



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

## Research on Consumer Behavior Theory of Green Food Purchase Decision: Process Analysis and Exploration of Influencing Factors

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**ABSTRACT**

This study aims to explore the consumer behavior theory in green food purchasing decisions, analyze the decision-making process that consumers experience when choosing green food, and the influencing factors behind it. Based on the theoretical framework of consumer behavior, the study first regards the consumer's purchasing decision process for green food as a complete cycle, which is divided into five stages: demand identification, information search, comparative evaluation, purchasing decision, and post purchase evaluation. The thinking and action trajectories of consumers when choosing green food in each stage are analyzed one by one. Subsequently, based on the behavioral model of American social psychologist Kurt Lewin, this study analyzes the factors that influence consumers' purchase of green food from six perspectives: individual characteristics, social cognition, emotional attitudes, economic environment, political environment, and legal environment. Finally, the content of this study is summarized in order to lay the foundation for exploring the behavioral patterns of consumers in green food purchasing decisions from a theoretical perspective.

**INTRODUCTION**

With the continuous increase in consumer attention to green food, food safety issues have increasingly become a focus of social research. Food safety is not only a fundamental prerequisite for maintaining public health and promoting social progress, but also an important cornerstone for national prosperity and development. A healthy and sustainable food market should possess multiple characteristics, including a diverse range of food products, advanced production technologies, and a comprehensive testing and regulatory system. However, current food safety regulation still faces many challenges. At present, some illegal enterprises and merchants not only violate the relevant standards of food additives, but also deceive consumers through false brand information to obtain improper profits. These illegal behaviors not only pose a threat to consumers' health, but also harm their economic interests and further weaken public trust in the food industry. This lack of trust will have a significant impact on consumers' purchasing decisions, which in turn will have a negative effect on the development of the entire food industry. Therefore, as an important component of the food industry, any safety issues related to food safety will have a serious negative impact on the green food industry.

The current food safety issues mainly focus on three key aspects: firstly, the safety of food raw materials, ensuring that the source of raw materials is traceable and meets relevant standards;

Secondly, the safety of the processing, including hygiene standards and process control during the production process; Finally, there is the issue of storage in the sales process to ensure the safety and freshness of food during transportation and sales. Each of these links is directly related to the safety of the final product and the health of consumers. With the development of society, consumers' attitudes are undergoing a transformation. More and more consumers are becoming aware of the importance of green food for health, and their purchasing behavior towards green food will significantly drive market demand and ultimately translate into actual consumption. Therefore, green food will have a vast consumer market in the future, and the sustained growth in demand will promote the steady development of the market. In this context, how to combine relevant theories to explore consumers' purchasing decision-making behavior towards green food and enhance their willingness to purchase green food has become a key issue in market research.

## **2. FOUNDATIONS AND FRONTIERS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOR THEORY**

### **2.1 Consumers and Consumer Behavior**

Narrowly defined consumers usually refer to individuals or families who purchase and use various consumer goods or services, while broadly defined consumers include individuals, families, and organizational entities who purchase and use various products and services. This paper will explore the connotation and characteristics of consumer behavior from the perspective of narrow consumers.

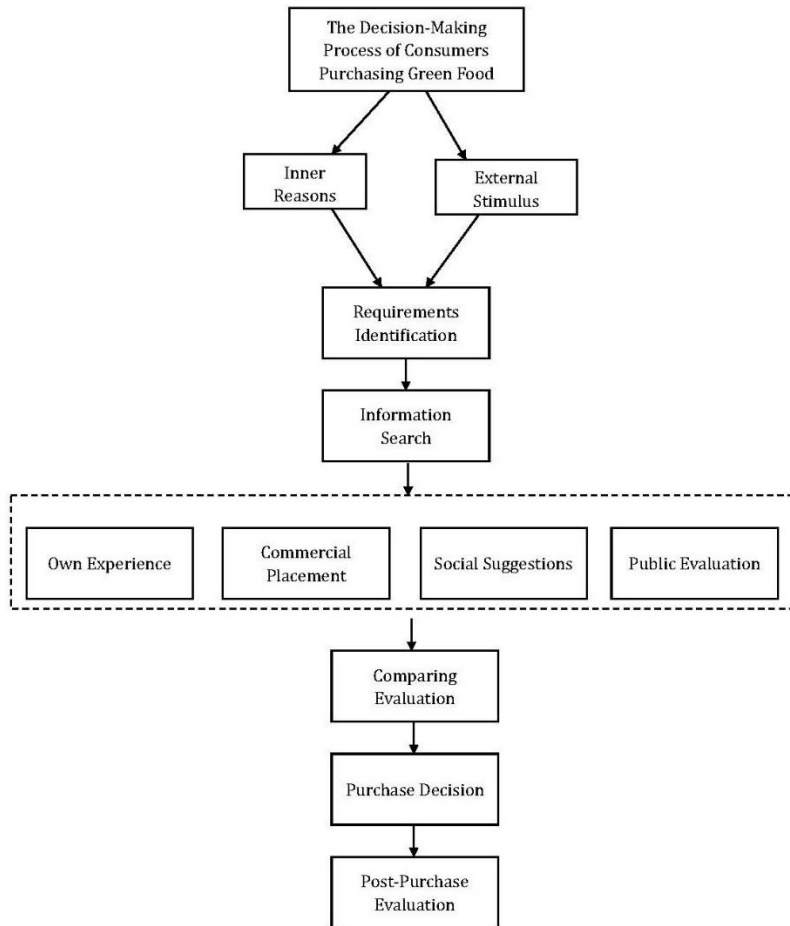
According to the above definition of consumers, consumer behavior can be defined as various behaviors and decision-making patterns exhibited by consumers in the process of purchasing and using consumer goods or services. Specifically, consumer behavior consists of two main parts: actual behavior and the decision-making process that determines these behaviors. The purchasing decision process constitutes the core content of consumer behavior and is a key direction in consumer behavior research. Existing consumer behavior theories mostly focus on the study of consumer purchasing decision-making processes, analyzing how consumers make choices in the market from different perspectives and choosing which path to take to meet their needs. Therefore, in-depth analysis of the purchasing decision-making process helps to understand consumers' purchasing motivations, behavior patterns, and the impact of various factors on consumer behavior, laying a theoretical foundation for more accurate market analysis and marketing strategy formulation.

### **2.2 Hypothesis Analysis of Consumer Behavior from the Perspective of New Institutional Economics**

New institutional economics proposes two key assumptions, one of which is the asymmetry and incompleteness of market information. In an environment of information asymmetry, consumers speculate on the intrinsic quality and actual value of products without sufficient product information, which is accompanied by uncertainty and may lead to the emergence of various risks. For example, in the food market, consumers face uncertainty in terms of texture, nutritional content, and safety when purchasing conventional foods. Even food that has obtained special quality certification may face risks for consumers due to false certification. In order to reduce or avoid these risks, consumers may conduct internal or external information searches, but this process usually comes with a certain cost. Another important assumption of new institutional economics is bounded rationality, which refers to the limitations of an individual's ability to calculate and understand the environment in the decision-making process. People's perception of risk is often selective and cannot fully identify all relevant information. When certain information does not align with consumers' expectations or identity interests, it is often overlooked, despite its potential importance. Due to the characteristics of information asymmetry and bounded rationality of consumers, in situations where decision risk is low and the cost of obtaining correct information is high, consumers are often unwilling to pay additional costs in pursuit of optimal choices, and tend to choose familiar products, which may lead

to them missing out on more suitable consumer product opportunities in the market. These two assumptions indicate the widespread existence of purchasing risk and the constraint of bounded rationality on consumer behavior. These two assumptions also apply to consumer behavior research on green food purchase decisions.

### 3. THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS FOR CONSUMERS TO PURCHASE GREEN FOOD



**Figure 1: Consumer decision-making process for purchasing green food**

According to the theoretical analysis of consumer behavior in the previous text, the purchasing decision process of consumers towards green food can be regarded as a complete cycle, which can usually be divided into five stages: demand identification, information search, comparative evaluation, purchasing decision, and post purchase evaluation. As shown in Figure 1, this process not only reflects the thinking and action trajectory of consumers when choosing green food, but also involves multiple dimensions of processing and evaluating relevant information.

#### 3.1 Requirement identification

In the decision-making process of purchasing green food, consumers' demand confirmation is influenced by multiple factors, including internal motivations (such as physiological needs, concerns about health and the environment) and external stimuli (such as environmental promotion, social media influence, etc.). At this stage, consumers become aware of their demand for green food and further clarify the specific types, usage methods, and degree of satisfaction of the required products. Therefore, this stage is usually defined as requirement confirmation or problem identification.

As the initial stage of green food purchasing decisions, demand confirmation only stimulates subsequent purchasing behavior when consumers realize that their demand for green food has not been met. Therefore, the study of demand composition provides a theoretical basis for understanding consumer behavior in green food purchasing decisions. Due to individual characteristics and psychological differences, different consumers may exhibit different psychological responses when facing the same green food or related environmental stimuli, resulting in diversity and differences in consumer demand. This diversity is not only reflected in the multiple demands of similar green foods or different brands, but also in the coexistence of explicit and potential demands among the same consumer. Every consumer will choose, purchase, and evaluate green food based on their own needs and values.

### **3.2 Information Search**

In the information search stage of green food purchasing decisions, consumer behavior is usually driven by internal demand. After confirming the demand for green food, consumers will actively seek information on goods and services related to meeting these needs. In addition, external environmental stimuli can also stimulate information search, such as product displays, environmental promotions, or green food promotions that may trigger consumers' awareness and interest in a certain green product, thereby stimulating their collection behavior. At this stage, consumers' main concerns include the quality, functionality, price, and environmental impact of green food. The acquisition of information can be divided into the following categories:

(1) Self experience: This factor refers to the personal experience of consumers in the process of purchasing green food in the past, as well as the memory or internal information formed by all related information. This experience includes direct usage experience of specific brands and products, as well as consumers' accumulated awareness of the quality, functionality, and sustainability of green food in different shopping scenarios.

(2) Commercial advertising: This factor covers all forms of commercial promotion activities, including advertising for green food, brochures, product packaging, social media marketing, and sales personnel referrals. By promoting the characteristics, advantages, and value of green food, consumers' awareness and willingness to purchase can be increased to a certain extent. For example, advertisements can emphasize the health benefits of green food, eco-friendly production processes, and contributions to sustainable development, thereby attracting the attention of potential consumers.

(3) Social advice: Social advice refers to suggestions and evaluations from friends, colleagues, family members, and other social networks. In the decision-making process of consumers, social advice is particularly important. Social advice can not only influence consumers' attitudes and preferences, but also provide emotional support and confidence in product selection. Especially when facing diverse market choices, positive evaluations within the social circle can significantly enhance consumers' trust and purchase intention towards a certain product.

(4) Public evaluation: This factor involves information obtained through media, government agencies, and consumer organizations, which typically provide consumers with certification, regulatory information, and industry standards related to green food. This helps consumers understand the market performance, quality standards, and environmental impact of green food. By paying attention to these evaluations, consumers can make more informed decisions and ensure that the green food they purchase meets their expectations and needs.

When consumers lack or have limited prior experience, they often search extensively in the external environment to obtain useful information that can aid in decision-making. Existing research suggests that consumers with the least knowledge of green food typically invest more effort in external

information search to ensure that their purchasing choices meet the standards of sustainable consumption.

### **3.3 Comparative evaluation**

In the decision-making process of purchasing green food, the comparative evaluation stage of consumers involves using specific criteria based on collected information to make value judgments on the attributes of various optional green foods, in order to evaluate the effectiveness of these foods in meeting their health, environmental and other needs, as well as their ability to solve related problems. This process is influenced by both internal stimuli (such as health awareness and environmental protection concepts) and external stimuli (such as market promotion and social recommendations). After consumers confirm the content, usage, and satisfaction level of their demand for green food, they enter the evaluation stage.

When evaluating green food, consumers typically focus on multiple key attributes or features, such as product organic certification, nutritional content, price, production methods, and sustainability. These attributes are not only related to the individual characteristics of consumers, but also directly affect the benefits they pursue (such as health and environmental protection) and the costs they pay in the process of purchasing green food. The consumer evaluation process includes comparing the surface characteristics and actual performance of a certain green food, as well as comparing it with other alternative green foods to identify the product type that best meets their needs. In this analysis and evaluation process, the effectiveness of the evaluation largely depends on the consumer's cognitive ability and personal knowledge level.

### **3.4 Purchase Decision**

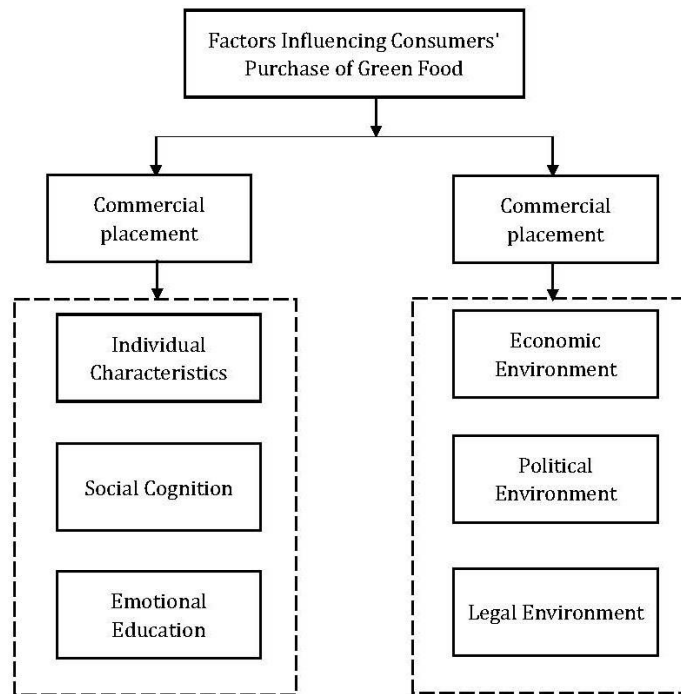
After consumers conduct information search and comparative evaluation of green food, they will form a purchasing intention and enter the stage of purchasing decision and implementation of purchasing behavior. In this process, purchasing decisions involve multiple dimensions, including choosing the purchasing store, determining the quantity, brand, variety, and payment method. Generally speaking, consumers tend to choose green food brands that they are familiar with or trust. However, there are multiple uncertain factors between the formation of purchase intention and actual decision, which may lead consumers to revise, postpone or ultimately cancel their purchase decision. For example, when evaluating green food, consumers may be unable to accurately judge the true quality and environmental friendliness of the product due to information asymmetry, which may lead to concerns about the risks they may face after purchasing. When consumers believe that purchasing green food may bring irreversible risks or negative impacts, they are more likely to choose to delay or change their purchasing intentions. In addition, consumers' decision-making process is also easily influenced by the opinions of others, social recognition, and other external factors, which may further interfere with their intention to purchase green food.

### **3.5 Post purchase evaluation**

After consumers purchase green food, the purchasing decision process does not terminate, but shifts to the subsequent evaluation stage of the purchased products. The degree to which consumers evaluate the purchased green food is usually influenced by the importance of product decision-making and the quality of the user experience. When the performance of green food meets or exceeds consumers' expectations, consumers often feel satisfied and thus increase their willingness to purchase again. Relatively speaking, if green food fails to meet consumers' expectations and causes them to feel disappointed or dissatisfied, especially in situations where consumers have strong self-protection awareness or high product value, consumers usually take corresponding actions. These actions may include requesting returns and exchanges from merchants, conveying dissatisfaction to family and friends, choosing not to purchase the brand or product again, complaining to consumer rights protection organizations, and even taking legal action in extreme cases. This kind of follow-up

evaluation not only affects consumers' willingness to repurchase, but may also have a chain reaction on the purchasing decisions of other potential consumers, thereby affecting the overall development of the green food market.

#### 4. FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMERS' PURCHASE OF GREEN FOOD



**Figure 2: Factors influencing consumers' purchase of green food**

Consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by a combination of multiple factors. According to the behavioral model of American social psychologist Kurt Lewin, individual behavior is influenced by both internal factors and external environmental factors. These internal and external factors together constitute a complex system of factors that affect consumer behavior, covering a large amount of theoretical research results. As shown in Figure 2, focusing on the research focus of this article, the following will explore the relevant theories of how individual characteristics, social cognition, emotional attitudes, economic environment, political environment, and legal environment affect consumer behavior.

##### 4.1 Individual Characteristics

There are significant individual differences in consumers' performance in green food purchasing decisions, which are largely influenced by individual characteristic factors. These factors mainly include age, gender, income, education level, family structure, occupation, and lifestyle habits.

(1) The differences in physiological functions and social experiences among consumers of different age groups result in different tendencies towards green food consumption psychology. For example, young consumers may be more concerned about the health and environmental characteristics of green food, while older consumers may be more concerned about the safety and traditional values of food.

(2) In terms of gender, male consumers usually focus on the functionality and practicality of products, and tend to pay more attention to efficiency and convenience when choosing green foods; Female consumers, on the other hand, are more meticulous and cautious, valuing the diversity, nutritional content, and brand reputation of food, especially being more picky when it comes to home purchases.

(3) The income level directly affects consumers' consumption ability and attitude. Consumers with higher incomes are usually willing to pay a premium for green food because they place relatively higher emphasis on health and environmental protection. In addition, differences in education levels can also affect consumers' values and choices.

(4) Consumers with higher education levels usually pay more attention to the knowledge and environmental information of green food, and tend to actively seek relevant external information to make more rational purchasing decisions.

(5) The different stages of a family's life cycle, such as being single, raising children, reaching adulthood, and reaching old age, can to some extent affect the family's demand for green food. For example, young families may pay more attention to the nutritional needs of children, while older families may prioritize food safety and health benefits. These individual characteristics do not affect the purchasing decision of green food in isolation, but rather through the combined effects of multiple factors, they comprehensively influence the consumer's choice process.

#### **4.2 Social cognition**

The cognitive process is the reflection of the human brain on the attributes and laws of objective things, manifested in various psychological phenomena such as sensation, perception, attention, memory, and thinking. In the decision-making process of purchasing green food, sensation and perception, as consumers' reactions to external stimuli or situations, constitute the initial stage of cognitive process. In order to deepen their understanding of green food, consumers will use psychological activities such as memory and thinking to complete their cognitive process. Memory refers to the storage of an individual's past experiences of purchasing green food and related information in the brain, while thinking is an indirect summary and reflection of the general attributes and internal connections of green food. Consumers form a subjective understanding that is consistent with their needs, expectations, and experiences of green food through sensation, perception, memory, and thinking.

In this article, consumers' cognitive process is mainly reflected in their understanding of the risks of purchasing green food and their perception of product quality. Firstly, the research hypothesis of new institutional economics suggests that purchasing risk is prevalent. In the process of purchasing green food, due to information asymmetry, consumers may face food safety risks such as pesticide residues, the use of non food additives, or false advertising. Some of these risks can be perceived by consumers, while others may not be perceived. There are significant differences in consumers' perception of risk, which directly affects their information collection and evaluation behavior when purchasing green food. Secondly, consumers' perception of green food and its quality will also affect their purchasing decisions. Only when consumers have sufficient cognitive ability towards a certain green food can they judge whether the product can meet their needs, and thus include it in the scope of evaluation and selection.

#### **4.3 Emotional Attitude**

Consumer emotional attitude refers to an individual's positive or negative evaluation of a specific thing or concept, involving emotional experiences and behavioral tendencies, specifically manifested as a preference or disgust for green food. This attitude usually stems from multiple factors, including direct contact with green food, direct or indirect influence from others, as well as personal experiences and family education. For example, consumers form a positive attitude towards a certain green food by trying it out or participating in related activities, or shape their perception of the product through recommendations and evaluations from family and friends. Consumer attitudes have a significant impact on their green food purchasing behavior and reflect potential action patterns in specific contexts. The theory of behavioral awareness and related models indicate that consumer behavior is the result of specific purchase intentions, and attitudes can effectively predict

this intention. When consumers hold a positive and affirmative attitude towards green food, it often promotes their purchasing behavior; On the contrary, if their attitude shows doubt or denial, it may hinder or terminate the purchasing behavior. Therefore, eliminating consumers' doubts and distrust of green food, enhancing their recognition of green food through education and publicity, has become an important strategy to effectively change their negative attitude and stimulate their desire to purchase. The main factors influencing consumers' attitudes towards green food include their intrinsic values, past experiences, and personality traits, while external factors such as information dissemination, advertising, consumer interaction, and group pressure also play a significant role.

#### **4.4 Economic Environment**

The economic environment can be divided into macroeconomic environment and microeconomic environment. As an important component of social consumption, individual consumers are inevitably influenced by the macroeconomic environment, including national economic policies, environmental regulations, and government macro-control, in the process of purchasing green food. At the same time, microeconomic environmental factors, including product design, production process, quality, pricing, and other aspects of enterprises in the field of green food, will also affect consumers' understanding and consumption choices of green food. For example, information asymmetry is prevalent in the green food market, often having a negative impact on consumers' purchasing decisions. However, when producers strictly follow production regulations and standards, ensure the quality of green food, and promote it appropriately, their production behavior and product quality will gradually win a good reputation, establish corporate credibility, and stimulate consumers' willingness to purchase. Price, as an important characteristic of green food, is usually regarded by consumers as a decision-making basis. When producers lower the price of green food, consumers are more likely to make purchasing decisions. In addition, the role of advertising in influencing consumers' purchasing behavior towards green food is becoming increasingly significant. Advertising helps consumers establish awareness of green food products, stimulate their interest in green food, and guide their attention and promote purchasing motivation by conveying key information about the brand, nutritional content, environmental characteristics, and uses of green food.

#### **4.5 Political Environment**

The political environment mainly involves the country's political system and policy orientation. Under a specific political system, the state regulates and guides the behavior of consumers and producers, especially in the field of green food consumption, by formulating and implementing relevant policies. Healthy and scientific consumption and production methods will be supported and encouraged by the state, while unhealthy, unethical, or harmful consumption and production behaviors will be opposed and restricted. For example, the government promotes the advantages of green food and reduces related consumption costs by formulating policies to encourage consumers to prioritize environmentally friendly and sustainable products in their purchasing decisions. This policy orientation not only promotes the popularization of green consumption, but also provides consumers with a more favorable purchasing environment.

#### **4.6 Legal Environment**

The legal environment mainly involves laws and regulations related to consumer and producer behavior, as well as national policies, which have a profound impact on the operation of the green food market. The government regulates the behavior of producers by formulating and implementing laws and regulations to ensure compliance with sustainable development standards. For example, when the government implements strict laws to regulate the behavior of green food producers and imposes severe penalties on non-compliant enterprises, while also introducing incentive policies or



providing subsidies to support the production of green products, these measures not only directly affect the behavior of producers and encourage them to adopt environmentally friendly production methods, but also effectively correct market failures and increase the supply of green products.

## 5. CONCLUSION

According to the analysis of consumer behavior theory, the general rules of consumers' green food purchase decisions can be summarized: consumers' behavior is stimulated by internal physiological needs and external environmental factors, thus forming their demand and cognition for green food. When consumers realize that a certain green food can meet their needs and expectations, they usually consider further purchasing actions. However, the common risks in the process of purchasing green food, including product quality and source reliability, may affect consumers' decision-making process. Specifically, if consumers perceive a high level of risk, they often take measures to reduce it, such as collecting detailed information and consulting before making a purchase. Meanwhile, in the process of encountering and understanding green food, consumers will form specific attitudes, which greatly affect their purchasing intentions. For example, based on the emphasis on environmental protection, consumers may hold a positive attitude towards certain brands of green food. Before making a purchasing decision, consumers usually compare and evaluate the quality, price, brand, and environmental certification of green food based on their personal needs and cognition, in order to help them make rational purchasing choices. Afterwards, after comparative evaluation, consumers ultimately make purchasing decisions and implement purchases driven by their attitudes and purchasing intentions. However, due to the limited rationality of consumers in cognition, perception, information utilization, and comparative evaluation, their purchasing decisions are also subject to certain limitations. Afterwards, the purchasing process does not end, and consumers will evaluate their own experiences to form a purchasing experience, which will have an impact on their future green food purchasing behavior. In this process, individual physiological characteristics, needs, cognition, attitudes, expectations, and other psychological factors, as well as external economic environment and policy regulations, jointly affect consumers' analysis, selection, and decision-making in green food purchase decisions.

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