

Why and when should brands turn organic? A twofold market-offering perspective

Renaud Lunardo

*Department of Marketing, Kedge Business School – Bordeaux Campus,
Talence, France*

Camille Saintives

Department of Marketing, ESSCA School of Management, Bordeaux, France

David A. Jaud and Armando Maria Corsi

Adelaide Business School, The University of Adelaide, Adelaide, Australia, and

Bradley J. Rickard

*Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management, Cornell University,
Ithaca, New York State, USA*

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to investigate the impact of a company's decision to turn organic. Specifically, it examines the effect of such a decision on brand/product outcomes, and the role that organic market penetration plays in these effects.

Design/methodology/approach – Two experiments were conducted using two different food product categories. Data were analyzed using mean comparison tests, serial mediation and moderation analyses.

Findings – Results from Study 1 show that turning organic serially leads to increased perceptions of brand adaptability (mediator 1) and a positive effect on consumers' perceived product quality (mediator 2), thus leading to stronger purchase intentions. Study 2 replicates and highlights the importance of market characteristics, showing that in markets with low organic market penetration rate (OMPR), brands turning organic are seen as challenging market norms, serially increasing (1) brand innovativeness (an additional mediator), (2) adaptability, (3) product quality perceptions, and then purchase intentions.

Research limitations/implications – This research used online experiments, but the analysis of actual consumer decisions would bring further insight into the effects of turning organic. Moreover, the experiments involved only food products, while other fast-growing organic product categories – like organic cosmetics – could be examined for replication purposes.

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Ethical statement: The methodology and the subjects involved in the data collection respect Kedge Business School's values and ethics. The data comply with the General Data Protection Regulation Guidelines.



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Practical implications – By turning organic, brands can position themselves as adaptable and responsive to changing market trends, which – in turn – positively influences how consumers perceive product quality. Companies can thus leverage this positioning by emphasizing their transition to organic in marketing campaigns, framing it as a response to evolving consumer values. Further, turning organic is more beneficial in markets with low OMPRs, which indicates that brands should consider turning organic primarily in such markets.

Originality/value – Unlike previous studies that focused on the static fact of being organic, this research adopts a dynamic view by showing that turning organic affects both product and brand outcomes. It also examines the specific market conditions under which turning organic is the most favorable for brands.

Keywords Organic food, Quality, Brand adaptability, Organic market penetration rate, Production process

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

Sales of organic products have continued to grow over time, with global sales of organic food amounting to about USD 183bn in 2022 with an expected compound annual growth rate of 11.6% that is expected to reach a value of USD 547bn in 2032 ([Precedence Research, 2023](#)). Simultaneously, current data indicate that the expansion of organic farmland remains sluggish compared to market growth, highlighting ongoing concerns about excess demand for organic products among consumers ([Willer et al., 2019](#)). Hence, agricultural producers and food manufacturing firms may benefit from the increasing demand for organic products by turning organic and offering new products. Such a strategic decision has recently been observed in major industries. For instance, organic agricultural production in France increased by 22% in 2020 compared to 2019, leading to a total of 137,000 hectares in organic crop production and an additional 9,784 hectares in organic vineyards ([Arthur, 2022](#)).

Past research conceives organic favorably, by focusing mostly on consumers' perception of and motives for buying organic food. Consumers perceive organic products being of higher quality ([Vega-Zamora et al., 2014](#)) and healthier ([Ha et al., 2019](#); [Hansmann et al., 2020](#)) than traditional products, and report greater willingness to pay a premium for such products ([Streletskaya et al., 2019](#)). However, turning organic represents a careful strategic move for a company which, in most countries, implies key principles must be followed, including a ban on the use of genetically modified organisms (GMOs), hormones, and antibiotics, as well as the use of artificial fertilizers, herbicides, and pesticides. In spite of the interdisciplinary body of research that has widely investigated the demand for organic products, most have examined consumers' perception of and motives for buying organic food ([Juhl et al., 2017](#)), leaving unexplored i/how the strategic move of turning organic affects consumers' brand- and product-related responses and ii/if specific market conditions are more favorable for brands considering turning organic. The questions thus remain why and when brands may gain or not from turning organic.

To examine these questions, we draw on signaling theory ([Spence, 1974, 2002](#)), branding literature (i.e. brand innovativeness ([Fang, 2008](#)), and brand adaptability ([Pecot et al., 2019](#))) to propose that when turning organic, brands send the signal that they are perceived as more adaptable and their products of higher quality, which subsequently leads to higher purchase intentions. By doing so, this research is the first to adopt a dynamic perspective on turning organic that goes beyond the often-used static perspective, which examines the effects of merely being organic (see [Table 1](#) for a review). We also adopt a market perspective and show that the effect of turning organic leads to greater purchase intentions due to increased perceptions of brand adaptability and product quality is stronger when the market is characterized by a low organic penetration rate. We use the organic market penetration rate (OMPR, hereafter) to describe the share of companies in an industry that have already turned organic. We expect that the OMPR will moderate the effects of turning organic, such that

Table 1. Overview of the existing empirical literature on organic products/brands and consumers' perceptions and responses

Authors	Product	Being (static) vs. turning (dynamic) organic perspective			Product-brand-market perspective			Variables included in the model		Study type
		Static	Dynamic	Product	Brand	Market	Moderator(s)	Mediator(s)		
Bartels and Hoogendam (2011)	Food	✓			✓			✓		Survey
Bauer <i>et al.</i> (2013)	Food	✓		✓	✓		✓			Experiments
Bezawada and Pauwels (2013)	Food and nonfood	✓		✓	✓	✓				Sales data
Bryła (2016)	Food	✓		✓						Survey
Çabuk <i>et al.</i> (2014)	Food	✓		✓				✓		Survey
Cervellon and I. Carey (2014)	Cosmetics	✓		✓			✓			Analysis of reviews + experiments Scanner data
Davcik and Sharma (2015)	Food	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			Experiment
Ellison <i>et al.</i> (2016)	Food	✓		✓	✓		✓			Survey
Gottschalk and Leistner (2013)	Food	✓		✓						Choice experiment/survey Experiment
Hempel and Hamm (2016)	Food	✓		✓		✓	✓			Survey
Hsu and Chen (2014)	Food	✓		✓			✓			Survey
Hwang (2016)	Food	✓		✓						Survey
Hwang and Chung (2019)	Food	✓		✓		✓	✓			Survey
Isojärvi and Aspara (2023)	FMCG	✓		✓			✓			Experiment

(continued)

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Authors	Product	Being (static) vs. turning (dynamic) organic perspective		Product-brand-market perspective		Variables included in the model		Study type
		Static	Dynamic	Product	Brand	Market	Moderator(s)	
Janssen and Hamm (2012)	Food	✓		✓		✓		Choice experiment
Jongmans <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Food	✓		✓	✓			Surveys
Juhl <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Food	✓		✓		✓		Scanner data
Lee and Yun (2015)	Food	✓		✓			✓	Survey
Lockie <i>et al.</i> (2004)	Food	✓		✓			✓	Survey
Mai <i>et al.</i> (2021)	FMCG	✓		✓		✓		Scanner data + survey
Mainardes <i>et al.</i> (2017)	Food	✓		✓			✓	Surveys
Marian and Thøgersen (2013)	Food	✓		✓			✓	Survey
Nadricka <i>et al.</i> (2020)	Food	✓		✓		✓		Experiments
Ngobo (2011)	FMCG	✓		✓		✓		Scanner data
Nie and Zepeda (2011)	Food	✓		✓	✓			Survey
Nuttavuthisit and Thøgersen (2017)	Food	✓		✓			✓	Survey
Perrini <i>et al.</i> (2010)	Food	✓		✓	✓			Survey

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Authors	Product	Being (static) vs. turning (dynamic) organic perspective			Product-brand-market perspective		Variables included in the model		Study type
		Static	Dynamic	Product	Brand	Market	Moderator(s)	Mediator(s)	
Persaud and Schillo (2017)	Food	✓		✓			✓	✓	Survey
Pino <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Food	✓		✓				✓	Survey
Prentice <i>et al.</i> (2019)	Food	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓	Survey
Reinders and Bartels (2017)	Food	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Survey
Septianto and Kempner (2021)	Food	✓		✓			✓	✓	Experiments
Stolz <i>et al.</i> (2011)	Food	✓		✓					Lab purchase simulations
Taghikhah <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Wine	✓		✓					Survey
Tarkiainen and Sundqvist (2009)	Food	✓		✓			✓		Survey
Thøgersen <i>et al.</i> (2021)	Food	✓		✓		✓		✓	Survey
Tsakiridou <i>et al.</i> (2008)	Food	✓		✓					Survey
Van Doorn and Verhoef (2011)	Food	✓		✓		✓	✓		Experiments
Van Doorn and Verhoef (2015)	Food	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	Scan data + survey
Van Herpen <i>et al.</i> (2012)	Food	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓		Sales data

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Authors	Being (static) vs. turning (dynamic) organic perspective					Product-brand-market perspective		Variables included in the model		Study type
	Product	Static	Dynamic	Product	Brand	Market	Moderator(s)	Mediator(s)		
Yadav and Pathak (2016)	Food	✓		✓					Survey	
Yuan <i>et al.</i> (2022)	Food/clothes	✓					✓	✓	Survey	
Zagata (2012)	Food	✓						✓	Survey	
<i>This study</i>	<i>Food</i>	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	<i>Experiments</i>	
Note(s): This table only considers quantitative-based articles that have been published in A* or A journals according to the ABDC journal ranking list available at: https://abdc.edu.au/abdc-journal-quality-list/										
Source(s): Authors' own work										

when the OMPR is low (i.e. only a few companies have already turned organic in the market), the decision of turning organic triggers perceptions that the brand brings new ideas to the market, thus being seen as more adaptable and leading to greater perceived product quality and purchase intentions.

In what follows, we present our theoretical justification for the positive effects of turning organic on brand- and product-related outcomes. We test our theoretical framework across two online experiments that use two distinct food product categories (i.e. chocolate and tomato sauce), which provide consistent support for the notion that turning organic is beneficial to brands. We then present the implications of our results for both academics and managers, especially those involved in the food industry, and the avenues for further research.

Theoretical development

This section outlines how and why a product that turns organic affects consumers' purchase intentions through the effect of perceived i/brand adaptability and ii/product quality. First, building on signaling theory (Spence, 1974), we discuss why turning organic may lead to an increase in perceived brand adaptability and subsequent perceived product quality. Second, we explore the literature on brand innovativeness to explore the conditions under which turning organic is beneficial for companies and demonstrate that the decision of turning organic leads to greater brand- and product-related outcomes when the market is characterized by a low (versus high) OMPR.

Turning organic products and brand perceptions

Organic agriculture refers to an ecological production system that helps to preserve biodiversity and reduce the concentration of polluting substances in the environment (Magnusson *et al.*, 2003). Although potentially different across countries and continents, the production processes of organic products encompasses "organic-labeled goods, or produced according to specific standards regarding raw material growing practices, processing methods, delivery, and so forth" (Mai *et al.*, 2021, p. 1152), leading to the belief that the production process is designed to reduce adverse environmental impacts and does not require as many natural resources as non-organic products (White *et al.*, 2019). Against this backdrop, the extant literature on organic products has identified clear determinants with consumption – deriving from sociodemographic characteristics like education (Panzone *et al.*, 2016), income (Ha *et al.*, 2019), age (Auger *et al.*, 2003; Septianto and Kemper, 2021), and other household characteristics (Thompson, 1998) and private motives like ethical concerns (Pino *et al.*, 2012), health-related concerns (Hansmann *et al.*, 2020) and environmental preservation (Baker *et al.*, 2004). It has also identified clear behavioral outcomes for organic products relative to nonorganic products, including stronger purchase intentions and willingness to pay a price premium (Bauer, Heinrich and Schäfer, 2013).

However, by examining the outcomes for *existing* organic products, prior literature has adopted what we refer to here as a *static* approach. Although interesting, this approach leaves the effects of *turning* organic unexamined, which calls for a *dynamic* approach. Signaling theory provides an appealing framework to explain the impact of such a decision of turning organic on consumers' brand- and product-related perceptions. This theory states that the marketplace is characterized by information asymmetry, with consumers not having the full information required for judging the quality of an offering (Spence, 1974, 2002). Due to such an asymmetry whereby one side holds more or better information than the other, consumers often struggle when assessing a brand and its products and rely on cues or signals as a means of evaluating product quality. A signal represents "a marketer-controlled, easy-to-acquire

informational cue, extrinsic to the product itself, that consumers use to form inferences about the quality or value of that product” (Bloom and Reve, 1990, p. 59) and can take the form a brand name (Erdem and Swait, 1998; Rao *et al.*, 1999) or a low price (Dawar and Sarvary, 1997).

The need for such signals, due to a high degree of information asymmetry, is even more important for specific markets with credence attributes – which includes the market for organic food – because consumers are not able to verify whether a product was produced according to the promised characteristics (Janssen and Hamm, 2012). Importantly, past research shows that labeling can represent an interesting signal for brands to indicate quality. For instance, eco-labels can work as a signal sent to consumers about the environmental qualities of a food product (Atkinson and Rosenthal, 2014). Still in the food domain, Janssen and Hamm (2012) showed that organic labels help the products be perceived as more trustworthy and credible, and ultimately preferred. Therefore, and building on the notion that strategic intent can also serve as a signal (Pappu and Quester, 2016, p. 7), we posit that a brand can also send a signal when making the decision to turn organic. Particularly, we argue that such a move can reassure consumers about the ability of the brand to cope with market changes in a context of an increasing interest in healthy eating (Chandon *et al.*, 2022; Scott and Vallen, 2019), heavy reliance of consumers on health claims (Kaur *et al.*, 2017) and organic labels (Chandon and Cadario, 2023) when shopping for food products. Such ability to cope with market trends and reinvent itself refers to brand adaptability, or the ability of a company to identify emerging market and technology opportunities, which, in turn, implies changes in a firm’s strategic posture (Oktemgil and Greenley, 1997; Tuominen *et al.*, 2004). Given what precedes, we propose the following hypothesis:

H1. Turning organic increases perceptions of brand adaptability.

Positive effects of brand adaptability

Prior research emphasizes the need for brands to always adapt to external environment-related changes. The basic assumption of marketing and organizational research on adaptability is that an organization that strives to become resilient “must be able to divert resources from yesterday’s products and programs to tomorrow’s” (Hamel and Valikangas, 2003). Accordingly, some brands pivot their business focus and exhibit brand adaptability, which includes strategic decisions and subsequent operational practices to maintain some competitive advantage. Prior research shows that adaptability is key to performance (McKee *et al.*, 1989) and firm survival (Walker and Ruekert, 1987).

Building on what precedes the large literature on brand perceptions, we hypothesize that it is not only adaptability but also the perceptions from consumers that the brand is able to adapt that is important in driving performance. Perceptions of adaptability – or perceived brand adaptability – refer to the perceptions of a firm’s “ability to adjust to changes in the environment” (Pecot *et al.*, 2019, p. 1637). Regarding the strategic decision to turn organic, we predict that brands that turn organic indirectly enhance the perception of product quality and purchase intentions. The reason is that these brands signal their ability to adapt by changing their product to align with organic food standards. This perception of adaptability in an evolving world benefits brands (Pecot *et al.*, 2019; Spielmann *et al.*, 2021) and can increase consumers’ evaluations of products, including those of product quality (Pecot *et al.*, 2022; Rose *et al.*, 2016). Such evaluations of perceived quality do not refer to the actual quality of the product but rather to the consumer’s subjective evaluations of it (Zeithaml, 1988). As such, perceptions of quality are dynamic and change in response to marketing actions and signals, and a brand that appears adaptable may alter perceptions of product

quality. Given the well-established link between perceptions of product quality and purchase intentions (see [Blut et al., 2023](#) for a review), the increase in perceived brand adaptability following the strategic move of turning organic may lead to a more positive perception of product quality and, consequently, higher purchase intentions for the organic product. Therefore, we propose the hypothesis below:

- H2. Perceived brand adaptability that results from turning organic increases the perception of product quality (*H2a*), leading to stronger purchase intentions (*H2b*). Therefore, turning organic indirectly increases purchase intentions through the serial mediating roles of perceived i/brand adaptability and ii/product quality (*H2c*).

The moderating role of organic market penetration rate and the intervening effect of brand innovativeness

Prior research provides evidence that the success of a strategic move – like turning organic – is contingent upon specific conditions. The literature on “first movers” – those that:

- produce a new product;
- use a new process; or
- enter a new market can claim this distinction ([Lieberman and Montgomery, 1998](#)) – supports the notion that first movers achieve long-term competitive advantage ([Kerin et al., 1992](#)).

We argue that when a brand turns organic, a low OMPR – characterized by a small number of competitors in the organic space – may render the brand as a pioneer and high in brand innovativeness. Within this perceptual view of brand innovativeness, and in line with [Pappu and Quester \(2016, p. 4\)](#), we define perceived brand innovativeness as “the extent to which consumers perceive a brand as being able to provide new and useful solutions to their needs.” Specifically, it emphasizes the brand’s ability to challenge the market with new ideas ([Fang, 2008](#); [Kunz et al., 2011](#)) to introduce new, unconventional and original ideas or products that are seen as unique or groundbreaking ([Barone and Jewell, 2014](#)). Quite differently, brand adaptability is related to the capability of the brand to reinvent itself ([Pecot et al., 2019](#)) and refers to the capacity of the brand to adjust its strategies and offerings in reaction to market demands ([Day, 2011](#)). In this sense, perceived brand adaptability relates more to flexibility, and brands perceived as adaptable are those that can shift direction or evolve quickly to align with new consumer expectations. Put differently, perceived brand innovativeness is associated with proactive novelty, while perceived brand adaptability is more a question of responsive flexibility (to a changing market).

Although distinct, a relationship between the two constructs may be observed depending on the degree of the OMPR. Specifically, and building upon signaling theory ([Spence, 1974](#)), we state that when brands turn organic, they send a strong signal to consumers about their forward-thinking and innovative nature. This would even be more the case in markets with low organic market penetration rates (OMPRs), where adopting an organic strategy can be seen as a pioneering move that distinguishes the brand from competitors. This differentiates the brand as a leader in adopting trends or practices that others have not yet embraced, which contributes to perceived brand innovativeness. Therefore, we posit:

- H3. The OMPR negatively moderates the effect of turning organic on perceived brand innovativeness. Specifically, turning organic (vs. control) leads to greater perceived brand innovativeness when the OMPR is low (vs. high).

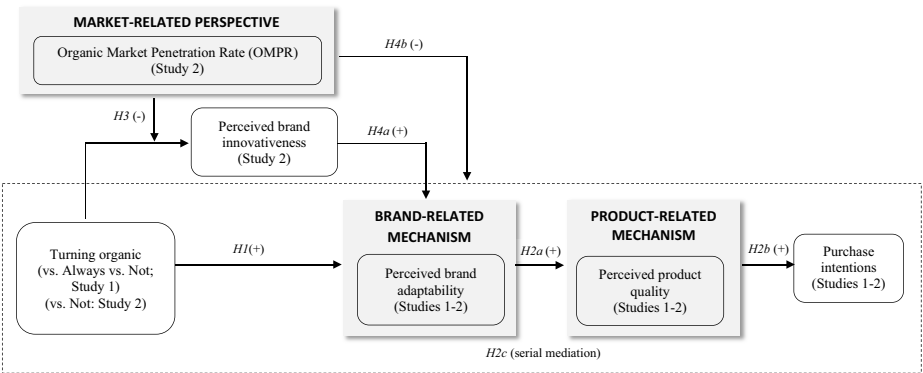
Further, [Pappu and Quester \(2016\)](#) consider signaling theory to provide “the most parsimonious explanation among the frameworks used in extant research (e.g. exchange theory) to explain the innovativeness–loyalty relationship” (p. 6) because brand innovativeness acts as a signal that positively influences consumer perceptions of the quality of the brand. Among these perceptions, we state that the perception of brand adaptability may represent a prime candidate. This assumption holds on the notion that when brands offer new solutions and are perceived as innovative, they demonstrate their ability to adapt to changing conditions. This proactive approach signals to consumers that the brand can quickly pivot and adjust its strategy in response to new opportunities or challenges. Therefore, brand innovativeness deriving from turning organic under conditions of low OMPR may serve as a signal to consumers regarding the ability of the brand to adapt with respect to their environment and provide quality products accordingly. Thus, we conclude that perceptions of brand adaptability and product quality must transmit the impact of innovativeness onto consumer purchase intentions, and this would be stronger with low OMPR. Hence, we propose the following hypotheses:

H4. Perceived brand innovativeness mediates the effects of turning organic on perceived brand adaptability and subsequent product quality perceptions and purchase intentions (*H4a*), and this effect is even stronger under low (versus high) OMPR (*H4b*).

These hypotheses lead to the theoretical model that is illustrated in [Figure 1](#).

Study 1: turning organic

With Study 1, we aim to test our theoretical model and see if turning organic can trigger the perception that the brand is able to adapt to external changes (i.e. economic, social, political or technological), and subsequently increase perceived product quality and purchase intentions. Importantly, to ensure that it is the strategic decision of turning organic (as a dynamic process) that drives the effects and not the mere organic property of the product, we rule out this potential alternative explanation by opposing in this experiment a manipulation



Source(s): Authors’ own work

Figure 1. An illustration of the theoretical model

of the turning organic decision to one where the brand has always been producing organic products (as a static process).

Participants, design and procedure

A total of 200 individuals from the USA were recruited online via Prolific and asked to participate in a study that employed a between-subjects design (Organic: “Turning” versus “Always been producing,” versus “Conventional” or nonorganic [as the control group]). Participants were exposed to a mock webpage that presented a chocolate bar from a fictitious brand, Neyerhans. The brand was presented as a Belgian one and founded in 1987. In the three conditions, the selling price for the chocolate bar was constant at \$9. In the “Turning organic” condition, the web page stated that the Neyerhans company “switched in 2022 towards organic cocoa beans to bring you chocolate of the highest quality and delicious taste.” In the “Always been producing organic” condition, the statement was simply that the Neyerhans company “has always been using organic cocoa beans to bring you chocolate of the highest quality and delicious taste.” In the control condition, the statement was “The Neyerhans company brings you chocolate of the highest quality and delicious taste” (see [Appendix 1](#) for stimuli).

Once exposed to the stimuli, participants first rated their purchase intentions (4 items from [White et al., 2012](#); $\alpha = 0.93$) to avoid common method variance ([Podsakoff et al., 2003](#)). Sample items were “I would consider buying this chocolate” and “I would likely make this chocolate one of my first choices in this product category.” ($\alpha = 0.93$). Participants then rated their perception of brand adaptability using a two-item measure from [Pecot et al. \(2019\)](#): “Regarding Neyerhans, to what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements?” “This brand renews itself,” and “This brand knows how to reinvent itself” ($\alpha = 0.92$, $r = 0.87$, $p < 0.001$). Next, participants rated the product quality, using two items from [Bao et al. \(2011\)](#): “This is a high-quality chocolate bar,” and “This is a superior chocolate bar” ($\alpha = 0.85$, $r = 0.74$, $p < 0.001$).

Further, we measured chocolate liking (“To what extent do you like chocolate in general?”, from “1: Not at all” to “7: Very much”) as one variable that could explain variance in purchase intentions and was used as a covariate in our analyses. Brand familiarity was assessed (“To what extent are you familiar with this brand?”, from “1: Not at all” to “7: Very much”) to ensure that participants were unfamiliar with the brands ($M = 1.45$, $SD = 1.18$). Also, to ensure data quality ([Arndt et al., 2022](#)), an attention check was included (“please, answer ‘Strongly disagree’ here”), and the observations of the 11 respondents that failed this check were removed from the data set, leaving the final sample of 189 respondents (51% female, $M_{age} = 42.35$, from 18 to 75).

Finally, for manipulation check purposes, respondents completed an ad-hoc 3 item-scale that measures their perception of whether the company’s production process has changed. Items were “The way this chocolate has been produced is new to the company,” “The company has produced this chocolate using a method that is unusual to them” and “The way this chocolate has been produced was really different from the traditional method used by the brand” ($\alpha = 0.92$). Result revealed significantly different perceptions of a change in the process across conditions [$F(2, 188) = 23.01$, $p < 0.001$], and planned contrasts supported our manipulation, with a significantly greater perception of a change in the process in the turning organic condition ($M = 4.66$) as opposed to the “Always been producing organic” [$M = 3.18$, $F(1, 187) = 42.18$, $p < 0.001$] and the control [$M = 3.49$, $F(1, 187) = 25.40$, $p < 0.001$] conditions. Also, people were asked at the end of the questionnaire if the chocolate bar was conventional or organic (coded 0 versus 1), with a third modality (i.e. “was not mentioned”). Results revealed that respondents in the ‘Turning organic’ (80.00%) and ‘Always been

producing organic' (65.70%) conditions were significantly more likely to respond that the chocolate was organic, as opposed to those in the control condition (11.3%; $\chi^2 = 72.57, p < 0.001$), providing support for our manipulation. Unless stated otherwise, all the items were rated on 7-point Likert scales, anchored with "1: Not agree at all" and "7: Fully agree." [Table 2](#) provides the psychometric properties of the scales.

Results

To test whether "turning organic" (versus always producing organic versus control) drives a stronger perception of brand adaptability – and that "always been producing organic" cannot be responsible for such effects – an ANOVA was conducted. As expected, results revealed significant mean differences across conditions [$F(2, 188) = 8.80, p < 0.001$]. Planned contrasts revealed that the perception of a change in the production process was significantly higher in the "turning organic" condition ($M = 5.13$) than in the "always been producing organic" [$M = 4.36, F(1, 188) = 13.29, p < 0.001$] and control [$M = 4.34, F(1, 188) = 13.44, p < 0.001$] conditions ([Table 3](#)). Therefore, only the fact of "turning" (as opposed to always been producing) organic triggers the perception that the brand is adaptable, which then can explain the subsequent predicted effects on perceived product quality and purchase intentions.

To test this prediction and H2c, a serial mediation analysis was performed (Process, Model 6, 5,000 bootstraps) (see [Table 4](#)). Specifically, the multi-categorical production type conditions ("Turning organic" vs "always been producing organic" vs conventional as control) served as the independent variable, perceptions of i/brand adaptability and ii/product quality as serial mediators, and purchase intentions as the dependent variable. Chocolate liking served as a covariate. We followed the guidelines from [Hayes and Preacher \(2014\)](#) on mediation analyses using multi-categorical independent variables, and thus performed a general linear modeling approach to estimating the direct and indirect effects when the independent variable (i.e. turning organic conditions) is multi-categorical (PROCESS macro, Model 6, 5,000 bootstraps). Results revealed that turning organic (versus control) increases the perception of brand adaptability ($B = 0.78, p < 0.001$), supporting H1. As predicted by H2, results then yielded a positive effect of such perceived brand adaptability on perceived product quality ($B = 0.26, p < 0.001$; H2a), as well as a positive effect of such perceived quality on purchase intentions ($B = 0.40, p < 0.001$; H2b), making the indirect effect of turning organic on purchase intentions positive and significant ($B = 0.080, SE = 0.039, 95\% CI = 0.020; 0.174$; H2c). Also, chocolate liking as a covariate affected perceived product quality ($B = 0.14, p = 0.017$), but the serial mediation remained significant – and revealed slightly larger – without the inclusion of this covariate in the model ($B = 0.090, SE = 0.043, 95\% CI = 0.024; 0.195$). Finally, and importantly, when the brand is depicted as 'always been producing organic', the serial indirect effect on purchase intentions is not observed ($B = 0.001, SE = 0.022, 95\% CI = -0.042; 0.048$), which is in line with our hypothesis.

Discussion

The results of Study 1 provide initial support for the prediction that turning organic indirectly prompts purchase intention through the effects of the perceptions of (1) brand adaptability and (2) product quality. When a brand turns organic, consumers perceive it as more adaptable, which, in turn, improves the perception of its product quality and eventually increases purchase intentions. However, this serial effect was observed using the chocolate category, and we need to make sure that the positive indirect effect of turning organic still holds when using a different product category. Therefore, in Study 2, we collect data using tomato sauce as another product category to improve the generalizability of the findings and

Table 2. Studies 1–3: Psychometric properties of the measures

Constructs	Study 1		Study 2	
	Loadings	AVE (α)	Loadings	AVE (α)
<i>Purchase intentions</i>				
I would consider buying this [product]	0.909	0.83 (0.93)	0.855	0.78 (0.90)
I would recommend this [product] to friends	0.920		0.866	
I would likely make this [product] bottle one of my first choices in this product category	0.951		0.933	
I would exert a great deal of effort to purchase this [product]	0.881		0.855	
<i>Perceived brand adaptability</i>				
This brand renews itself	0.968	0.93 (0.92)	0.954	0.90 (0.89)
This brand knows how to reinvent itself	968		0.954	
<i>Perceived product quality</i>				
This is a high quality [product]	0.931	0.86 (0.85)	0.971	0.94 (0.94)
This is a superior [product]	0.931		0.971	
<i>Perceived brand innovativeness</i>				
This brand is very innovative in its industry	–	–	0.895	0.79 (0.91)
This brand challenges existing market ideas	–		0.864	
This brand brings new ideas to its market	–		0.879	
This brand is creative	–		0.919	
<i>Perception of a change in the production process</i>				
The way this [product] has been produced is new to the company	0.920	0.85 (0.92)	0.934	0.84 (0.90)
The company has produced this [product] using a method that is unusual to them	0.933		0.889	
The way this [product] has been produced is really different from the traditional method used by the brand	0.927		0.933	
Source(s): Authors' own work				

Table 3. Study 1: Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations)

Variables	Control condition (n = 62)	Always been producing organic condition (n = 67)	Turning organic condition (n = 60)
Purchase intentions	3.96 (1.68)	3.72 (1.39)	3.82 (1.54)
Perceived product quality	5.08 (1.11)	5.00 (1.00)	5.35 (1.14) ^c
Perceived brand adaptability	4.34 (1.17)	4.36 (1.13)	5.13 (1.24) ^{a, b}
Liking (covariate)	6.13 (1.23)	6.19 (1.25)	6.17 (1.37)
Brand familiarity	1.50 (1.29)	1.30 (0.88)	1.57 (1.35)

Note(s): ^aSignificantly different from control condition at least at the 0.05 level. ^bSignificantly different from “Always been producing organic” condition at least at the 0.05 level. ^cSignificantly different from “Always been producing organic” condition at least at the 0.10 level

Source(s): Authors’ own work

Table 4. Regression estimates (unstandardized) from studies 1 and 2

Direct effects		Study 1 (Chocolates, n = 189)		Study 2 (Tomato sauce, n = 488)	
		Coef.	p	Coef.	p
Turning organic →	PBA	0.78***	< 0.001	0.64***	< 0.001
	PPQ	0.06	0.756	0.67***	< 0.001
	Purchase intentions	-0.57*	0.024	0.01	0.928
PBA →	PPQ	0.26***	< 0.001	0.35***	< 0.001
	Purchase intentions	0.41***	< 0.001	0.27***	< 0.001
PPQ →	Purchase intentions	0.40***	< 0.001	0.35***	< 0.001
<i>Covariates</i>					
Liking →	PBA	0.11	0.116	0.31***	< 0.001
	PPQ	0.14*	0.017	0.25***	< 0.001
	Purchase intentions	0.08	0.287	0.32***	< 0.001
<i>Total and indirect effects</i>		Coef	95 % CI	Coef	95 % CI
Total effect		-0.018	-0.146, 0.100	0.482***	0.348, 0.628
Turning organic → PBA → Purchase intentions		0.323*	0.128, 0.565	0.173**	0.093, 0.279
Turning organic → PPQ → Purchase intentions		0.023	-0.127, 0.224	0.231***	0.137, 0.347
Turning organic → PBA → PPQ → Purchase intentions		0.080*	0.020, 0.174	0.079*	0.044, 0.121
Turning organic → PBA → PH → Purchase intentions		—	—	0.079*	0.031, 0.129
Turning organic → PBI → PBA → PPQ → Purchase intentions		—	—	0.023*	0.009, 0.043

Note(s): PBA = Perceived Brand Adaptability; PPQ = Perceived Product Quality; PBI = Perceived Brand Innovativeness; PH = Perceived Healthiness; *** $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.01$; * $p < 0.05$

Source(s): Authors’ own work

examine whether the effects of turning organic on purchase intentions through perceptions of brand adaptability and product quality show similar patterns. We also examine the moderating effect of the OMPR in the next study.

Study 2: the role of the organic market penetration rate

Study 2 first aims to try to replicate the effects of turning organic observed in Study 1 by using a different product category. Further, because the decision of turning organic could have different effects depending on market characteristics, Study 2 is designed to examine if the proportion of competitors that are already organic in the market could strengthen or

weaken the effects of turning organic. Therefore, this study investigates the moderating role of the OMPR and thus answers the question if turning organic is more beneficial when the market has a low (versus high) OMPR. Finally, because organic products are surrounded by a positive halo such that they are associated with greater healthiness (Ha *et al.*, 2019; Hansmann *et al.*, 2020), we test such perceived healthiness as an alternative second mediator and test it against perceived quality to examine its strength in explaining the effects of turning organic.

Participants, design and procedure

To test the predicted effect of the OMPR, Study 2 employs a 2 (Turning organic: Yes versus Control) $\times$ 2 (OMPR: Low [12%] versus High [88%]) between-subjects design. In this study, participants ($n = 502$, 57.4% female, $M_{\text{Age}} = 38$, $SD = 11$) were recruited online through Prolific and were compensated for their participation. They were randomly asked to read one of four mock retail web pages presenting a Napoletana sauce from a fictitious company, *Cucina & Amore* (see Appendix 2 for the stimuli). In all conditions, the price of the sauce was identical (\$10.80) and the only differences were about i/whether or not the brand had turned organic and ii/the organic market penetration rate. In all conditions, participants read “Founded in 1976, *Cucina & Amore* produces this Napoletana sauce in the region of Basilicata, in Southern Italy”, but in the turning organic condition they also read “The brand has recently adopted organic production methods, so its sauce is now 100% organic” and an organic logo was added for ecological validity purposes (versus “The brand is not organic” in the control condition). In the low OMPR condition, it was specified that the brand operates “in a market where only 12% of brands are certified organic” as opposed to “in a market where 88% of brands are certified organic” in the high OMPR condition.

After being exposed to a mock webpage, respondents were asked to complete the same measures of purchase intentions ($\alpha = 0.90$), perceived brand adaptability ($\alpha = 0.89$), and product quality ($\alpha = 0.94$) as in Study 1, adapted to the context of the study. They also completed a four-item measure of perceived brand innovativeness adapted from Fang (2008; e.g. “This brand challenges existing market ideas”, and “This brand brings new ideas to its market”; $\alpha = 0.91$). Because this construct is conceptually close – yet, different – from that of brand adaptability, a test of discriminant validity was performed. The heterotrait–monotrait (HTMT) procedure (Henseler *et al.*, 2015) was carried out, requiring the calculation of a ratio of the average correlations between constructs to the geometric mean of the average correlations within items of the same constructs. A ratio of 0.894 was revealed, below the 0.90 threshold value recommended by Henseler *et al.* (2015), suggesting no significant issue of discriminant validity among the two constructs.

Also, given the aforementioned positive halo effect surrounding organic products exists whereby consumers associate those products with greater healthiness, there is a need to test if turning organic indirectly increases purchase intentions due to a potential mediating effect of such perceived healthiness. Respondents thus completed a single item measuring this construct (“This Napoletana sauce is healthy”, from “1: Not agree at all to” to “7: Fully agree”, $M = 4.67$, $SD = 1.26$).

For manipulation check purposes, participants also completed the same measure of perception of change in the production process ($\alpha = 0.90$) as in Study 1, and a mono-item asking how high or low was the percentage of organic companies in the market as described on the web page (from “1: Very low” to “7: Very high”). They also completed similar mono-item measures of liking ($M = 4.48$, $SD = 1.36$) and brand familiarity ($M = 1.69$, $SD = 1.35$) as in Study 1, as well as a similar attention check as in Study 1. Due to 10 participants failing to respond correctly to the attention check, and three speeders (i.e. having spent less than 2 s per item; Arndt *et al.*, 2022), the final sample was composed of 489 participants (57.4% female,

$M_{\text{Age}} = 38$, $SD = 11$). After completing these measures, participants completed a set of survey questions about their socio-demographic characteristics.

Manipulation checks

To validate our stimuli, a two-way ANOVA was performed, yielding a main positive effect of turning organic on the perception of change in the regular production process of the brand [$M_{\text{Turning organic}} = 4.02$, $M_{\text{Control}} = 2.91$; $F(1, 486) = 72.64$, $p < 0.001$]. Importantly, no main effect of OMPR [$F(1, 484) = 0.514$, $p = 0.47$] nor its interaction with the Turning Organic manipulation [$F(1, 484) = 0.037$, $p = 0.84$] emerged.

Turning to OMPR, we conducted another two-way ANOVA, which revealed a positive effect of OMPR [$M_{\text{Low}} = 2.67$, $M_{\text{High}} = 5.53$; $F(1, 484) = 474.99$, $p < 0.001$]. However, the results also show significant effects of turning organic as well as the interaction between these two terms (p 's < 0.019). These significant results can be explained by the fact that the effect of OMPR also depends on the level of turning organic. Put differently, the difference between the high and low conditions of OMPR may change based on whether Turning Organic is high or low. However, following recommendations from [Ejelöv and Luke \(2020\)](#), we looked at the partial effect sizes of the three effects, and the effect of OMPR is by far the strongest effect (partial $\eta^2 = 0.495$) compared to the effect of turning organic (partial $\eta^2 = 0.012$) or the interaction one (partial $\eta^2 = 0.018$). This confirms the success of our manipulation.

Results

[Table 5](#) presents the descriptive statistics. Turning to hypotheses testing, our first analysis aimed to examine if our previous results replicated. As in Study 1, a serial mediation was performed (5,000 bootstraps) and a similar pattern of results was observed ([Table 4](#)). Precisely, results revealed here again a significant serial mediation effect (Index = 0.079, SE = 0.019, 95% CI = 0.044; 0.121). Turning organic (vs control) increased perceived brand adaptability ($B = 0.64$, $p < 0.001$; $H1$), which then increased perceived product quality ($B = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$; $H2a$). Then, such product quality was positively related to purchase intentions ($B = 0.35$, $p < 0.001$; $H2b$), leading to a significant positive indirect and serially mediated effect of turning organic on purchase intentions, supporting $H2c$.

A serial parallel mediation was performed to test the potential mediating role of perceived product healthiness. To compare this potential effect with that of perceived quality, both variables were included in parallel as the second mediators (Process, Model 81, 5,000

Table 5. Descriptive statistics (means and standard deviations) for Study 2

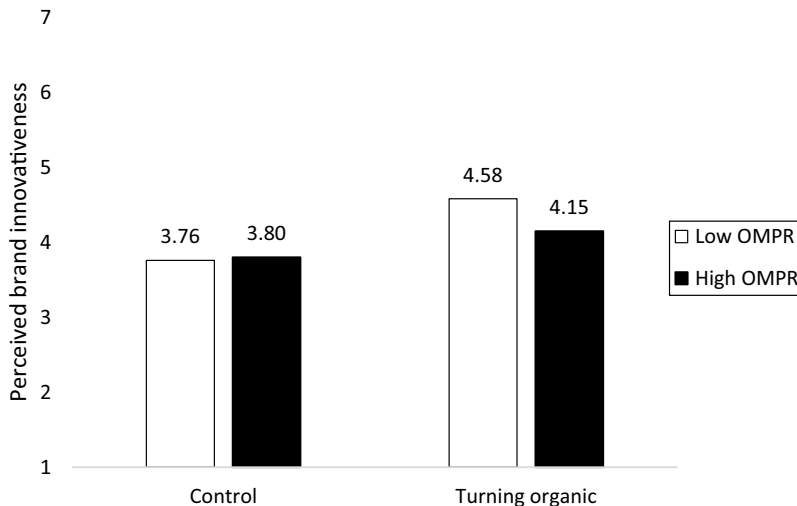
	Control condition		Turning organic condition	
	Low OMPR ($n = 123$)	High OMPR ($n = 122$)	Low OMPR ($n = 122$)	High OMPR ($n = 121$)
Purchase intentions	3.41 (1.44)	3.34 (1.47)	4.00 (1.39)	3.84 (1.32)
Perceived product quality	4.61 (1.21)	4.29 (1.35)	5.49 (0.99)	5.27 (1.00)
Perceived brand adaptability	3.86 (1.22)	3.93 (1.26)	4.58 (1.04)	4.57 (1.05)
Perceived brand innovativeness	3.76 (1.27)	3.80 (1.23)	4.58 (1.08)	4.15 (1.24)
Perceived product healthiness	4.29 (1.37)	4.21 (1.18)	5.09 (1.19)	5.07 (0.98)
Liking (covariate)	4.42 (1.31)	4.43 (1.29)	4.64 (1.40)	4.44 (1.45)
Brand familiarity	1.60 (1.29)	1.88 (1.53)	1.70 (1.36)	1.58 (1.20)

Source(s): Authors' own work

bootstraps). Here again, a significant positive indirect effect was observed (Index = 0.079, $SE = 0.024$, 95% $CI = 0.031, 0.129$) due to the positive effect of perceived brand adaptability on perceived product healthiness ($B = 0.43$, $p < 0.001$) and the positive effect of this variable on purchase intentions ($B = 0.27$, $p < 0.001$). However, in this parallel analysis, the mediating effect of perceived healthiness was slightly weaker than that of perceived product quality (Index = 0.092, $SE = 0.028$, 95% $CI = 0.042, 0.155$), bringing support to our focus on this latter mediating variable.

Next, the predicted moderating effect of the OMPR in the turning organic-brand innovativeness relationship was examined, using a two-way ANOVA. Results yielded a significant effect of turning organic on brand innovativeness [$F(1, 484) = 28.57$, $p < 0.001$], no effect of OMPR [$F(1, 484) = 3.13$, $p = 0.077$], and their significant interaction [$F(1, 484) = 4.52$, $p = 0.034$; Figure 2]. Specifically, and supporting *H3*, in the turning organic condition, perceived brand innovativeness was significantly higher in the low OMPR condition ($M = 4.58$) than in the high OMPR condition ($M = 4.15$, $t = 2.85$, $p = 0.002$), while no significant mean difference ($M_{Low} = 3.76$, $M_{High} = 3.80$, $t = -0.24$, $p = 0.404$) was observed in the control (i.e. not turning organic condition).

The last analysis tested two predictions. It first tested the mediating effect of perceived brand innovativeness as part of the indirect effect of turning organic on perceived i/brand adaptability and ii/product quality, and purchase intentions. Then, it tested the moderating role of the OMPR in this sequence. To test these two predictions, a moderated serial mediation analysis was performed (Process, Model 83; 5,000 bootstraps; Hayes, 2018). The analysis included the manipulation of turning organic as the independent variable, perceived i/brand innovativeness, ii/brand adaptability and iii/product quality as the mediating variables (in that order), purchase intentions as the dependent variable, and the manipulation of the OMPR as the moderating variable. Product liking was included as a covariate. As yielded by prior analyses, results revealed a significant positive effect of turning organic on



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure 2. The moderating role of the OMPR in the effect of turning organic on perceived brand innovativeness

perceived brand innovativeness ($B = 0.82, p < 0.001$), no effect of OMPR ($B = 0.04, p = 0.801$), and their significant interaction ($B = -0.46, p = 0.033$). Then, a positive effect of such innovativeness on perceived brand adaptability ($B = 0.65, p < 0.001$) was observed, followed by a positive effect of such adaptability on perceived product quality ($B = 0.29, p < 0.001$). Increases in perceived product quality were associated with stronger purchase intentions ($B = 0.42, p < 0.001$), leading to a significant index of serial mediation (Index = 0.023, $SE = 0.009$, 95% $CI = 0.009, 0.043$). Importantly, given the moderating role of the OMPR, a significant and negative index of moderated mediation was observed (Index = $-0.036, SE = 0.020$, 95% $CI = -0.082, -0.002$), whereby turning organic has a significantly stronger positive indirect effect on purchase intentions when the OMPR is low (Index = 0.065, $SE = 0.020$, 95% $CI = 0.029, 0.111$) as opposed to high (Index = 0.027, $SE = 0.014$, 95% $CI = 0.003, 0.059$). These results support *H4*.

General discussion

The primary goal of our research was to adopt a dynamic, twofold perspective on organic products by explaining the positive offering (i.e. brand and product) outcomes of turning organic under specific market conditions. The results of our studies offer three key contributions. First, we go beyond the consensual static approach adopted in research on organic products by adopting a dynamic perspective on this strategic move. We show that it is not the fact of merely *being* organic that triggers positive brand and product perceptions and subsequent purchase intentions, but that it can also be triggered by the process of *turning* organic. Second, by showing the positive effect of turning organic – and thus the effect of changing the food production process – we contribute and challenge the promising stream of literature that investigates the effects of different types of production processes on consumers' evaluations (Abouab and Gomez, 2015; Fuchs *et al.*, 2015; Wilcox *et al.*, 2023). Third, while prior research has considered only the brand (Bartels and Hoogendam, 2011) or the product (e.g. Hempel and Hamm, 2016; Janssen and Hamm, 2012), or both (e.g. Bezawada and Pauwels, 2013; Davcik and Sharma, 2015), this research is the first to adopt a twofold perspective that considers the interaction between the offering and the market in which it operates. By doing so, we are more able to identify in which specific market conditions – here, one of low OMPR – the decision of turning organic is beneficial to a brand, enlarging our spectrum for managerial implications.

Theoretical implications

These findings also have three academic contributions. First, by adopting a *dynamic* approach our research complements the literature on organic products that has opted so far for a *static* examination of organic products. Our research – and especially results from Study 1 that compared a condition of turning organic to one where the brand was depicted as already being organic – shows that it is not the fact of *being* organic that drives brand- and subsequent product-related perceptions but that of the dynamic process of *turning* organic. Therefore, this research has important implications for the literature on consumers' perceptions of brands and their production processes.

Abouab and Gomez (2015) observed the importance of the production process in consumers' perceptions of product naturalness. Further work from Streletskaya *et al.* (2019) and Vecchio *et al.* (2019) replicated the role of the production process, extending the range of outcomes by showing that such a process can even affect preferences. Our findings contribute to the literature that investigates the effects of different types of production methods on consumers' evaluations (Fuchs *et al.*, 2015) by highlighting the

positive effect of turning organic on consumers' responses to organic products. However, they stand in sharp contrast with [Wilcox et al.'s \(2023\)](#) conclusion that consumers evaluate the products of a brand that use a traditional method to be higher in quality than similar products that are not made using a traditional method. Rather, our results consistently support the conclusion that perceptions of product quality increase following a change in the production process, from nonorganic to organic. This discrepancy is likely because, while [Wilcox et al. \(2023\)](#) opposed traditional to nontraditional production methods, we studied the specific decision of turning organic without any mention of a traditional method in our experiments.

Our second contribution relates to the identification of the process that explains the outcomes of turning organic. By adopting a brand- and product-related (i.e. offering) perspective showing that perceived brand adaptability increases after turning organic, our results shed new light on how adopting the decision to transition to organic enhances brand image. Although turning organic represents a challenging decision that can shape a company's future, the marketing literature on the impact that such decisions have on brands has remained surprisingly scarce. Our results show that a brand that decides to turn organic is perceived as more able to adapt to environmental changes, leading to greater perceptions of product quality – and perceived healthiness, as revealed in Study 2 – and purchase intentions. Given that brand adaptability is a component of brand heritage ([Pecot et al., 2019](#)), our results contribute to this stream of literature (e.g. [Balmer and Burghausen, 2019](#); [Pecot et al., 2022](#); [Urde et al., 2007](#)) by showing that although the decision of turning organic implies a change, it does not alter brand heritage but rather contributes to it, subsequently being beneficial to purchase intentions. As this turning point in the brand's history is in line with stakeholders' aspirations, it is therefore seen as contributing to the brand's longevity and its heritage ([Humphreys and Latour, 2013](#)). Further research is needed that explores questions in this area.

The third contribution of this research lies in the identification of the market conditions – and more specifically the penetration rate – in which the decision to turn organic is most beneficial. Study 2 showed that it is when the market has a low (versus high) OMPR the decision to convert to organic is the most beneficial. Building on the literature on “first movers,” we showed that when a company is one of the first to enter the organic market, it is perceived as more innovative, which in turn increases the perceived adaptability of the brand, the quality evaluations of its products, and purchase intentions. These results thus complement the body of literature on brand innovativeness ([Brexendorf and Keller, 2017](#); Fang 2008; [Kunz et al., 2011](#); [Shams et al., 2015](#)). Specifically, our findings showing an indirect effect of brand innovativeness on perceived product quality are consistent with those of [Pappu and Quester \(2016\)](#) and build on the same overarching theory (i.e. signaling theory), although in their research the effect is direct. However, while [Pappu and Quester \(2016\)](#) examined brand innovativeness in direct relation to product quality and loyalty, our research goes beyond by identifying the market conditions (low levels of OMPRs) when such brand innovativeness is the strongest. Results from Study 2 show that not all market conditions are equal in their ability to help brand innovativeness and emphasize the need to consider market dynamics when examining the link between brand innovativeness and adaptability. As such, we extend recent work from [Wilcox et al. \(2023\)](#) that finds evidence of a positive effect of traditional-based production methods on product perceived quality, while our research demonstrates that bringing new methods (i.e. organic) in a market where only a few competitors already employ such methods can lead to greater perceptions of innovativeness and adaptability.

Managerial implications

Our findings provide recommendations for food companies that are either already in the process of turning organic or are considering turning organic. Companies already in the process of turning organic should communicate messages about their brand adaptability, ultimately leading to greater product evaluations and purchase intentions. For example, these companies could promote this change in the hope of showing how they are adapting to new consumption trends (i.e. organic). This would help to increase transparency in the process and show companies' willingness to adopt a more environmentally friendly approach. It is also relatively uncommon to communicate around the "turning organic" attribute compared to already being organic, and this could help relatively young companies to get some visibility and support their brand positioning (i.e. showing they embrace changes for the sake of the environment and that they do "walk the talk").

For companies considering turning organic, the process of turning organic is lengthy and costly. For example, in Europe and the USA, the full process of transitioning from conventional to organic agricultural practices takes three years for plant-based products. It is also well documented that organic production costs are higher than those in a conventional production system and organic yields are typically lower. Hence, the decision to turn organic must be carefully considered. Our results show that the results of turning organic are most positive when the penetration of the organic market is low. Therefore, we recommend that brands consider being first movers and organic products in markets when the OMPR is low enough to benefit from an increase in perceived innovativeness, and increased perceptions of product quality and purchase intentions.

Limitations and avenues for further research

Given that our research collects data from online experiments, future work might consider using field experiments to test whether our results could be replicated using realistic treatments with representative populations and practically relevant dependent variables such as actual taste or/and purchases (Meyvis and Van Osselaer, 2018). Also, scraping – or "developing software to collect information displayed in a web browser automatically" (Boegershausen et al., 2022) – to collect product details and purchase transactions for actual products sold in the market would be another research option to consider. For example, data could be retrieved from online consumer reviews to see if individuals report better taste for organic products and whether they purchased products and brands that had recently adopted organic lines. Further, our experiments involved only food products, while other organic product categories – like organic cosmetics – have seen substantial growth and could be examined to see if our results can be replicated in nonfood markets.

Considering the difference in the total effects across Studies 1 and 2, a worthwhile avenue for further research is to consider product categories that differ in their hedonic versus utilitarian properties. The total effect of turning organic on purchase intentions is not significant in Study 1 but significant and positive in Study 2, and such inconsistency across total effects might be due to the difference in the product category: Study 1 involves a hedonic product (i.e. chocolate) while Study 2 involves a product category (i.e. tomato sauce) that consumers might primarily perceive as a more utilitarian product (Datta et al., 2017). Because such an indulging product like chocolate may have its overall evaluation driven by hedonic motivations (Batra and Ahtola, 1990), in Study 1 the primary hedonic motivation may explain purchase intentions more strongly than the fact of turning organic. Conversely, in Study 2, the utilitarian motivation may not be sufficient to explain purchase intentions, and turning organic may play a greater role. Therefore, further research is needed on the distinction between hedonic and utilitarian products in the context of brands turning

organic. Another potential explanation may lie in that organic/Fair Trade chocolate has been proven to not attract consumers to the product, especially due to a lack of salience and attention toward these certifications on the packaging, which, in turn, doesn't drive the demand toward these products compared to the regular counterparts (Rousseau, 2015). Such a phenomenon is not observed in the case of tomato sauces as consumers may be already familiar with organic products in this category (Naspetti and Zanolì, 2014).

Further, while we specify in our online experiment that the brand turned organic in its entirety, there could be a situation in which a brand might turn part (some lines) of its production organic and keep other parts non-organic. Consumers might see this as "greenwashing," or a failed attempt to apply green marketing strategies to gain competitive advantages, especially among environmentally conscious consumers. This is not uncommon, especially amongst food and beverage brands, who might choose to have an organic product line alongside a regular product line to appeal to different consumer segments. As greenwashing can not only affect a company's profitability, but also lead to a loss of consumer trust, which, in turn, can result in ethical harm (Szabo and Webster, 2021), future research might compare the effect of turning organic for all products versus turning organic for only some products in a company's portfolio, and examining the changes in trust, taste, brand adaptability, and purchase intentions.

Finally, price could serve as a potential moderator in the relationship examined in this paper. Namely, what would be the best price level for a product that turns organic? For example, Isojärvi and Aspara (2023) show that advertising the combination of organic products and price promotion influences consumers' reactions positively; this price discount may be an opportunity for consumers to try the product at a lower price point. Given the different patterns of results between turning organic and being organic in Study 1, could we expect similar results when combining products that turn organic with price promotions? We encourage future research to conduct experiments in which price is manipulated and see if there are any differences in consumers' responses toward products that turn organic.

Conclusion

This study investigates the impact of a company's transition to organic production from both product- and brand-related perspectives. While historically, adopting organic practices or entering the market as an organic producer has been regarded as a strategy for differentiation, contemporary challenges such as climate change and evolving consumer behaviors may shift this advantage into a "new normal" that businesses must navigate. This paper, therefore, adds a little yet significant brick to the wall of knowledge by showing how brands can benefit from being perceived as adaptable and responsive to changing trends. At the same time, we offer an interesting foothold for other researchers to keep exploring how brands can communicate that they are doing the right thing, when an element of differentiation becomes the norm the majority of producers abide by. The implications of these findings extend beyond the food and beverage sector, encompassing any product from living organisms, as well as even artificial products designed to minimize their carbon footprint.

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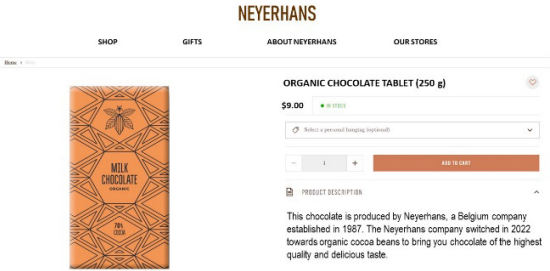
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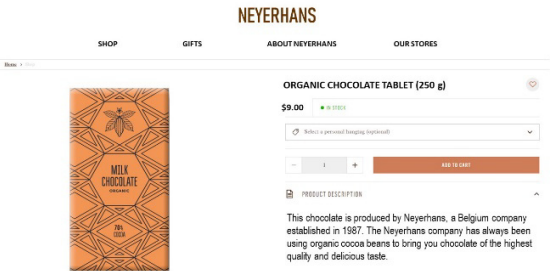
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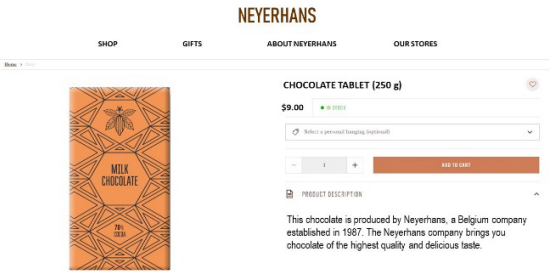
Turning organic condition



Always been producing organic condition

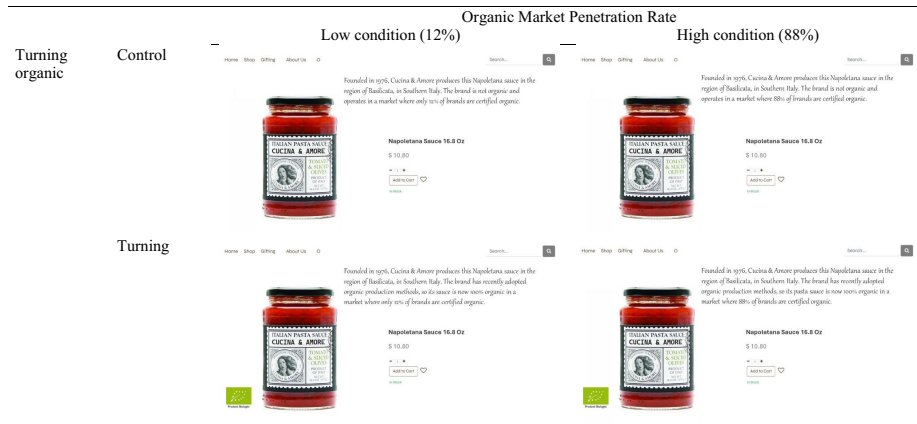


Control condition



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure A1. The stimuli used in Study 1



Source(s): Authors' own work

Figure A2. The stimuli used in Study 2

About the authors

Renaud Lunardo is a Professor of Marketing at Kedge Business School (Bordeaux, France) since 2011. He has been visiting scholar at Duke University, Louisiana Tech, HEC Montreal and the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science at UniSA. His expertise is in social psychology. His research has received numerous awards and has been published in international journals including *Journal of Retailing*, *Journal of Business Research*, *International Journal of Research in Marketing*, *Journal of the Association for Consumer Research*, *Marketing Letters*, *Psychology and Marketing*, *European Journal of Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing Management* and *Journal of Travel Research*.

Camille Saintives is an Associate Professor of Marketing at ESSCA School of Management in Bordeaux (France). Her expertise is in consumer behavior. Her research has published in journals including *Psychology and Marketing*, *Journal of Business and Industrial Marketing* and *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services*.

David A. Jaud is a Senior Lecturer of Marketing and Wine Business at the Adelaide Business School. His areas of expertise are consumer behavior (e.g. information processing, imagination stimulation, emotions and coping strategies, consumer wellbeing and responsible consumption), and wine and food marketing. He has published in international academic journals such as *Food Quality and Preference*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, *Journal of Consumer Behavior*, *Journal of Public Policy and Marketing*, *Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services* and *Psychology and Marketing*.

Armando Maria Corsi is the Director of the Wine Business Group and the Discipline Leader – Marketing at the Adelaide Business School. His key area of research is the analysis of consumer behavior, particularly towards wine and other premium foods and beverages. Member of the Editorial Board of *Food Quality and Preference*, the *International Journal of Market Research* and the *Australian Journal of Grape and Wine Research*. Armando is author of more than 90 refereed papers, book chapters and trade articles on wine and food marketing. Armando Maria Corsi is the corresponding author and can be contacted at: armando.corsi@adelaide.edu.au

Bradley J. Rickard is a Professor of Food and Agricultural Economics in the Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management. His teaching and research focus on the economic implications of policies, innovation, and industry-led initiatives in food and beverage markets. Results from his research have been highlighted by various media outlets including *Buffalo News*, *The Economist*, *Freakonomics.com*, *National Public Radio*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Washington Post* and *Wine Spectator*. He also serves as an editor for the *Journal of Wine Economics*.