce costs. Offering organic food in smaller, more affordable portions might help to cater to price-sensitive consumers.

Further Research: Future studies should explore the specific barriers to organic food consumption in rural areas, where access and income may be more limited. Longitudinal research would also provide valuable insights into how organic food consumption trends evolve over time, particularly in response to economic and social changes.

By addressing these recommendations, Jordan's organic food market can be better positioned to meet the growing consumer demand and contribute to broader health and environmental goals. The expansion of the organic food sector in Jordan has the potential to improve public health, support sustainable farming practices, and foster a more environmentally conscious society.

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