

Organic food consumption at casual and fine dining restaurants in the UK: Restaurant managers' perspectives

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ABSTRACT

Keywords:

Organic food consumption,
Casual dining,
Fine dining,
Model of diners' organic food
consumption behavior.

This research explores the phenomenon of organic food consumption in UK restaurants from restaurant managers' perspectives. The research collected primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected from restaurant managers and secondary data was collected from restaurant websites, menus and social media platforms. Twelve semi-structured interviews were carried out with restaurant managers in London. Thematic analysis and content analysis were adopted to analyze the qualitative data. Findings: From the viewpoints of restaurant managers, there is a growing organic dining trend and rising consumer demand for organic. The trend towards organic food consumption in UK restaurants is influenced by a number of substantial factors. Consumer health concerns and prices were identified as significant factors influencing diners' behavior towards organic food in restaurants. Media coverage of the benefits of organic food, including taste and quality, are key influencing factors. Restaurant operations including social media engagement, and availability of organic and labelling practices are important determinants. These factors were all identified as significant in terms of understanding diners' organic consumption behavior in restaurants. Being one of the first attempts to explore the factors influencing organic consumption behavior in restaurants in the UK from the perspective of restaurant managers

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1. Introduction


The term hospitality can be defined as the provision of food, drink, and accommodation in a way that forges bonds between those who participate in it (Jayawardena, Wijesundara, & Herath, 2022). According to Gössling (2018), food has a significant role in tourist activation for a destination, and among other things, culinary culture in the hospitality sector is impacted by production of organic food. Organic food is defined as being produced through a farming system that avoids using synthetic chemicals and aligns with organic standards to accomplish the primary aims of sustainability, which are social, economic, and environmental (Pang, Tan, & Lau, 2021). People nowadays are more aware of the health aspects of their diets. They choose to eat healthier and because of this, consumers look for satisfying meals which are low calorie, low fat, high in nutrients and tasty. Due to the increase in awareness and knowledge about healthy food, the consumption and popularity of organic and locally produced food has grown exponentially (Frash Jr, DiPietro, & Smith, 2015; Jang, Kim, & Bonn, 2011; Namkung & Jang, 2013; NRA, 2015). Organic food represents a food segment that motivates consumers to have a healthier life style compared to conventional food (Dević-Blanuša, Kalenjuk, & Gagić, 2017). Hence, consumers could have different perceptions

of organic food to conventional ones. Moreover, different marketing strategies can be implemented by restaurant managers to increase organic food consumption in the restaurant industry through creating a positive influence on the growth of a sustainable environment (Teng & Wang, 2015).

The organic food market has expanded dramatically in recent years to become one of the fastest growing global markets in the food industry, particularly in Western nations (Agovino et al., 2017; Marian et al., 2014). Across the globe, organic food consumption has become a leading food trend (De Toni et al., 2018; USDA, 2015). According to the Global Organic Market Forecast (2012-2017, 2021), the organic food market has demonstrated a significant growth in the last two decades. The global market share of organic food and beverages reached 80 billion USD and the growth rate of the organic food market is predicted to reach over 16% from 2015 to 2020 (Mathews, 2020-2017). Germany, the UK, Denmark, Italy, and Austria are the leading countries in terms of trends in eating organically (Poulston & Yiu, 2011) and, with the rise of consumers' interests in natural, organic and locally produced food, consumers tend to seek more local food and organic food in restaurants and are willing to pay more for it (Harvey, 2021b).

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Research Paper



Organic food consumption has boomed in recent years in the UK. People have begun to cook at home more and higher quality food is sought by consumers, which is also one of the main reasons for an increase in organic food consumption (Harvey, 2021a). Consumer interest in matters such as food safety, nutrition, provenance and health and authenticity is increasing, not only when consumers cook in their own homes but also when they eat out (Everett & Aitchison, 2008). Organic food consumption in restaurants is mainly driven by consumers' safety, health and environmental awareness (Wijesinghe & Nazreen, 2020). For example, research conducted to understand young organic food consumers' attitudes and behavior in the UK and Poland showed that green consumption consciousness is significantly stronger among young British people, and they have higher environmental attitude intensity than Polish consumers. A stronger pro-environmental attitude is more likely to result in a person selecting organic food (Kowalska et al., 2021). There has been a significant rise in sales of organic produce to the dining industry with high street restaurants introducing organic options on their menus to customers looking for sustainable options. As a result, the number of cafés and restaurants that have joined the "the organic served here" award scheme has increased (Crichton, 2019; Organicgrowersalliance, 2021).

In line with this trend, such substantial growth has attracted many scholars to explore the underpinning factors affecting diners' behavior towards consuming organic food (Lu & Gursoy, 2017; Shin et al., 2019). The general panorama of the literature on organic food can be briefly summarised by two points. First, research investigating organic food overly concentrates on consumers' purchasing of organic food and produce through shopping (Bruschi et al., 2015; Grzybowska-Brzezinska et al., 2017; Hossain & Lim, 2016; Petrescu et al., 2017). This strand of literature identifies factors influencing the purchasing of organic food such as environmental awareness, increasing health consciousness, genetically modified organisms and the non-natural substances used to increase productivity in agricultural production (Aertsens et al., 2011; Honkanen, Verplanken, & Olsen, 2006). However, such studies neglect other forms of organic food consumption in the restaurant industry. Therefore, the area of organic food consumption in restaurants has a significant research gap. Second, the limited research on organic food consumption in restaurants (e.g. Filimonau & Grant, 2017; Poulston & Yiu, 2011) focuses on the managerial and business sides of the organic consumption trend. For example, conducting 12 interviews with restaurant managers in the UK, Filimonau and Grant (2017) investigated the feasibility and practical requirements of organic dining, while Poulston and Yiu (2011) carried out interviews with five restaurant managers to understand whether their major managerial motivations were profit or principle. Although many studies have been conducted on organic food consumption behavior in different contexts, there is still a lack of

research on diners' organic food consumption behavior from the supply perspective, which constitutes a gap in the literature that needs to be filled. Due to a lack of knowledge in relation to organic food consumption behavior in restaurants, especially in the UK context, such an empirical gap needs to be filled. Therefore, this research explores the phenomenon of organic consumption from the perspectives of restaurateurs in causal and fine dining restaurants in London in the UK.

This paper is structured as follows: Section 2 provides a critical review of literature sources underpinning this research, including organic food consumption and influential factors. Section 3 explains and justifies the data collection and analysis techniques used in this research. Section 4 presents and discusses findings in relation to existing literature. It also proposes a conceptual framework which explains the factors influencing organic consumption in restaurants, based on the themes identified from the data. Section 5 summarizes key findings and discusses relevant implications. Limitations and future research plans are also explained.

2. Literature Review

Organic Food Consumption: Demand and Supply Perspective

Across the globe, organic food consumption has become a leading food trend (De Toni et al., 2018; USDA, 2015). Due to beneficial health impacts, nutrient content, and a lack of artificial substances used in the food production process (Jongmans et al., 2019; Rana & Paul, 2020; Rohman et al., 2020; Wojciechowska-Solis & Barska, 2021), consumption of organic food has become more popular among consumers wishing to avoid unhealthy food practices (Lian, 2017). As a result, the organic food market has grown significantly in recent years and has become one of the fastest growing markets in the food industry, particularly in Western countries (Agovino et al., 2017; Marian et al., 2014). In the UK context, the organic market has experienced the highest year-on-year growth in 15 years and its value reached £2.79 billion with 12.6% growth in 2021 (SoilAssociation, 2022). Also, there has been a significant growing demand for organic food across all areas, including supermarkets, home delivery, food services and independent retail. Sales of organic in the food service industry rose 8.3% thanks to high street chains including Pret a Manger, McDonald's and Wetherspoons now offering more organic milk and snacks to their customers (SoilAssociation, 2020). The Soil Association's 2018 survey indicated that 43% of consumers considered restaurants or cafés that offered organic items to be better than alternatives (Crichton, 2019).

One of the fastest growing gastronomic movements has been organic food in the restaurant industry. Seventy-one percent of fine dining restaurants now offer their customers organically grown or environmentally sustainable food (NRA, 2016). The growth of organic food consumption has

been driven by restaurant managers' desire to meet diners' needs and desires in relation to organic food. These motivations include not only the symbolic value of serving organic food but also the practical benefits of serving healthy ingredients (Wu, Cheng, & Ai, 2019). For example, it is reported that quick service restaurants providing organic options have a greater advantage in regard to perceived food quality, attitudes towards the restaurant, and willingness to choose in comparison to casual and fine dining restaurants (Lu & Gursoy, 2017). Konuk (2019) emphasized that restaurants take advantage of serving organic food to differentiate themselves from their competitors by providing health claims. Furthermore, restaurant managers are serving organic food to increase customer loyalty, achieve better sales performance and increase return business in restaurants incorporating green practices. Having organic items on menus boosts companies' images of green practices and being socially responsible operators (Shin & Mattila, 2019). Serving organic food enable restaurants to make profit from their business ethics and the gastronomic experiences of clients (Filimonau and Grant (2017).

To summarize, organic dining is a growing and promising food trend across many countries. The demand for organic food is also exponentially growing in the food market. Consumers can reach not only a wide range of organic options in their food shopping but also more options when dining out. The UK organic food market has experienced significant growth in recent years which means UK consumers pay more attention to organic food (SoilAssociation, 2022).

Factors Influencing Organic Food Consumption

In previous literature, scholars investigating organic food consumption have highlighted a number of different dynamics influencing diners' motivations towards organic food. For example, researchers have found correlations between organic food consumption behavior and the health consciousness of customers (Anisimova, 2016; Basha & Lal, 2019; Hansen, Sørensen, & Eriksen, 2018; Shin & Mattila, 2019). Rising health awareness is one of the most common reasons shaping diners' organic consumption behavior (Bonn, Cronin Jr, & Cho, 2016; Rana & Paul, 2017; Shin et al., 2018). Accordingly, health plays a significant role on choice of organic food.

The taste and quality of organic produce are also significant factors. Organic foods are perceived to be cultivated by avoiding unnatural fertilisers and pesticides (Shepherd, Magnusson, & Sjöden, 2005) and due to chemical-free production, consumers consider organic food to be tastier than its conventional counterparts. Studies have found that consumers are mainly driven towards organic food by its taste (Asioli et al., 2017; Lockie et al., 2004; McEachern & McClean, 2002; Petrescu et al., 2017). Quality of food is one of the primary factors affecting the choice of restaurant (Bonn, Cronin Jr, & Cho, 2016; Dolezalová et al., 2016; Frash Jr, DiPietro, & Smith,

2015; Rana & Paul, 2017; Saleki & Seyedaleki, 2012). Organic food is perceived as a high-quality product (Bruschi et al., 2015). Organic ingredients can also connote a high-quality product and superior features (Bruschi et al., 2015). Accordingly, taste and quality have a significant influence on consumption behavior in terms of organic food.

Literature further reveals competing findings regarding the price of organic food, and the impact this has on purchasing behavior. Some studies have found that certified organic food is more expensive than conventional food (Magnusson et al., 2001; Vindigni, Janssen, & Jager, 2002), which generally deters potential consumers from buying organic and is seen as a major limiting factor in the purchase of organic food (D'Souza, Taghian, & Lamb, 2006; Mauracher, Procidano, & Valentini, 2019; Petrescu et al., 2017). Consumers have been found to be unwilling to pay a price premium for organic (Pilelienė & Tamulienė, 2021). However, other studies (e.g. Filimonau & Grant, 2017; Smith, Huang, & Lin, 2009) found the effect of price on the consumption of organic food was limited since customers tended to acknowledge the lower yield and higher production costs of organic produce (Hossain & Lim, 2016; Kim, Suwunnamek, & Toyoda, 2008). Several studies focused on the process of buying and consuming organic food stress the link between knowledge of organic food and consumption behavior (Li & Jaharuddin, 2021). Knowledge of organic food is thus another significant factor effecting organic food consumption behavior. More recent studies have pointed out that consumers' buying attitude towards organic food is significantly stimulated by information and knowledge about organic produce (Kim & Bonn, 2015; McClure & Seock, 2020; Teng & Wang, 2015; Xie et al., 2015). Accordingly, knowledge has an influence on organic food choice. The above discussion shows that the existing literature involves a cluster of different factors impacting organic food consumption behavior. Organic consumption behavior is mainly driven by the following factors: health, taste, quality, price and availability of organic.

3. Methodology

This research used qualitative methods to address the research aim which is necessary to obtain accurate and deep knowledge, opinions, and experiences of managers in relation to diners' demand for organic food in restaurants. This research collected primary and secondary data to explore organic food consumption behavior in restaurants in London. The reason for choosing London is that it is the biggest and most crowded city in England, with over 3,000 restaurants, and the number of casual and fine dining restaurants is high (Statistic, 2020). Purposive sampling in which potential participants are chosen on the basis of some criteria was employed (Dudovskiy, 2016). Purposive sampling method enabled this research to recruit managers who had a long-standing interest and were actively involved in the organic dining sector. To identify a research

Table 1. Profile of the interviewees

Participants	Type of business	Size	Position	Managerial work experience	Gender
Participant 1	Fine dining	21	Owner	7 years	Male
Participant 2	Casual dining	12	Owner	2 years	Female
Participant 3	Fine dining	40	Owner	5 years	Male
Participant 4	Casual dining	10	Owner	4 years	Male
Participant 5	Casual dining	15	Owner	2 years	Male
Participant 6	Fine dining	17	Owner	3,5 years	Female
Participant 7	Casual dining	20	Owner	15 years	Male
Participant 8	Fine dining	35	Owner	17 years	Male
Participant 9	Fine dining	45	Owner	20 years	Male
Participant 10	Casual dining	18	Owner	6 years	Male
Participant 11	Fine dining	38	Manager	9 years	Female
Participant 12	Casual dining	14	Owner	2 years	Male

Source: Elaborated by Authors

sample, five different criteria were selected: mission statement, advertising campaign, social media engagement, menu labelling, and food ingredients. Then, restaurant menu structures, food ingredients, advertising campaigns and mission statements were checked to see if they indicated a commitment to organic food. For primary data collection, semi-structured, face-to-face interviews were used because of the effectiveness of this technique in gathering data about ‘people’s knowledge, views, understandings, and interactions’ (Mason, 2002: 63). Twelve semi-structured interviews were conducted with six casual and six fine dining restaurant managers in London. The size of the sample for the number of interviews was not set for this research prior to data collection. However, after conducting twelve interviews, the researcher decided that data saturation had been achieved.

An interview guide was used for the semi-structured interviews that was designed by adapting questions from previously identified themes in the literature (Chen, 2010; Frash Jr, DiPietro, & Smith, 2015; Holmes et al., 2018; Jimenez-Chavez, Connors, & Josiam, 2016; Poulston & Yiu, 2011). The thematically designed interview guide first focused on details about the restaurant, followed by the theme of organic dining trends in the UK. After that, different topics related to reasons why diners prefer organic food in restaurants were elaborated. Finally, the implications of the organic dining trend on the industry and restaurateurs’ views about how diners decide to consume organic in restaurants were discussed. Instead of sticking with the interview guide, the researcher regarded it as a guideline since semi-structured interviews are context-driven conversations with a purpose (Burgess, 1984). Also, secondary data was collected through the restaurant’s websites, related menus and social media platforms. Restaurant menu structures, ingredients, advertising campaigns and mission statements were reviewed to see if they indicated a commitment to organic food products.

Since multiple modes of data were collected, two different data analysis stages were conducted. First, the content on the restaurant websites was analyzed. Content analysis is a tool to investigate any document or communication

artefacts with the help of some pre-set categories and criteria. These ‘units of analyses’ according to Bryman (2016), are ‘used as guides to the kinds of objects that might be the focus of attention’ (p.295). Five different criteria were determined in order to evaluate the restaurant’s engagement with organic food: mission statement, advertising campaign, social media engagement, menu labelling, and ingredients. Through content analysis, restaurant websites were systematically evaluated to identify a restaurant’s engagement with organic food.

Thematic analysis was used for the analysis of qualitative data from the interviews. After the interviews, digitally recorded interviews were translated into text. Then all the data was organized in a systematic way to generate initial codes. In this way, lots of data was reduced into smaller and more meaningful data packets. Following the generation of preliminary themes, the researcher characterized the themes classified in the data into emerging titles and themes. Finally, all analyzed data were verified against the aim of the research to establish an association between the different themes and research questions.

4. Findings and Discussion

Profile of Interviewees

Table 1 shows the details of the research participants, including the type and size (number of covers) of the business; managerial position and work experience of the participants.

Each interview lasted approximately half an hour. The sample range of the research enabled the researchers to explore diverse contexts. The experience of restaurateurs varied between 2 to 20 years while 9 participants were male and 3 females. Similarly, the size of the restaurants varied from 12 to 45 covers, and restaurateurs’ experiences ranged from two to 20 years in the organic dining sector.

Organic Food Consumption Trend and Diners' Demand for Organic Food in Restaurants from the Perspective of Casual and Fine Dining Restaurant Managers

This research aims to explore phenomenon of organic consumption from the perspectives of restaurateurs. Hence, it is important to identify whether there was a demand for organic food in London's casual and fine dining restaurants. The data illustrated a strong emphasis on the idea that organic dining is currently on trend in the restaurant industry. Most participants agreed that there was a growing trend of organic food in the restaurant industry.

All right. There's a trend/movement towards providing or incorporating organic foods, super foods into the recipes. Obviously, the products we are using, there is a demand for it. So, within the restaurant industry, they want to supply the demand for, I mean, more and more restaurants are starting to incorporate organic produce into their kitchens. There was great demand for it. And people are becoming more aware of where they're sourcing their products from (Participant 8).

This data is consistent with other recent findings which argue that there is an exponentially growing interest in organic and local produce because people are more conscious and have more knowledge about the health implications of organic food (Frash Jr, DiPietro, & Smith, 2015; Jang, Kim, & Bonn, 2011; Namkung & Jang, 2013; NRA, 2015). Also, the number of restaurants that adopt organic ingredients in their menus is increasing (BHR, 2015).

Two different sub-themes regarding how consumers perceive organic food emerged from the data: most participants agreed that customers were curious about the provenance of their food when making decisions regarding their organic food consumption. However, five of 12 interviewees stated that their customers did not tend to consider the nature and process of their food while deciding whether to engage in organic food consumption. Therefore, it appears that customers can be divided into two in terms of their engagement with organic food. Seven of 12 participants strongly emphasized that they usually wanted to know how food was produced, and what it contains, and associate organic food with a typical healthy diet:

A lot of people are on the healthier side of foods. So when people see a new restaurant open and when they see the 'organic' sign they always come in and ask questions "What do you do? What type of food are you doing? What are you using?" After these questions they automatically tend to think that this food is pretty much healthy because of being organic and the way it is cooked (Participant 6).

This finding is consistent with other research arguing that consumers look for and select healthy food options considering the remarkable rise in consumers' health consciousness and the exponential grown in popularity of organic and local produce food (DiPietro & Gregory, 2013;

Frash Jr, DiPietro, & Smith, 2015; Namkung & Jang, 2013). The data generated by this research also underlines that consumers tend to affiliate organic with the idea of being healthy and good for the body. Customers' awareness and curiosity about organic food appears as a salient theme in the analysis. Restaurant managers also said that they frequently observe such types of behaviors from consumers:

They're like, you know, they keep digging the questions and they keep asking the questions where the food come from and what kind of processes the food is exposed to (Participant 11).

This argument seems to confirm the findings of Mintel (2015) in which consumers are characterized by a sincere desire to question and understand the food production process.

On the other hand, five out of 10 participants agreed that some consumers do not tend to consider whether food is organic or not while making their decisions. As such, a clear emphasis emerges that not all customers tend to care whether the food is organic or not; some of the restaurateurs observed no special interest from their customers in organic products:

I'm telling you no one cares if the product is organic. It's very strange, you would think that people... Only one person has ever cared, and he was a consultant for me. No customer has ever once said "I love coming here 'cause the food's organic"... Trust me, people don't really care much. I wish they did but they don't (Participant 5).

In a similar vein, another participant said that some consumers do not have any special awareness towards organic products:

I would say to a certain extent only... because when they book for an evening out, they do not usually look if they are doing organic product or not (Participant 1).

Therefore, it appears from the analyses of the data that there is a significant trend of being interested in the nature of the product – whether it is organic or not – and being curious about how the product is cooked and served. However, unlike previous studies (Filimonau & Grant, 2017; Poulston & Yiu, 2011), which found that there is a growing consumer awareness about what they eat, what the product is and where it comes from, it can be said that this trend of being aware of the food and cooking process is not generalizable to all consumers. Some restaurateurs observed that some consumers do not have any curiosity about the provenance of their food while others stressed an extensive interest among customers towards organic food.

Influential Factors

Restaurant managers were asked about factors influencing organic food consumption in their restaurants. A range of factors were identified, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2.: Main emerging themes and codes

Main emerging themes	Main code
Influencing factors to consume organic	Avoiding pesticides No hormones and artificial additives
Health concern	GMO free
Taste of organic	Superior taste Better flavour
Quality of organic	Higher quality
Media	TV shows Publications
Social media engagement	Radio news Facebook Instagram
Price of organic	Higher price
Availability of organic	On restaurant menu
Labelling on the menu	Description of the product Emphasizing ingredients Informing customers

Source: Elaborated by Authors

Health Concerns

The data arising from this research suggests that health concerns are a significant factor when choosing organic food in restaurant: because the products that are out in the market at the moment, especially with people coming in with more sort of health issues like lactose intolerance, everyone's trying to protect their health and be careful about what they're eating because of, obviously, weight gains and stuff like that as well (Participant 3).

This finding is consistent with a number of studies in the literature emphasizing that health has an important influence on consumers' organic buying behavior (Anisimova, 2016; Basha, 2014; Chen, 2009; Hall & Gössling, 2013; Hansen, Sørensen, & Eriksen, 2018). Participants stressed that health is a strong antecedent of diners' organic food consumption behaviors in restaurants:

When I say organic it is understood as healthy and when I announced health and mention about healthy eating, I guess, my customers can more understand why organic is the best option. Because they give importance to health. Health and healthier are the words which are more important for people (Participant 2).

Therefore, the data confirms previous findings that argue that health is a significant factor influencing consumers' choices (Anisimova, 2016; Hansen, Sørensen, & Eriksen, 2018; Lian, 2017).

Media Coverage of Benefits

- **Taste. The taste food is also portrayed as a significant factor shaping diners' organic food consumption in restaurants:**

For most of the customers, taste is of top priority. They believe that because our burgers are produced organically and cooked in a really good way, they say that the flavour is way better than the non-organic ones. This is not just my opinion, we are getting so many good comments about the taste, they appreciate it (Participant 10).

This finding confirms research which argues that diners regard organic food as superior in terms of taste and flavour (Hoppe, Vieira, & Barcellos, 2013). Restaurant managers stated that their customers regard organic food as being tastier and more flavorsome; this corroborates earlier findings in literature (Lockie et al., 2004; Lyons, Lockie, & Lawrence, 2001; McEachern & Mcclean, 2002; Price et al., 2016; Radman, 2005).

- **Quality. The quality of organic food is an important factor for diners. Data suggests that diners often affiliate organic food with higher quality:**

I would say people believe that organically grown definitely does affect the quality of the product. Because they say there are no chemicals hormones artificial additives something like that (Participant 11).

This research found that customers regard dishes made using organic food as being of higher quality, which plays a role in customers' consumption behaviors of organic food in restaurants:

Customers also know the difference, I mean, the difference in quality. Especially some of them, they know that organic dishes are of more quality. (Participant 10).

The above results are consistent with research which found that customers regard dishes made using organic food as being higher in quality (Bonn, Cronin Jr, & Cho, 2016; Dolezalová et al., 2016; Rana & Paul, 2017).

- **Media. Media is another notable dimension of diners' intentions towards consuming organic food. In this regard, some restaurateurs emphasized that media could shape customer behavior:**

I would say mainly publications... People can easily be scared from some food or scared from the other factors. So, what they publicize to people, they just believe it. They just read about some articles, some publication or some radio news or something on the TV (Participant 4).

This finding clearly echoes the findings of Pham et al. (2018) which show that the media manipulates the attitudes of customers in regards to the consumption of organic food in restaurants. Participant 10 gives the example of TV shows in raising the awareness of diners about organic food consumption:

We have a television programme, you may also know that, chefs are having competition. You know, chefs are in the contest of cooking the best meal. I believe this type of programs get the attention of the people. Before that program, people didn't pay attention to what they are eating, and they didn't know how they cook it (Participant 10).

The example of TV cookery shows was also highlighted by research conducted by Ramsden (2014). Thus, in congruence with the earlier literature, the programmes and shows in the media industry were found to be a factor

Table 3: Details of restaurants’ involvement in organic food

Restaurant	Mission statement	Advertising campaigns	Social media engagement	Menu labelling	Food ingredients
Restaurant 1	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Restaurant 2	Yes	No	No	No	Yes
Restaurant 3	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Restaurant 4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Restaurant 5	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes
Restaurant 6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Restaurant 7	No	No	No	Yes	Yes
Restaurant 8	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Restaurant 9	No	No	Yes	No	Yes
Restaurant 10	No	Yes	No	Yes	Yes
Restaurant 11	No	Yes	No	No	Yes
Restaurant 12	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

Source: Elaborated by Authors

shaping diners’ attitude towards what and how to consume organic good (Filimonau & Grant, 2017).

Price

Price appears as a determining factor in diners’ choices of organic consumption. However, restaurateurs stated that while some customers are willing to pay a price premium for organic menu items, others tend to be reluctant. This research found that price constitutes one of the major dimensions of diners’ choices (according to 10/12 interviewees). Participant 6 stated that ‘a lot of people really look at their pocket as well as their health’ while Participant 3 summed up the significance of price by saying ‘because at the end of the day, everything is money’. However, the results of the analysis of whether customers are willing to pay a premium price are divided: while some customers do not mind paying extra for organic food, others may be unwilling to pay a premium.

Organic food is more expensive. At the beginning people were not willing to pay more for the organic food. It took time to get my customers loyalty. But now my customers know what we are doing and what come involve and they know the differences of our products in terms of quality taste and smell (Participant 2).

The above findings accord with research which indicated that diners accept the need to pay extra for organic food (Batte et al., 2007; Duffort, 2006; Filimonau & Grant, 2017; Hossain & Lim, 2016). However, a sub-theme which shows that some diners are reluctant to pay extra price to organic food also emerged out of the data:

we get a lot of negative reviews about the price... honestly, I can tell you up front I don’t think I’ve seen a single review of someone who wants to even thank me and that has really hurt me because people don’t want to pay that money (Participant 5).

These results confirm literature findings which show price as a barrier to consumption of organic food (Brown & Sperow, 2005; Duffort, 2006). As such, the relatively high prices can play a restrictive role in consuming organic food (Petrescu et al., 2017). Therefore, the influence of price as a factor in determining organic food consumption can be

dependent upon the type of diners. Participant 4 underlined this difference:

Most of my customers are not willing to pay extra, in general. It's very limited number of people, I believe, I truly believe that in catering industry, not the huge number of people, but then a very limited number of people, they are happy to pay a premium price for organic food. Price sensitivity is quite high (Participant 4).

This agrees with the research of Filimonau and Grant (2017) and Duffort (2006) who underlined that, according to restaurateurs, socio-demographic factors such as the financial situation of customers play a determining role in how much effect the price of food has on diners’ organic food consumption behavior in restaurants.

Restaurant Operation

The secondary data was collected through restaurant websites to identify their involvement in organic food. The table below shows the results of the content analysis.

Although a majority of restaurants do not define serving organic food as their mission statement, most highlight organic ingredients in their advertising campaigns. Five participants posted information about their organic ingredients through social media. Even though all participants used organic ingredients in their businesses, three of the restaurants did not label their organic ingredients on their menus.

- **Social Media Engagement.** One of the most intriguing, yet also significant, factors arising from the data is that restaurant managers believe social media platforms play a crucial role in diners’ organic consumption behavior s. Participants 6 summarised the importance of social media as:

We advertise it all on Facebook... Instagram, we’ve got quite big pages on things like that, so people know it in that way... if customers see something that’s worth them coming for, either vegan food, vegetarian food, or even organic food – it’s all basically there on the Internet (Participant 6).

Thus, social media engagement emerged as a notable sub-theme of the factors influencing diners’ behavior towards organic consumption in restaurant. The significance of

social media platforms in shaping diners' behavior towards organic food was not identified in the previous literature.

• **Availability of Organic Food.** The availability of organic food is also a crucial element that shapes customers' organic food consumption (mentioned by 10/12 restaurant managers):

people know where they're going to find the best item, best product. People are looking for the best organic product, healthy product. When it's available, of course, they want to have it (Participant 11).

This finding supports previous results in the literature, which argues that the availability of organic food can have an impact upon customers' attitudes towards whether they consume organic food (Boccaletti & Nardella, 2000; Fotopoulos & Krystallis, 2002; Mhlopho, 2015).

• **Labelling.** One of the most striking themes that emerged from the data is the impact of labelling on customers' behavior around organic food. Many participants underlined that labelling items as 'organic' on the menu has a substantial influence on preference for organic food in restaurants:

if you are using organic you need to emphasize on that [the menu] and you need to let people know what it is... (Participant 1).

Therefore, participants emphasized that seeing the label 'organic' on the menu can lead diners to have positive connotations about the food, such as it being healthy and tastier, which can influence behavior. Some interviewees argued that the visual effect of seeing the organic label can shape diners' choices:

when our guests come and read the menu and we inform them by writing that we serve organic chicken or organic tomatoes. Organic heritage tomatoes... when they see them on the menu that by itself. This does make a big difference before they taste it (Participant 8).

Overall, the significance of labelling was accentuated by participants, however, it has drawn little attention in the literature (although see Hwang & Ok, 2013; Jimenez-Chavez, Connors, & Josiam, 2016).

A Conceptual Framework to Understand Organic Food Consumption in Restaurants

This research explores the phenomenon of organic food consumption in UK restaurants from the perspective of restaurant managers. The findings show the demand for organic food in restaurants. Various factors influencing diners' organic food consumption behavior were revealed during the interviews: health, taste, quality, labelling, availability, media, and social media engagement. Based on the findings, this research proposes a model which illuminates the understanding of organic food consumption behavior. The proposed model uses four different aspects of organic consumption behavior: restaurant operation, media coverage of the benefits of organic food, diners' motivation, and the price of organic food. A proposed conceptual framework (Figure 1) is based on the research findings.

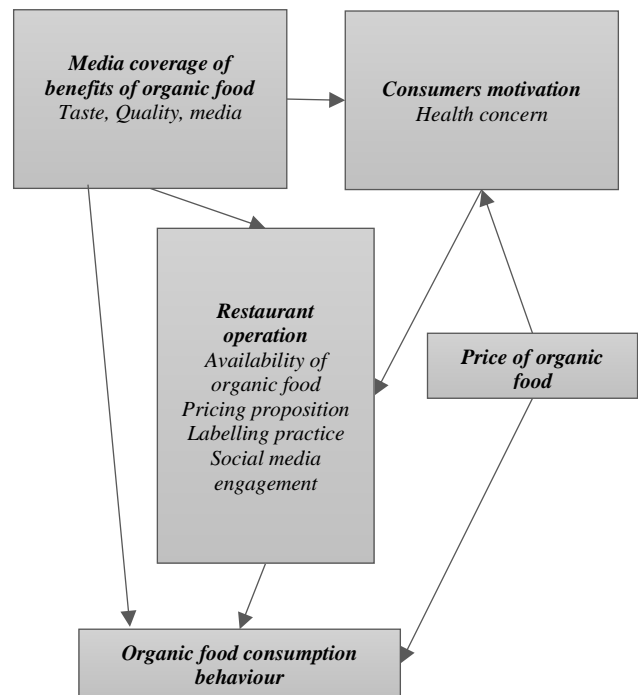


Figure 1. Proposed conceptual model of organic food consumption behavior in restaurants

According to the model, media coverage of the benefits of organic food has a direct impact on restaurant operation, diners' concerns and organic food consumption behavior. Restaurant operations such as labelling practices, availability of organic food, social media engagement and diners' concerns are influenced by the coverage of the benefits of organic food in the media. Based on the findings, health concerns are a key deciding factor in the consumption of organic food. However, the price of organic food appears as a moderator between diners' concerns and the actual organic food consumption behavior of diners. That is, the price of organic food plays a determining role between diners' concerns and organic food consumption behavior.

5. Conclusions and Implications

Recently, the restaurant industry has experienced significant growth. Casual and fine dining restaurant segments could appeal to a diverse range of diners. In recent years, it has been seen that consumers not only follow trends of consuming organic food at home but they have also begun to consume organic food when dining out. This research explores the phenomenon of organic consumption in UK restaurants from the perspectives of restauranters in casual and fine dining restaurants in London by providing an in-depth understanding of restaurant operations and factors influencing diners' organic food consumption in restaurants. Combining secondary data and the results of in-depth face-to-face interviews, this paper has explored some factors

influencing the consumption of organic food in British restaurants.

The findings show that there is a growing trend of organic food consumption in the restaurant industry, that diners are more conscious about what they eat, and that they look for organic when dining out. Diners' demand for organic is influenced by a range of factors: health concerns, taste, quality, media, price, social media engagement, availability, and menu labelling. As a result, restaurants have started to adopt more organic food on their menus to respond to rising consumer demand. This research created a conceptual model to explore and explain the factors affecting organic food consumption behavior in restaurants. This model includes factors that have not been adequately studied in the existing literature. According to this model, a significant relationship between diners' motivation, media coverage, restaurant operation and organic food consumption was observed. Media coverage emphasising the benefits of organic food such as health value and good taste intersects with diners' motivations towards organic food and restaurants' operational capabilities such as pricing and labelling. The qualitative analysis suggests that the price of organic food can moderate diners' motivations such as their health concerns and the consumption behavior of organic food in restaurants.

The findings prompt us to consider the theoretical and managerial implications concerning organic food consumption in restaurants. This research proposes a model of organic food consumption in restaurants. As for the managerial implications, the findings suggest that there is a growing positive attitude towards organic food consumption by diners. It might be useful to state some recommendations for the industry to build a sustainable environment. This research identified the factors of health, media, and price as influencing diners' organic food consumption behavior. Taking these into consideration, this research suggests that the restaurant industry should reconsider their business strategies to incorporate dynamics regarding their labelling, pricing and advertising practices. For example, whereas some of the diners are not price conscious, others are while purchasing organic food, therefore, there is a necessity to maximize the awareness of organic food availability in the industry by aiming at different client bases. By doing so, customers' awareness about the scope of organic farming can be increased. Additionally, considering the rise of public awareness towards organic dining, restaurant managers can take advantage and raise public awareness of health consciousness to increase patronage and improve the profitability of their businesses. Moreover, consumers use social media platforms as a source of information therefore restaurants managers should use social media channels more actively to promote their organic menus. The outcomes of the research have significant implications to assist managers in developing effective strategies and market policies in the organic dining industry in the UK.

Understanding insights related to the process of consumer behavior surrounding organic food consumption in restaurants contributes to the literature on organic consumption behavior by providing in-depth data generated from the supply perspective.

Finally, this research has some limitations and suggestions for further research. This research recruited participants only from casual and fine dining restaurants due to practical and temporal considerations. In this regard, research covering organisations from different sub-sectors of the dining industry in the UK, such as quick service or fast-food restaurants, would convey more detailed and diverse results from the wider UK restaurant industry. Further research, applying the developed model in different contexts and restaurant settings, is needed to establish the viability of the model to cast light on the actual behavior of organic food consumption in diverse contexts.

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INFO PAGE

Organic food consumption at casual and fine dining restaurants in the UK: Restaurant managers' perspectives

Abstract

This research explores the phenomenon of organic food consumption in UK restaurants from restaurant managers' perspectives. The research collected primary and secondary data. Primary data was collected from restaurant managers and secondary data was collected from restaurant websites, menus and social media platforms. Twelve semi-structured interviews were carried out with restaurant managers in London. Thematic analysis and content analysis were adopted to analyze the qualitative data. Findings: From the viewpoints of restaurant managers, there is a growing organic dining trend and rising consumer demand for organic. The trend towards organic food consumption in UK restaurants is influenced by a number of substantial factors. Consumer health concerns and prices were identified as significant factors influencing diners' behavior towards organic food in restaurants. Media coverage of the benefits of organic food, including taste and quality, are key influencing factors. Restaurant operations including social media engagement, and availability of organic and labelling practices are important determinants. These factors were all identified as significant in terms of understanding diners' organic consumption behavior in restaurants. Being one of the first attempts to explore the factors influencing organic consumption behavior in restaurants in the UK from the perspective of restaurant managers

Keywords: *Organic food consumption, Casual dining, Fine dining, Model of diners' organic food consumption behavior.*

Authors

Full Name	Author contribution roles	Contribution rate
Lokman Dinç	Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Formal Analysis, Investigation, Resources, Data Curation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing	70%
Rong Huang	Conceptualism, Methodology, Software, Validation, Writing - Original Draft, Writing - Review & Editing, Supervision	30%

Author statement: Author(s) declare(s) that All procedures performed in studies involving human participants were in accordance with the ethical standards of the institutional and/or national research committee and with the 1964 Helsinki declaration and its later amendments or comparable ethical standards. **Declaration of Conflicting Interests:** The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article

This paper does not required ethics committee report

Justification: This research was conducted before January 1, 2020. For this reason, it is exempt from "ULAKBIM TRDizin" criterion.