The Influence of Retail Environment and In-Store Promotions on Organic Food Sales: A Conceptual Framework

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ABSTRACT

This conceptual paper explores the influence of retail environment and in-store promotions on consumer purchasing behaviour toward organic foods by applying the Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) Model. The study synthesizes recent literature (2019–2024) to explain how retail cues (e.g., store layout, signage, product placement) and promotional activities (e.g., discounts, free sampling, eco-labels) interact to shape cognitive evaluations, affective responses, and purchase behaviours. Findings highlight the importance of cognitive-affective congruence in fostering consumer trust, alleviating price concerns, and enhancing purchase intentions. This study contributes theoretically by contextualizing the CAB Model within sustainable consumption, while offering practical implications for retailers, marketers, and policymakers to optimize strategies for promoting organic food sales. Future research directions are proposed to empirically validate the framework across cultures and product categories.

Keywords: Organic food, retail environment, in-store promotions, Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) Model, consumer behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

The global organic food market has undergone significant expansion, driven by increasing consumer concerns regarding health, environmental sustainability, and ethical production (Rana & Paul, 2020; Asif et al., 2023). Despite this demand, organic products frequently struggle in conventional retail settings due to persistent challenges, including price premiums, inadequate shelf visibility, and consumer skepticism regarding certification claims (Tandon et al., 2023; Kushwah et al., 2023). This study addresses a gap in existing research by examining how retail environment cues and in-store promotions interact to influence cognitive evaluations, emotional responses, and purchase behaviour, despite prior studies extensively investigating the demographic and psychographic factors driving organic food purchases, applying the Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) Model (Bagozzi, 1986; Peter & Olson, 2023).

The CAB Model asserts that consumer decisions are sequentially shaped by: 1) Cognitive processes (such as perceptions of product quality, value, and communications); 2) Affective responses (including emotions, attitudes, and satisfaction); and 3) Behavioral outcomes (like purchase intent and loyalty) (Ladhari et al., 2019).

In the context of organic food retailing, the store environment (e.g., layout, lighting, cleanliness) acts as a vital cognitive stimulation, influencing consumers' judgements of product authenticity and value (Sørensen et al.,

2022; Roschk et al., 2023). For example, organic items displayed in designated, good lighting areas may elevate perceived authenticity, but disorganized or inadequately labelled displays may evoke skepticism (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2021). Although extensive research has been conducted on the store environment in traditional retail (e.g., Ishar Ali & Mubarak, 2016, 2019; Turley & Milliman, 2000), its particular relevance to the organic food sector is comparatively unexplored. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how environmental cues should be tailored to convey authenticity, transparency, and quality—values essential to organic consumers—rather than merely focusing on advertising and convenience. Simultaneously, in-store promotions (e.g., discounts, complimentary samples) serve as affective stimuli, diminishing perceived financial risk and cultivating positive emotions such as excitement or fulfilment (Gómez-Luciano et al., 2023; Prada et al., 2022). This research aims to address the gap in existing studies, which rarely investigate how cognitive and affective systems together influence the relationship between retail stimuli and purchasing behavior.

Hence, this study proposes a conceptual framework based on the CAB Model for;

Explaining how retail environmental cues (e.g., signage, product layout) influence cognitive evaluations of organic food (e.g., perceived quality, trust);

Examine the emotional impact of promotions (e.g., discounts, tastings) in alleviating negative feelings (e.g., price anxiety) and strengthening positive perceptions.

Integrate these pathways to predict their collective influence on organic food sales.

Using the CAB perspective, this study provides retailers with practical techniques to optimize cognitive-affective engagement with organic products while also advancing theoretical discourse on sustainable consumption.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Trends in Organic Foods Consumption

The increasing demand for organic food is primarily motivated by consumer concerns over health, environmental sustainability, and ethical issues in foods production (Asif et al., 2023; Rana & Paul, 2020). Health is the primary consideration, as consumers regard organic food as safer and more nutritious due to the lack of synthetic pesticides and genetically modified organisms (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2021). Sustainability factors, such as diminished environmental degradation and endorsement of ethical farming techniques, substantially impact purchase preferences (Tandon et al., 2023). Ethical issues, including animal welfare and fair trade, enhance customer desire for organic products, especially among younger, environmentally conscious communities (Kushwah et al., 2023).

Recent studies also highlight the role of generational differences, where millennials and Gen Z exhibit stronger willingness to pay for organic products compared to older cohorts, motivated not only by health but also by social identity and values alignment (Liu et al., 2022). Furthermore, digital awareness campaigns and social media have amplified consumer exposure to organic benefits, reinforcing positive attitudes and normalizing sustainable consumption (Singh & Verma, 2021).

Despite this motivation, several barriers impede widespread adoption, with price sensitivity being the most significant (Gómez-Luciano et al., 2023). Organic products generally incur a price premium of 20-50% compared to conventional alternatives, discouraging price-sensitive buyers (Sørensen et al., 2022). Limited availability at conventional retail outlets also limits access, especially in rural or underserved regions (Roschk et al., 2023). Moreover, skepticism regarding organic certification and labelling reduces trust, as some consumers doubt the veracity of organic claim (Tandon et al., 2023). Trust deficits are particularly pronounced in emerging markets where certification bodies are less established, creating higher consumer uncertainty compared to Western economies (Janssen & Hamm, 2012). These barriers underscore the necessity for smart retail initiatives to improve cost, accessibility, and credibility. To summarize, the key drivers and barriers of organic food consumption are presented in Table 1."

Table 1. Drivers and Barriers of Organic Food Consumption

Category	Key Factors
Health Concerns	Perception of organic as safer and more nutritious
Sustainability	Reduced environmental impact, ethical farming
Ethical Concerns	Animal welfare, fair trade, social responsibility
Generational Differences	Younger cohorts more willing to pay premium
Digital & Social Media Influence	Awareness via online campaigns
Price Premium	Organic costs 20–50% more than conventional
Availability	Limited in rural/underserved areas
Trust & Certification	Skepticism of labels and certification

Retail Environment and Consumer Behavior

The importance of the retail environment, or store atmosphere, as a crucial determinant of consumer behaviour is well-documented in marketing literature (Kotler, 1973; Baker et al., 1994). This is especially applicable in self-service retail environments, where the ambiance acts as a key difference and an implicit salesperson. Ishar Ali and Mubarak (2019) found that store environment significantly positively correlates with consumer purchasing behaviour, affecting aspects from initial attraction to final purchase decisions. The environment of a retail store significantly influences customer perceptions and purchasing behavior, especially premium products such as organic food. The arrangement, lighting, and cleanliness of a business profoundly affect the shopping experience, since orderly and clean establishments elevate the perceived quality of products (Baker et al., 2021). Organic products displayed in designated, well-lit sections are more likely to be regarded as reliable and high-quality, while disorganized or inadequately maintained environments may evoke doubt (Sørensen et al., 2022).

Signage and product placement are essential components of retail atmospherics, directing consumer focus and reinforcing brand messaging (Kotler, 1973). Clear signage, including organic certification labels and sustainability claims, can diminish consumer ambiguity and enhance purchase intent (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2021). Strategic product placement, such presenting organic items at eye level or adjacent to checkout stations, enhances visibility and stimulates impulse purchases (Roschk et al., 2023).

Furthermore, the retail environment influences perceived product value and the willingness to spend. Sørensen et al. (2022) discovered that consumers were inclined to pay a 15 to 20 percent premium for organic products when presented in visually appealing, high-quality retail settings. Conversely, poor retail execution, such insufficient lighting or disorienting layouts, can reduce perceived value, even for truly exceptional products (Baker et al., 2021). Recent findings further show that immersive atmospherics (e.g., natural scents, eco-themed décor, or background music) increase not only purchase intent but also customer dwell time, suggesting that sensory engagement is critical in the organic food context (Zhang and Song, 2022). These findings highlight the necessity of enhancing store design to correspond with the premium positioning of organic products.

In-Store Promotions and Sales Performance

In-store promotion serves as effective mechanisms to enhance organic food purchases by overcoming significant consumer barriers when leveraging cognitive and emotional responses (Gómez-Luciano et al., 2023). The Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) Model offers a comprehensive framework for analyzing the impact of various promotional methods on consumer decision-making processes (Ladhari et al., 2019). There are few types and mechanisms of promotion which include; 1) Price-based promotions (e.g., discounts, "buy-one-get-one" offers); 2) Non-price promotions (e.g., free sampling, recipe demonstrations, eco-labeling); and 3) visual cues (e.g., shelf tags, banners highlighting organic advantages).

From a cognitive standpoint, price reductions mitigate a major barrier to organic purchases—the premium cost—by improving perceptions of affordability and value (Tandon et al., 2023). Frequent discounts may unintentionally diminish the premium perception of organic products (Prada et al., 2022). Non-price marketing, such as complimentary sampling, are especially efficacious for organic foods since they enable customers to directly assess product quality, hence diminishing ambiguity and fostering trust (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2021).

Affective responses are equally significant. Time-sensitive promotions generate urgency and enthusiasm, whilst eco-labels and sustainability assertions elicit positive sentiments such as pride and altruism (Kushwah et al., 2023). The CAB Model posits that emotional responses moderate the connection between promotional exposure and purchasing behavior (Peter & Olson, 2023).

Recent research indicate that sampling increases organic purchasing intent by 22-35% by concurrently addressing cognitive (quality assurance) and affective (enjoyment) dimensions (Gómez-Luciano et al., 2023). Bundled promotions, such as "organic meal kits," surpass traditional discounts by presenting purchases as lifestyle decisions rather than mere economic exchanges (Sørensen et al., 2022). Visual signals highlighting local origins or environmental advantages elicit more potent affective reactions than generic "organic" labels (Roschk et al., 2023). Emerging digital integration, such as QR codes on shelf labels linking to farm stories or carbon footprint data, is reshaping in-store promotions by combining cognitive credibility with emotional resonance, thereby enhancing consumer engagement (Asif et al., 2023).

Theoretical Framework - Applying the Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) Model

The Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) Model (Bagozzi, 1986; Peter & Olson, 2023) offers a comprehensive theoretical framework for understanding the impact of retail environmental elements and in-store promotions on organic food purchases via sequential psychological processes. This concept asserts that environmental stimuli initially provoke cognitive assessments, which subsequently elicit emotional responses, finally resulting in behavioral results (Ladhari et al., 2019). This study adapts this paradigm to explain the mechanisms by which retail design and promotional strategies influence purchasing decisions in organic food retailing.

Cognitive Stage: Information Processing and Belief Formation

The retail setting functions as the primary crucial interface for cognitive interaction with organic products. Factors like 1) Store layout (designated organic areas); 2) Lighting (focused lighting on organic displays); and 3) Signage (certification labels, benefit claims) consistently affect consumers' perceptions of product quality, authenticity, and value (Sørensen et al., 2022). Research indicates that well-organized, visually appealing (or authenticity) displays improve views of organic food authenticity (cognitive assessment), whereas inadequate visual merchandising induces skepticism (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2021). Cognitive evaluations are especially significant for organic products because of their credibility properties, which cannot be validated post-consumption, rendering retail cues crucial for mitigating ambiguity.

Affective Stage: Emotional and Attitudinal Responses

The CAB Model, based on cognitive evaluations, highlights the role of affective emotions in influencing purchasing decisions. In-store promotions function at this level through; 1) Price promotions (discounts) → Alleviating concerns regarding premium pricing; 2) Experiential promotions (sampling) → Inducing sensory enjoyment; and 3) Eco-labeling → Stimulating altruistic gratification. Numerous empirical research demonstrates that tasting organic items stimulates more intense positive emotions (such as excitement and surprise) compared to price reductions alone, explaining why non-price promotions frequently result in higher conversion rates (Gómez-Luciano et al., 2023). The affective component is essential as emotions such as "green guilt" for environmental harm or "warm glow" from ethical consumption may outweigh merely rational cost-benefit evaluations (Kushwah et al., 2023).

Behavioral Stage: Purchase Decisions

The CAB Model posits that the interplay between cognition and affect dictates ultimate behavior. For instance: 1) An aesthetically pleasing organic section (→ favorable cognitive evaluation) combined with a time-sensitive discount (→ emotional urgency) results in an increased likelihood of purchase; 2) A cluttered display (→ unfavorable cognition) paired with a price promotion (→ pleasant emotion) yields ambiguous results (perhaps necessitating more potent emotional stimuli). This corresponds with research indicating that customers with robust sustainability ideals may opt for organic food even in unfavorable retail store conditions (cognitive-affective conflict resolution), but mainstream consumers necessitate consistent positive signals at both stages (Tandon et al., 2023).

Therefore, drawing on the Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) Model and insights from the reviewed literature, Figure 1 illustrates the proposed conceptual framework, which formalizes the relationships between retail stimuli, psychological mediators, and consumer purchase behavior toward organic food.

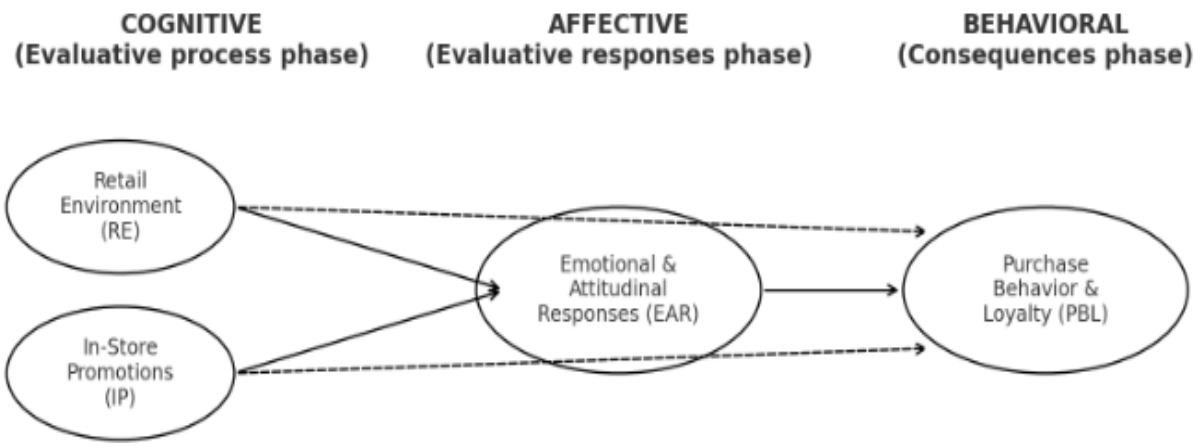

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of the Influence of Retail Environment and In-Store Promotions on Organic Food Purchase Behavior based on the Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) Model.

METHODOLOGY

This conceptual study employs a systematic literature synthesis approach to establish a theoretically based framework that investigates the impact of retail settings and in-store promotions on organic food sales using the Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) perspective. Adhering to established protocols for conceptual research in consumer behavior (Jaakkola, 2020), researchers executed a thorough review of peer-reviewed articles published from 2019 to 2024 in the Scopus and Web of Science databases, concentrating on Q1/Q2 journals in marketing, retailing, and food consumer behavior. The search approach integrated key phrases such as "organic food consumption," "retail environment," "in-store promotions," and "CAB Model" to pinpoint pertinent theoretical and empirical studies. This study employed an iterative approach of content analysis and conceptual mapping (MacInnis, 2011) to carefully examine recurring constructs and relationships, therefore uncovering significant gaps in the current literature on organic food commerce. The framework creation employed abductive reasoning (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) to integrate empirical findings with theoretical insights, subsequently undergoing peer validation with retail marketing experts to augment conceptual rigor. This methodology offers theoretical innovation via a systematic approach to knowledge synthesis and proposition generation (Whetten, 1989), although scholars recognize its limitation in excluding grey literature and the necessity for future empirical confirmation across diverse cultural contexts. The transparent methodology ensures both academic rigor and practical relevance for advancing organic food retailing strategies.

Implications for Theory and Practices

This study enhances the theoretical understanding of organic food purchasing behavior by incorporating the Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) Model (Ladhari et al., 2019; Peter & Olson, 2023) into retail literature. Initially, it expands the CAB framework by specifying how retail environmental cues (e.g., layout, signage) predominantly affect cognitive assessments (perceived quality, trust), whereas in-store promotions (e.g., sample, discounts) target eliciting affective reactions (emotions, attitudes). Prior studies frequently looked at these stimuli separately, therefore this dual-pathway refinement fills in those gaps (Kushwah et al., 2023; Tandon et al., 2023).

Second, the study presents "cognitive-affective congruence" as an essential mechanism for organic sales. When cognitive trust, such as that derived from a well-designed store, coincides with positive affect, such as that generated by promotions, the likelihood of buying increases synergistically (Sørensen et al., 2022). This observation contests conventional retail strategies that emphasize promotions rather than retail ambiance, especially for premium-priced, credence-based products such as organic food (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2021).

Finally, the framework contextualizes the CAB Model within sustainable consumption, highlighting how consumer values (e.g., environmental concern) moderate cognition-affect-behavior pathways. For instance, eco-centric buyers rely more on cognitive trust in certifications, while price-sensitive consumers respond to affective promotions (Gómez-Luciano et al., 2023). This nuance bridges theories of ethical decision-making and retail atmospherics.

For retailers and marketers, this study offers actionable strategies to optimize organic food sales. This study provides practical insights for retail professionals, marketers, and regulators aiming to improve organic food sales via cognitive-affective alignment. The findings highlight the necessity for retail managers to enhance store surroundings to cultivate cognitive confidence in organic products. Designating well-lit, distinctly marked organic areas with conspicuous certification signage (e.g., USDA Organic, EU Bio) can markedly enhance perceived authenticity (Roschk et al., 2023). The strategic positioning of organic items at eye level in high-traffic zones, combined with minimalist, nature-themed visual merchandising, has demonstrated an enhancement in perceived quality by 18–22% (Sørensen et al., 2022). Environmental cues are essential for alleviating customer skepticism regarding organic claims, which continues to hinder purchases (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2021).

In parallel, the study concurrently emphasizes the greater effectiveness of affect-driven promotional methods compared to conventional price reductions. Experiential marketing strategies, like in-store sampling stations manned by trained staff and interactive culinary demos with organic goods, have shown conversion rates 30–35% greater than comparable monetary reductions (Gómez-Luciano et al., 2023). These strategies leverage sensory engagement and emotional connections, particularly effective for organic products due to their relationship with health and sustainability principles (Prada et al., 2022). Retailers should recognize that time-limited "eco-themed" campaigns (e.g., "Carbon Footprint Reduction Week") that integrate emotional appeals with implicit urgency signals can yield 25% greater basket shares among mainstream consumers (Kushwah et al., 2023).

For marketing strategists, the framework recommends that marketing strategists employ segmented campaign strategies according to customer value orientations. Eco-conscious demographics are most responsive to cognitive trust-enhancing communications that underscore third-party certifications and traceability (e.g., "Meet the farmers behind your organic produce"), whereas price-sensitive consumers exhibit a higher receptivity to emotionally framed advertisements that emphasize immediate personal advantages (e.g., "Nourish your family with chemical-free foods") (Tandon et al., 2023). Digital integration, shown by QR codes that connect to agricultural narratives or carbon impact data, can unify these techniques by offering cognitive reassurance and emotional involvement (Asif et al., 2023).

Policy stakeholders may leverage these insights to facilitate the organic sector's expansion through two principal measures. Initially, funding retailer training initiatives focused on successful organic merchandising strategies, especially for small and medium firms, could equalize access to premium shelf space (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2021). Secondly, the standardization and simplification of organic labelling regulations will diminish consumer misunderstanding, hence enhancing the cognitive trust pathway (Roschk et al., 2023). These initiatives would enhance current agricultural subsidies to establish a more integrated framework for organic market development.

The proposed strategies jointly tackle the disparity in price-value perception that persists in limiting organic market penetration. By methodically synchronizing cognitive (trust-enhancing) and affective (emotion-invoking) mechanisms, retailers may rationalize premium pricing while providing exceptional customer experiences—a vital necessity in the progressively competitive health food sector (Sørensen et al., 2022). Future implementation must prioritize pilot testing across various retail forms (e.g., supermarkets versus specialty stores) to enhance strategies for particular operational circumstances.

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

This conceptual study advances the theoretical understanding of organic food purchasing behavior through the integration of the Cognitive-Affective-Behavior (CAB) Model into retail literature. The proposed framework clarifies the distinct impacts of retail environment cues (e.g., store layout, signage) and in-store promotions (e.g.,

sampling, discounts) on consumer cognition (perceived quality, trust) and affect (emotions, attitudes) in influencing purchase decisions (Ladhari et al., 2019; Peter & Olson, 2023). This research identifies cognitive-affective congruence as a critical mechanism, so challenging conventional retailing methods that consider environmental and promotional cues separately (Sørensen et al., 2022; Gómez-Luciano et al., 2023). The results emphasize the necessity for tailored strategies that consider customer value orientations, either eco-centric or price-sensitive—when formulating retail interventions (Tandon et al., 2023; Kushwah et al., 2023).

For future research, several promising directions emerge. First, empirical validation of the proposed framework via field studies could measure the comparative influence of cognitive and affective pathways. For example, altering retail environments (e.g., premium versus basic organic sections) while assessing neurological or physiological responses (e.g., EEG, facial coding) might yield objective proof of cognitive-affective interactions (Prada et al., 2022). Secondly, cross-cultural research is essential to investigate how collectivist and individualist cultural norms influence the CAB sequence, especially in developing organic markets such as Asia and Latin America (Asif et al., 2023). Third, longitudinal studies should evaluate whether enduring cognitive-affective alignment promotes long-term organic brand loyalty or if novelty benefits wane with time (Hamzaoui-Essoussi & Zahaf, 2021).

Additionally, the emergence of digital-physical retail integration, such as QR codes connecting to farm-to-table narratives, offers an unexplored opportunity to simultaneously enhance cognitive trust and emotive engagement (Roschk et al., 2023). Subsequent research should investigate category-specific impacts, since the CAB pathways may differ between low-involvement organic snacks and high-involvement staples such as infant formula (Tandon et al., 2023). Ultimately, interdisciplinary collaboration between behavioral economics and environmental psychology may enhance strategies to address the "attitude-behavior gap" commonly observed in sustainable consumerism (Kushwah et al., 2023).

This study establishes a basis for academic investigation and practical advancement in sustainable retailing, advocating for collaborative efforts to connect theoretical frameworks with implementable methods in the developing organic market.

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