



# Creativity in marketing communication to overcome barriers to organic produce purchases: The case of a developing nation

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## ABSTRACT

The change from conventional to organic foods has been found to have benefits for environmental sustainability and for consumers' health. Although a market for organic fresh produce has been found to exist in South Africa, consumption levels are low and there is incomplete understanding of the barriers to organic consumption. In this qualitative research interviews were conducted with participants who were aware of organic products but were not regular consumers of organic products. Snowball sampling was used to recruit participants to the study to better understand barriers to organic purchases. Qualitative data obtained from interviews was transcribed and thematic analysis conducted. Generally, participants appeared to be concerned about the environment, however, their concern for the environment does not lead to organic consumption. Furthermore, participants had positive attitudes toward organic products, are not influenced by friends and family but are deterred by issues such as price, availability and labelling of organic products. The recommendations include initiatives that will assist marketers with communicating organic benefits to consumers thereby explaining the reasons for higher prices and leading to consumer trust. Creative communication strategies present an opportunity to overcome barriers to consumption.

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## 1. Introduction

It is now widely acknowledged that a transition to more sustainable lifestyles is required to secure the subsistence but also the well-being and human development of future generations (Brown and Vergragt, 2016; Capatina et al., 2017). The question of how to transition to an economy that is in harmony with ecological limits is one the greatest questions of our times (Brown and Vergragt, 2016).

Agriculture is considered a major cause of the global decline in biodiversity (Puech et al., 2014). The reason agriculture is blamed for the decline in biodiversity is that the earth is covered in vegetation and any change to the vegetation will affect the climate which can then lead to environmental problems (Lee and Yun, 2015). However, the practice of organic agriculture has been identified as a pathway to sustainable development and enhanced food security (Kisaka-Lwayo and Obi, 2014). Organic food products are viewed as being a more sustainable alternative to conventional

food (Mhlophe, 2016). Thus, organic purchases are regarded as contributing to sustainable development as it contributes to caring for the environment.

Consumption is the reason for producing anything and farming organically is motivated by consumption patterns (Yazdanpanah and Forouzani, 2015). However, to lead consumers to sustainable consumption, marketing communication activities have to be conducted. Marketing activities regarding sustainable development include promoting a better quality of life for consumers at the present and for future generations (Capatina et al., 2017).

Sustainability marketing includes a philosophy and a range of activities. It aims to satisfy consumers' needs or wants and create a favourable position for the business in the marketplace by communicating how the business addresses environmental, social and economic concerns (Villarino and Font, 2015). For organic products, the aim of farmers and retailers is to market the benefits of consuming organic products such that it leads to an increase in organic purchases. Thus, creative marketing communication can assist both farmers and retailers to market sustainable products effectively.

In South Africa, the organic food sector is relatively new as the South African organic food market reveals features of an immature

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market, still in the early stages of the product adoption cycle (Bartels and Hoogendam, 2011; Mhlophe, 2016; Persaud and Schillo, 2017). Therefore, it is important to understand factors that hinder adoption of organic produce.

This paper reports on a study of consumers in a developing nation who have positive attitudes towards organic consumption but who face various barriers to consumption. The paper contributes to the literature on sustainable consumption and particularly organic produce consumption by exploring the barriers to such consumption in a developing nation sample and providing creative marketing communication recommendations to overcome these barriers.

## 2. Literature review

### 2.1. The role of creative communication

Communication about the benefits of organic products among consumers should be the main concern for the marketers, as communication is considered an important tool for the success of any eco-friendly product (Yadav and Pathak, 2016). Communicating sustainability assists to make the target audience aware of how the products offered to them will meet their needs whilst also addressing economic, social and or environmental issues (Villarino and Font, 2015). Therefore, to achieve an increase in sustainable consumption, creative communication is one of the elements to be utilised by sustainable organisations.

Businesses with a solid green focus often suffer from sustainability marketing myopia as a result of being product, instead of customer-focused and thereby emphasising some aspect of their sustainability credentials rather than focusing on consumer needs (Villarino and Font, 2015). Unsubstantiated sustainability claims often result in greenwashing, which is the strategic disclosure of positive sustainability information about a company's performance whilst omitting negative information, leading to products being falsely marketed as sustainable (Villarino and Font, 2015). To avoid perceptions of greenwashing, marketers should focus on providing an accurate and consistent message about the benefits of consuming organic produce not only for the individual consumer but for the environment and the broader society.

Marketers today have a wide array of marketing communication tools to choose from. These tools include:

- Advertising: This form of marketing communication is regarded as the most visible manifestation of a marketer's communication efforts (Cant et al., 2017; Kotler and Keller, 2012).
- Personal Selling: This form of face-to-face interaction dominates the marketing communication mix of many organisations as most businesses start off by selling to a relatively small number of customers who require personal selling (Cant et al., 2017).
- Shopper Marketing: Sales promotion and point-of-sale digital media initiatives are some of the examples of shopper marketing (Cant et al., 2017).
- Direct Response Marketing: The use of mail, telephone, e-mail and internet/digital media to communicate directly with the customer are some of the elements of direct response marketing (Kotler and Keller, 2012).
- Public Relations: This involves a variety of programs directed internally to employees of company or externally to customers, other firms, government, and the media to promote or protect the company's image or individual product communication (Kotler and Keller, 2012).
- Sponsorship: This form involves a contract to provide financial and other support to an organisation or individual in return for rights to use the sponsor's name and logo in connection with a sponsored event or activity (Cant et al., 2017).

- Digital media: The digital media elements include internet, email, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and mobile technology such as cell-phones and laptops (Cant et al., 2017).

The various communication activities contribute to brand equity and drive sales in various ways such as creating brand or product awareness, forging brand image in consumers' memories, and eliciting positive brand feelings thereby achieving customer loyalty (Cant et al., 2017).

### 2.2. Environmentally conscious consumers and organic fresh produce

The intensification of environmental consciousness, awareness and concern has led to a rise in intention to purchase organic foods (Lee and Yun, 2015). Increasing organic consumption motivates farmers to farm organically (Yazdanpanah and Forouzani, 2015). Consumers' concern for their health and alertness to the effects of chemical deposits in conventional food products, lead consumers to consider organic products (Gakobo and Jere, 2016). The issues of environmental safekeeping, nutritional concerns, concerns about pesticides, as well as improved taste and flavour in organic products are some of the factors identified as benefits of consuming organic products (Gakobo and Jere, 2016; Mhlophe, 2016).

Over the last two decades, studies have been conducted on the consumption of organic food. Their aims were generally to determine the motives for purchasing organic products (Mhlophe, 2016; Naidoo and Ramatsetse, 2016). Studies also focused on the attitudes and behaviours of consumers regarding the purchase and consumption of organic food but often in highly developed countries, while ignoring developing countries (Yadav and Pathak, 2016).

### 2.3. Conceptual framework

Rogers (1976) explains that the classic model of diffusion involves a new idea, product or practice, being adopted by various members of a society over time as a result of communication through various channels be they personal or mass. According to Gatignon and Robertson (1985, p. 849), diffusion theory "offers a fairly well-developed conceptual framework for the study of communication" particularly in relation to interpersonal communication. More recently, Rogers (2003) identified the attributes of relative advantage, trialability, compatibility, complexity and observability which affect adoption behaviour. The theory of diffusion has been used in a variety of studies investigating the supply-side, e.g. organic farmer or food processors activities (e.g. Padel, 2001; Shanahan et al., 2008). Thus while having some relevance for the study especially in terms of developing communications tools to assist in the adoption of organic produce through society, the current study specifically focused on understanding factors affecting individual consumption of organic produce and the barriers to such consumption.

Therefore a conceptual framework, as depicted in Fig. 1 was developed for the research, based on the extended Theory of Planned Behaviour (TPB) model by Yadav and Pathak (2016). Macovei (2015, p. 15) states that the "TPB framework assumes that behavioural intentions are a function of an individual's Attitudes, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioural Control of the respective behaviour". However, Yadav and Pathak (2016) extend the model by adding moral attitudes, environmental concern and health consciousness as constructs affecting purchase intention. Extant literature on organic consumption and possible barriers to purchases such as demographic factors, price, availability, and awareness of organic foods which may be influenced by creative

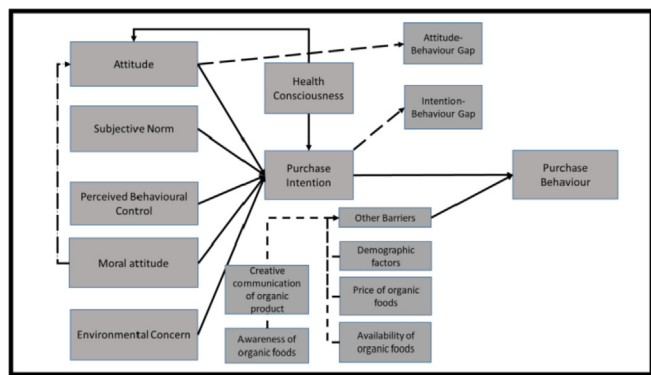


Fig. 1. Conceptual framework of the study.

marketing communication and labelling, was also added to the conceptual framework as they have been found to specifically influence organic consumption. Lastly the framework depicts the attitude-behaviour gap and the intention-behaviour gap. This provided a framework for exploring the barriers to organic consumption in South Africa.

- Attitude toward a behaviour indicates a level of agreement or disagreement with behaviour and whether behaviour is regarded as being good or bad (Macovei, 2015). It is also about the person's appraisal of behaviour whether favourable or unfavourable (Yazdanpanah and Forouzani, 2015). It is thus a positive or negative evaluation of behaviour (Krömker and Matthies, 2014).
- Subjective Norm (SN) is the perceived social influence to perform or not to perform the organic consumption behaviour (Yazdanpanah and Forouzani, 2015) and the expectation that relevant others will approve of the intended behaviour (Macovei, 2015).
- Health consciousness is concerned with health worries that are shared and impact a person's daily activities (Yadav and Pathak, 2016).
- Environmental concern measures the point of awareness of problems concerning the environment and provision of efforts to resolve those concerns (Yadav and Pathak, 2016).
- Perceived Behavioural Control (PBC) measures the perception of difficulty or ease in purchasing organic foods (Tsakiridou et al., 2008). It also refers to perceptions of personal control over what to purchase and consume (Chen, 2007). PBC considers if the consumer perceives themselves being able to complete the intended behaviour (Krömker and Matthies, 2014).
- Moral attitude measures the favourable and unfavourable self-evaluations which arise from expected compliance with one's own moral principles (Yadav and Pathak, 2016).
- Intention measures a person's plan, decision and commitment to carry out an action and achieve a purchase goal (Gakobo and Jere, 2016).

Using this conceptual framework, the study reported below aimed to understand the barriers preventing actual organic produce purchase within a developing nation context. Recommendations for using creative communication to address the barriers could then be provided.

### 3. The study

The research was exploratory and qualitative in nature and aimed to determine barriers to organic food consumption in South

Africa. The sample for this study comprised participants who complied with the inclusion criteria which were that the participant was a non-user or infrequent consumer of organic food but someone who believed that there are benefits to consuming organic foods. Secondly, participants had to be the main food purchaser for the household. Snowball sampling was used. Snowball sampling is a non-probabilistic, non-random sampling technique which relies on the interviewer making initial contact with informants (Henryks and Pearson, 2013; Palys, 2008; Robinson, 2014). Snowball sampling is valuable to gain information concerning a relatively under-explored topic - such as barriers to organic purchases - where population members are difficult to locate (Venter, van der Merwe, de Beer, Kempen and Bosman, 2011). Participants for the current study were difficult to locate as the research topic needed participants who knew about the benefits of organic purchases but were not regular consumers of organic products.

The selection of participants was carried out in two stages. The initial participants (seed informants) were identified within the researchers' personal, family and professional networks using convenient sampling. The initial participants were chosen to include different ages, gender, income and background. Once data was collected from the seed informants, they were asked to provide contact details of possible participants meeting the inclusion criteria, thus ensuring a continuous referral chain of possible participants and the application of snowball sampling. The sample size for this study was planned to be 30, however at 25 participants data saturation was reached, as there was no new information that was extracted from participants. The study methodology and data collection tool were approved by the university's Research Office Ethics committee and all participants were informed of the nature of the research and that their participation was entirely voluntary. In line with the university ethics requirements all participants signed informed consent documents giving permission for their data to be used.

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were chosen as an appropriate data collection technique, as they allow two-way communication and the acquisition of understandings and perspectives (Venter et al., 2011). The semi-structured interview, according to Hancock et al. (2009), is an in-depth interview that is a discussion between the researcher and the participant instead of a closed-ended question and answer session. The qualitative data obtained from the interviews was recorded manually. Thereafter, transcribed scripts were sent to participants to check and confirm captured information and thus ensure credibility of data and the trustworthiness of this qualitative research (Wahyuni, 2012). As indicated by Venter et al. (2011), the transcripts were used to analyse data by means of inductive content analysis, stressing key words in each line. Similar statements were grouped by key words used by participants into concepts and themes and categorised according to relevant questions asked from interview guide. Emergent similar themes were grouped together in accordance with their relatedness which was determined on the basis of similar responses whose messages were of the same meaning (Wahyuni, 2012).

Participants were selected so as to include a variety of demographic and lifestyle variables were represented in the sample. Thus, included in the sample were at least one couple with young children (at least one preschool child); a couple with no children living at home; a household shopper with older children and a single person with no children living at home. This spread of participants was chosen in order to examine the relationship that these demographic factors may (or may not) have with organic purchaser perspectives (Henryks and Pearson, 2013).

The sample ranged between the ages of 20–29 and 50–59, with

70% of the participants being under the age of 40. The majority of participants (88%) were female. This gender bias was to be expected as a criterion for inclusion in the sample was that the participant was the primary purchaser of food products for the family, and in South Africa, this is most often the female. The sample included the main ethnic groups in South Africa with 56% being Black, 20% Indian, 20% White and 4% Coloured. All participants had achieved at least a school leaving certificate with 76% of participants having a post school qualification. As expected, the majority of participants (92%) were employed. A good range of incomes was represented in the sample. This research adds to the body of knowledge on green consumption by paying attention to barriers to organic consumption of adult consumers of South Africa.

#### 4. Findings

The emergent themes from the content analysis of the in-depth interview data revealed a number of key findings.

##### 4.1. Organic product buying behaviour

Although participants were screened for inclusion in the study by ensuring that their consumption of organic fresh produce was either infrequent or non-existent, to break the ice and settle the participants, and mostly to confirm their eligibility to participate in the study, participants were asked if they buy organic products, and if so, what types. The most common response was that participants do not regularly buy organic fresh produce, with some participants stating they buy organic produce occasionally as shown in Table 1 below.

Firstly, the study confirmed that although these participants believe in the benefits of consuming organic fresh produce, they do not regularly buy organic produce, with some participants not sure if they buy organic produce or not, due to unclear labelling of organic products. For participants who stated they purchase organic products occasionally, fruit and vegetables were mentioned as organic items bought, mostly at grocery shops.

##### 4.2. Reasons for non-purchase of organic products

As is evident in Table 2, the main reasons given for not purchasing organic produce were the high price of organic produce and the lack of clear labelling. Participants also felt organic produce was not always available.

The high price of organic produce was the most common reason given for not purchasing organic produce while the health benefits was the main reason given for purchasing organic produce. For example Participant 4 stated that,

*"I don't buy organic because they are expensive and are no better than conventional products".*

When probed, this participant said that he does not buy organic

**Table 1**

Organic Produce Purchasing Behaviour. The frequencies presented in the tables do not necessarily add to 25 as multiple themes surfaced in participants' responses to this question.

Type	Frequency	Percentage
I don't purchase organic	9	31%
Not sure if I buy organic or not, as there is no label	7	24%
Fruits and Vegetables	10	34%
Clothes	3	11%
<b>Total (N = 25)</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100%</b>

**Table 2**

Reasons for purchase and non-purchase of organic produce.

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Price	11	44%
Health benefits	8	32%
Labelling	2	8%
Availability	2	8%
No better than conventional	2	8%
<b>Total (N = 25)</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>

as organic produce is priced higher than conventional produce and yet he sees no benefit as organic is the same as conventional fresh produce. Thus, there seems to be a perception of greenwashing in that some consumers are not aware of organic benefits and believe organic produce is no better than conventional products.

##### 4.3. Attitudes

There were mixed attitudes about consuming organic foods with positive attitudes dominating as is evident in Table 3 below.

The positive attitudes towards organic products were related to health benefits and better care for the environment. The most common theme was 'healthy'; this indicates that participants associate consuming organic products with healthy living. This is a positive attitude that participants have about organic consumption. For example Participant 3 stated that,

*"I feel it is money well spent consuming a healthier product".*

The feeling participants have about organic products is that it is money well spent on health products, however, these participants stated that they do not buy organic products in the screening question.

These responses of positive attitudes towards organic products without intention to purchase organic represents an **attitude-behaviour gap**. While participants were recruited for their non-purchase of organic products and participants also stated they do not intend purchasing organic product, however, most participants had positive attitudes towards organic products.

There is an opportunity to overcome this attitudinal barrier by converting the positive attitude into an actual purchase decision through creative communication of the benefits of purchasing organic products.

The main negative attitude was related to the perception that organic products are a "prestige product for the rich". Thus the price of organic products represents a barrier to consumption.

##### 4.4. Social norms

There were participants who stated that *"it is a nice feeling to share beliefs with family; it shows that you belong"*. However, they stated that their families had not purchased or consumed organic produce so they also had not made that purchase decision. Participant 14 stated the following about the importance of consuming

**Table 3**

Attitudes towards organic products.

Theme	Frequency	Percentage
Healthy	15	60%
Prestige product for the rich	5	20%
Better care for environment	3	12%
No feelings	2	8%
<b>Total (N = 25)</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>100%</b>



organic the same way as friends and family,

*“yes [it is important] because we discuss food choices but we haven't discussed organic food choices and I like to do what my family does”.*

Thus, food choices were not independently made by the participant but were influenced by family and friends. Thus while social norms appear to influence these consumers' behaviour, the lack of behavioural norms to support organic consumption could well act as a barrier to organic purchase.

#### 4.5. Perceived behavioural control

Participants stated that availability of organic products where they shop was a personal barrier to organic purchase. Participant 25 stated that,

*“Even when I have money and wish to buy organic, I don't find it at [supermarkets and] organic shops where I can buy for my family”.*

Participant 7 also stated that,

*“organic products are not available where I shop for my family”.*

The availability of organic products where participants buy their monthly shopping was a perceived difficulty to organic purchase. Thus participants perceived there to be a lack of control over their ability to purchase organic produce.

## 5. Discussion of findings

### 5.1. Organic purchasing behaviour patterns

Findings confirmed that participants do not regularly purchase organic products though they know of organic purchase benefits as responses were from participants who never buy organic (64%) and from those who bought organic occasionally (36%). These results are similar to an observation by [Naidoo and Ramatsetse \(2016\)](#) who stated that irrespective of speedy growth and the forecasts of development in the organic food industry, sales of organic food in the South African food markets are comparatively low compared to other countries.

### 5.2. Consumer attitudes towards organic purchasing

This study's findings were that participants have generally positive attitudes towards organic purchasing. A favourable attitude to organic foods is a trigger and motivator for organic food purchases ([Teng and Wang, 2015](#)). The more consumers have concern about their health and environmental protection, the more probable it is that they have a positive attitude to organic foods and these attitudes significantly increase intention to purchase organic food ([Chen, 2007](#)). [Yadav and Pathak's \(2016\)](#) study in India amongst young consumers also found that attitude was significant in determining purchase intention. This was also confirmed by [Macovei's \(2015\)](#) research on predicting pro-environmental behaviour in Romania, which found that consumers had positive attitudes towards behaving in a pro-environment manner, which had in turn, a positive influence on their intention to behave in a pro-environmental manner.

However, attitude alone does not lead to action. Even when attitudes are favourable, consumers' actual purchases of organic food may remain low ([Pearson et al., 2013](#)). This behaviour is

referred to as attitude-behaviour gap ([Carrington et al., 2010](#)). The current study found evidence of the attitude-behaviour gap in this South African sample. There is thus an opportunity to overcome this attitudinal barrier by converting the positive attitude into an actual purchase decision by creative communication of the benefits of purchasing organic products.

### 5.3. Subjective norms and organic purchase behaviour

Literature states that subjective norms are a function of normative beliefs made up of expectations of individuals' reference group formed by their immediate social network, such as family, friends, colleagues or neighbours ([Macovei, 2015](#)). In the study by [Macovei \(2015\)](#) in Romania on applying the TPB in predicting pro-environmental behaviour, subjective norms had an insignificant effect on intention. Another study by [Yadav and Pathak \(2016\)](#) to investigate the consumer's intention to purchase organic food in India, also found subjective norm failed to show any significant influence on purchase intention and the author's concluded that buying organic food is yet to become a social norm in a developing nation such as India. In the current study while there is evidence of the existence of social influence in that the participants said they were influenced in food purchases by family and friends, the lack of purchase of organic produce by these key reference groups thus negatively affects organic produce purchasing. Thus, it seems that organic food is yet to become a social norm in South Africa as is the case in India.

### 5.4. Perceived behavioural control and organic purchasing

The findings reveal that there is also a perceived lack of control evident in the participants' responses which may well be a reason for their lack of organic purchasing. The study conducted by [Macovei \(2015\)](#) also found that PBC has an influence on behaviour, albeit weak. As perceived behavioural control measures the perception of difficulty or ease in purchasing decisions, the current study revealed that there is perceived lack of control in purchasing organic food products. The reason for the lack of control could be that organic food products are regarded as new products and South African consumers considers themselves as less self-confident and not in control ([Mhlophe, 2016](#)).

### 5.5. Environmental concern, health consciousness and moral attitude

Participants in this study generally cared about the environment, worried about their actions and thought that it is morally right to purchase organic products. Thus for most participants, moral attitude did not seem to be a barrier to organic purchase. Despite showing concern for the environment, their actions however, did not show belief that purchasing organic food is morally right. In the study conducted in India by [Yadav and Pathak \(2016\)](#), moral attitude had a profound impact as their findings suggest the importance of moral attitude in determining the consumer's organic food purchase intention in the Indian context thus indicating similarity to that of developed nations. This was also supported by a study conducted in Italy, Finland and United Kingdom, where moral attitude had considerable influence on intentions to purchase organic apples and pizza ([Arvola et al., 2008](#)). However, the current study showed high concern about the environment with mixed feelings on moral obligation of caring for the environment.

The study also showed that participants considered themselves health conscious but less than half believed organic food is healthier. However, they are environmentally conscious and

concerned as well as health conscious but the influence of these factors on organic purchasing behaviour appears limited. The participants' belief in organic not being healthier could be a reason for non-purchase of organic food products. In the study conducted by [Yadav and Pathak \(2016\)](#) in India, consumers were found to be conscious about their health and consider health as an important parameter while taking the decision to buy food products, like their developed nation counterparts.

## 6. The role of creative communication in addressing barriers to organic consumption

Given the findings of the above qualitative study on the barriers to organic consumption, the following discussion presents recommendations on how creative marketing communication can address some of the barriers identified.

### 6.1. Creative communication to educate consumers

The change from conventional to organic food purchasing is a function of consumer education and creative communication strategies play an important role in facilitating consumer learning. These communication strategies include advertising, storytelling, social media, formal education, digital media, social media, sales promotion and sponsorship.

Literature reveals that the change from conventional to organic foods has benefits of caring for the environment ([Chen, 2007](#)) leading to long-term value for people and the environment ([Yadav and Pathak, 2016](#)). Knowledge has been found to positively influence pro-environmental behaviour ([Vicente-Molina et al., 2013](#)) and specifically in relation to organic foods, good knowledge of organic foods tends to be associated with high behavioural intentions ([Teng and Wang, 2015](#)). [de Magistris and Gracia \(2008\)](#) claimed that increasing organic knowledge is crucial to enhancing organic food consumption, since knowledge of organic foods strongly influences consumer attitudes that directly determine decisions or intentions to buy organic foods.

The study discussed above involved participants who said that they understood what the benefits of organic food products were. However, their knowledge of the different benefits was limited. For example, many participants did not perceive organic produce as healthier. [Rogers \(2003\)](#) suggests that products will diffuse through society quicker and more easily if the relative advantages are clearly highlighted and communicated to consumers. Therefore, the benefits of organic consumption must be communicated to consumers by farmers and retailers of organic products, at the point of purchase and through advertising. This consumer education can assist consumers to make informed purchase decisions. [Rex and Baumann \(2007\)](#) stress that to achieve a real impact in terms of sustainability it is necessary to move beyond eco-labels that 'speak' to the green segment of consumers who are already looking for green products. These authors stress that other avenues of marketing communication are needed to address the needs of a wider range of consumers.

Marketers of organic produce at either farmer or retailer level, need to creatively communicate the benefits of their products over conventionally farmed products. As comparative advertising is not possible in South Africa, these marketers will need to be creative. Advertisements could for example, mention scientific tests done on organic produce that show the health benefits. This will assist in showing the relative advantage of organic produce improving diffusion rate ([Rogers, 2003](#)). At point of sale, information boards or pamphlets can be provided that educate consumers about the benefits to themselves and to the broader environment and society. Marketers must ensure that these are informative to reduce

complexity and clearly show the benefits of organic produce so as to improve diffusion ([Rogers, 2003](#)). Retailers can demarcate certain areas within their stores to sell organic produce and this will help to provide an area where informative posters can highlight the benefits of organic products. This will also address the barrier identified in the above study that participants were not always sure what produce was organic and what not, and whether organic produce was actually available in the stores they shop at.

Perceptions of organic produce being unnecessarily high priced and not worthy of the higher price also requires creative communication and consumer education by organic farmers. Consumers need to understand and appreciate the added costs involved in ensuring produce is organic and must feel that the added benefits of preserving their own health as well as that of the environment, warrant the additional cost to them. Again this supports [Rogers \(2003\)](#) recommendation to make clear the relative advantage to improve diffusion. The study findings revealed that many participants did not believe organic foods were healthier than alternatives. Participants who do not believe the benefits outweigh the costs are likely to be sceptical of the higher prices of organic products and thus price can become a barrier to consumption. Thus, as mentioned above, benefits of organic consumption need to be communicated to consumers so that they can appreciate that organic benefits outweigh the price thus facilitating the organic purchase decision. Storytelling about the organic farming process might help to build this consumer awareness as well as give consumers a mental image of the source of their organic produce.

Organic farmers can also look to collaborative strategies. For example, restaurants may be encouraged to develop special menu items that showcase organic produce. These dishes could be developed collaboratively between the restaurant and farmer or local organic farming association and then jointly communicated to target markets for both the farmer and the restaurant, that way broadening both organisation's target audience and communication reach.

While the above creative communication strategies may be useful to farmers and retailers to increase consumption of their produce, social marketing communication strategies could be aimed more broadly at behaviour change to more sustainable consumption behaviours. Social marketing applies marketing principles and practices to influence behaviours such that society as a whole benefits ([Kotler et al., 2002](#)). Thus, social marketing campaigns can build knowledge on the benefits of organic consumption for individuals, society and the environment. Organic farmers could get together and support an education campaign where each farmer provides a fact about the benefits of organically farmed produce on their produce labels. This would not only benefit them in terms of actual sales, but develop a greater general understanding of the benefits of organic produce for people and the environment thereby benefiting all the farmers and society as a whole.

These campaigns can also explain how members of society can have their own organic gardens at home and how these can benefit their families. To use creative communication to encourage this behaviour, for example, the local municipality might run a competition using a social media platform with photos of the organic fresh produce, for organic home farmers to showcase their organic fresh produce and perhaps a local organic farmer to evaluate the produce and give feedback to home producers. This could create hype around the concept of organic produce, building awareness of the benefits of organic products as well as encouraging everyone to do their bit towards sustainable consumption. In a country like South Africa with a friendly growing climate and many people owning at least a small garden, consumer contribution to growing their own food and doing so organically, can have

additional benefits of reducing the carbon footprint of transportation of fresh produce brought in from non-local destinations. This creative communication strategy might also help to build social norms for supporting organic produce. As discussed above, social norms were not found to be encouraging organic produce consumption amongst this South Africa sample and yet social norms can place pressure on individuals to behave in certain ways. Building such social norms could be beneficial for the organic produce industry but also the sustainability of the country.

Another creative communication strategy is rather than stressing the health benefit of organic food consumption, it might be more useful for South African food producers and distributors to start their 'social' marketing communication with addressing to the need and importance of peoples' joint action to solve the issues of environmental sustainability in society. For example, they can suggest their potential customers to build the mutual trust and sense of 'community', either smaller (local/regional or tribal) or larger (national or African), through participating in the 'socially good' action of organic produce consumption. By understanding what consumers place real value on, the marketer can focus communication of the relative advantage in that area of value for the consumer thus increasing organic produce adoption (Rogers, 2003).

Formal environmental education is also a way to communicate the benefits of organic consumption. While organic consumption is obviously just one aspect of environmental education, organic consumption lobbyists could communicate with the curriculum developers at school and tertiary education levels to inform the curriculum. This supports the recommendations by Zsóka et al. (2013) who state that environmental education needs to have a stronger focus on sustainable living and consumers' behaviours and should address various levels of knowledge and environmental consciousness.

There are various tools that marketers can use to communicate creatively with customers:

- Advertisements in mass media or above the line medium will assist in creating consumer awareness of organic benefits. The element of creativity may achieve better results as more consumers may be reached if creativity is implemented. Examples of creativity in advertising include using community role models as champions of the organic message. Advertising using traditional methods such as print media (newspapers and magazines) should be used. Since organic food is healthy and environmentally friendly, advertising of organic produce should also be included in health and environmental sustainability publications (Hughner et al., 2007; Naidoo and Ramatsetse, 2016).
- Digital media marketing can also assist as most consumers are online citizens, thus creative communication using digital communication media can assist in facilitating marketing communication. This recommendation is supported by Mhlophe (2016) who recommends that placing of advertisements on websites will create awareness amongst customers on organic products and also achieve customer education. Organic produce farmer and retailer websites should have a section specifically dedicated to organic produce and its benefits.
- A social media presence should be established through sites such as Facebook and Twitter. Because these social media platforms serve as forums where consumers discuss their lives, including their purchases and the items they like (Naidoo and Ramatsetse, 2016), these can be used to build awareness or an appreciation for the benefits of organic fresh produce.
- Sales promotion: retailers together with farmers can offer short term incentives to consumers to encourage trial of organic produce purchases (Kotler and Keller, 2012). The sales

promotion initiative can be creative such that it offers bundles to consumers that lead to discounting of other essential products, thereby allowing the consumer to experience organic products.

- Sponsorship: farmers and retailers can partner to sponsor related community projects thereby creating consumer awareness of organic products.

Integrated marketing communication (IMC) should be used. IMC is the use of a single message using various media instruments (Kotler and Keller, 2012). By insuring an accurate, honest and consistent message about the benefits of organic produce, South African consumers can become aware of benefits of taking care of the environment. Thus, consumer education can assist consumers to be better informed about organic benefits which might lead to purchase of organic products.

## 6.2. Playful creativity in communication of organic benefits

Playful individuals tend to be creative and tend to de-emphasize "needs" (Byun et al., 2017). This creativity increases their tolerance for ambiguity and makes them more open, flexible and accepting of alternative outcomes rather than being driven by an orderly preference (Byun et al., 2017). This study found that there were mixed attitudes about consuming organic foods and playful creativity tools can be used to increase consumer awareness of organic benefits thereby affecting attitudes of consumers regarding organic purchases.

There are numerous companies in the business of developing new products that have found the social and intellectual environment of their employees to have a marked effect on the degree to which they come up with new ideas (Bateson and Nettle, 2014). A common feature of the most creative and innovative organisations is that employees are less subject to heavy bureaucratic constraints (Bateson and Nettle, 2014). Therefore, marketing intermediaries that stock organic products can use playful tools to promote organic food awareness and purchasing. These playful tools may include

- **Lego building:** this includes playful use of children's building blocks and storytelling (Schulz et al., 2015). This can be an initiative done within South African tertiary institutions and corporate organisations where participants will be encouraged to express their understanding of sustainability using Lego bricks thereby instilling a playfulness culture while influencing consumer attitude towards organic purchasing and sustainable food choices.
- **Art based interventions:** communication of sustainability can be done in various ways such as music, acting and dancing thereby influencing consumers' attitudes using art based interventions (Schulz et al., 2017). This initiative can be done at various workplaces to promote sustainability awareness. Songs, jingles and any other form of music can be written, performed with new dances and acting stressing the importance of conserving of the environment thereby increasing communication of organic food benefits.
- **Simulations:** electronic simulations can be used to educate consumers on the damage we humans do to the environment. These simulations can amplify the benefits of recycling and taking care of our biodiversity and also amplify the importance of consuming organic and sustainable products in order to take care of the environment.

## 6.3. Creative organic produce labelling

The study reported above found that participants often failed to

identify organic products from conventional products. One reason for this failure may be the lack of a South African organic label. Eco-labelling is an important aspect of communication (Bratt et al., 2011) and the primary means traditionally used in positioning green products (Rex and Baumann, 2007). A study by Heyns et al. (2014) suggested a strong emphasis on certification and labelling certification credentials as a means of promoting or differentiating green products. Thus, an organic label in South Africa would assist consumers to be aware of organic produce and its benefits. This would need to be a national or at least industry initiative.

A controlled and consistent way of certifying products helps to build the reputation of environmentally friendly products (Scott and Vigar-Ellis, 2014) and would thus help to build the trust in consumers of the benefits of organic fresh produce. The development of a national organic produce certification scheme with accompanying eco-symbol, would go a long way to address many of the barriers to organic produce consumption. Single, widely known certification symbols have been found to be preferable to a proliferation of symbols (Hanss and Böhm, 2012). This would make organic produce easily and quickly recognisable and thus address the barrier found in the above study that consumers thought organic produce was not available and were not sure if they were consuming organic produce.

An establishment of an online platform with which all sustainability promoting organisations speak with one voice about the benefits of organic produce can be beneficial. This could involve the establishment of a website which could provide detailed information. It could also provide a clear and transparent way of assessing or authenticating organic claims, thus reducing consumer distrust as well as reducing the opportunities for greenwashing. Ultimately this certification body could also lobby government for stricter controls on harmful farming practices used by conventional farmers and possibly supportive government strategies such as subsidies for organic farming, thus fostering the entire industry and improving the national sustainability strategy.

Until such certification or uniform organic symbol is designed, individual fresh produce marketers need to ensure that their organic produce is clearly labelled to ensure not only that consumers know when produce is organic but also to communicate some of the benefits as discussed above. Labels should be bright and colourful to attract attention but also be factual so as not to be perceived as greenwashing. Farmers should develop, and then consistently apply their individual organic produce labels so as to build consumer recognition for these. Organic producers who choose not to use individual packaging may be able to provide retailers with labelled crates which contain loose fresh produce. These crates could then contain the necessary labelling. Shelving that provides a place to store informative pamphlets may also be used when individual packaging, and thus labelling, is not used. Retailers can also play a role in providing consistent labelling of organic produce.

## 7. Conclusions

This article aimed to present a better understanding of the barriers to organic consumption in a developing nation such as South Africa and to develop creative marketing communication strategies to overcome these. The South African consumers in the study reported in this paper generally have a positive attitude towards organic products yet they do not clearly understand or believe the benefits associated with consumption of organic produce. There appear not to be strong subjective norms influencing organic consumption. Many consumers were not convinced that organic produce is healthier nor that it is their moral obligation to buy organic products in order to save the environment. These

consumers perceive the organic purchase as a difficult decision largely beyond their control and price, availability and inability to recognise organic produce appear to be key barriers to purchasing.

However, to lead consumers to sustainable consumption, creative marketing communication activities have to be conducted. Marketing activities encouraging sustainable consumption include promoting a better quality of life of current consumers and future generations. Recommendations are made to farmers, retailers, the organic produce industry as well as government, on how to use creative communication strategies to overcome the barriers to organic purchases in South Africa. As such this paper makes both a theoretical and a practical contribution. Extension of the existing theoretical models provides rich grounds for theory testing in future research.

As with most studies, there were some limitations. A methodological limitation in this study was the use of convenience and snowball sampling that does not permit generalisation to the entire population. This sampling decision did however fit the research design which sought to explore and better understand barriers to organic consumption in a sample of South African consumers through in-depth discussions. The sample was also drawn from seed participants from one city and it is possible that participants in other, bigger cities where possibly more organic products are sold, may have had different views and should be studied further. Another possible limitation was that due to the snowball sampling method used, the researcher and some participants had a common person that linked them. This could result in socially desirable answers as participants would want to answer questions and appear to know the subject since their friend or network had referred the researcher to them. However, the existence of negative responses to questions about attitude, intentions, subjective norms, moral attitude etc. by a fair number of participants, up to half the participants in some cases, seems to indicate that this was not too great a problem.

As this research sought to understand the barriers to organic consumption, future research could apply a quantitative approach and seek to quantify the relative impact of the different variables on intention and purchasing behaviour of organic produce. Finally as this research proposes the addition of various variables that affect organic produce purchasing and thus an extension to existing models of environmentally friendly behaviour, the theoretical contribution made through the conceptual framework should be tested empirically through future quantitative research.

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