

# Bridging the Intention–Behavior Gap in Organic Food Consumption: An Integrative Systematic Review of Emotion, Green Altruism, and Psychological Distance

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## Abstract

Organic food consumption has grown alongside increasing consumer concern for health, environmental sustainability, and ethical responsibility. Yet favorable attitudes do not consistently translate into actual purchasing behavior, indicating that the intention–behavior gap in this domain cannot be explained by rational evaluations alone. This study conducts a systematic literature review to develop an integrative psychological explanation of how emotion, green altruism, and psychological distance shape organic food consumption. Following PRISMA 2020, the review analyzed 35 peer-reviewed articles indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect and published between 2015 and 2025. The findings show that emotional mechanisms, particularly anticipated pride, guilt, and emotional attachment, commonly strengthen purchase intention by increasing perceived personal relevance, moral meaning, and self-consistency. Green altruism supports organic food consumption by framing it as an environmentally and socially responsible act, although its influence varies across contexts, consumer segments, and product categories. The reviewed evidence further indicates that psychological distance functions mainly as a framing and moderating mechanism that shapes whether emotional and altruistic motives are perceived as immediate, concrete, and behaviorally actionable. Across the reviewed studies, emotional and moral mechanisms more consistently predict intention than repeated purchase behavior, while trust, norms, and message framing help explain empirical inconsistencies. Overall, this review advances an integrative framework for explaining organic food consumption beyond rational choice and provides directions for future research on sustainable consumption behavior.

## Keywords:

Emotion; Green altruism; Organic food; Psychological distance; Sustainable consumption.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The global growth of organic food consumption reflects increasing public concern for health, food safety, environmental sustainability, and ethical responsibility. Organic food is widely perceived as a healthier and more environmentally responsible alternative to conventional food because it is associated with reduced chemical inputs, biodiversity preservation, and more sustainable agricultural practices. Recent global reports show a steady expansion of organic agriculture and markets worldwide, positioning organic food as an important component of sustainable food systems (Willer et al., 2023). Despite this growth, however, consumer adoption remains uneven, and repeated purchasing behavior is far from universal. This pattern

suggests that awareness of organic food benefits alone is insufficient to explain why consumers consistently choose organic food.

Research on organic food consumption consistently characterizes it as a value-laden form of consumption shaped by personal values, ethical considerations, health concerns, and identity expression rather than by purely utilitarian evaluations (Kushwah et al., 2019; Leyva-hernández et al., 2025; Rana & Paul, 2017). Although functional attributes such as price, availability, and perceived quality remain important, prior studies repeatedly show that these rational factors do not fully explain why consumers are willing to pay price premiums for organic food or why favorable attitudes often fail to translate into actual purchasing behavior. This inconsistency, widely discussed as the intention–behavior gap, remains one of the central challenges in ethical and sustainable consumption research (Ayyub et al., 2021; Bazhan et al., 2024; ElHaffar et al., 2020). The persistence of this gap indicates that organic food consumption cannot be understood adequately through rational-choice models alone and requires greater attention to the psychological processes through which values and attitudes are translated into action.

In response to this limitation, recent consumer behavior research has increasingly emphasized emotion-related mechanisms in sustainable consumption. However, the concept of emotion has often been treated too broadly. In this review, emotion is understood as a cluster of affective mechanisms that includes anticipated emotions such as pride and guilt, moral emotions, emotional attitudes, and general affective evaluations. These mechanisms influence how consumers interpret the meaning of their choices, anticipate self-evaluative consequences, and experience psychological rewards from acting consistently with their values. Empirical studies suggest that emotions such as anticipated pride, guilt, reassurance, and emotional attachment strengthen the perceived moral meaning, personal relevance, and self-consistency of sustainable food choices (Haj-Salem et al., 2022; Lombardi et al., 2024; Tang, Chen, et al., 2025). In the organic food context, emotion may therefore function as an affective activation mechanism that makes sustainable consumption feel rewarding and personally meaningful. At the same time, emotional effects appear to be context-dependent and may weaken when consumers face trust deficits, situational barriers, abstract benefits, or unsupportive social environments (ElHaffar et al., 2020).

Alongside affective mechanisms, moral motivation has emerged as another important explanation for organic food consumption, particularly through the concept of green altruism. Yet prior studies often use green altruism interchangeably with broader notions such as prosocial motivation or moral norms, even though these constructs are theoretically distinct. In this review, green altruism refers specifically to a voluntary orientation toward protecting environmental and collective welfare even without immediate personal gain, whereas prosocial motivation refers more broadly to helping-oriented motives and moral norms refer to internalized perceptions of moral obligation. This distinction is theoretically important because each construct implies a different motivational logic. Existing studies show that altruistic orientations can strengthen green and organic purchase intention by framing consumption as an environmentally and socially responsible act (Guiao & Lacap, 2022; Saleki et al., 2019). Nevertheless, altruistic concern alone does not consistently produce actual purchasing behavior, especially when consumers perceive their individual contribution as ineffective, distant, or constrained by price and convenience. This inconsistency suggests that moral concern must be analyzed together with the contextual conditions that determine whether it becomes behaviorally effective.

One perspective that helps explain such contextual variability is psychological distance, derived from Construal Level Theory (CLT). In the reviewed literature, psychological distance does not operate primarily as a direct predictor of organic food purchase. Rather, it appears mainly as a framing and moderating mechanism that shapes how concretely consumers interpret the health, environmental, and moral benefits of organic food. CLT proposes that individuals perceive outcomes as psychologically near or distant across temporal, spatial, social, and hypothetical dimensions, and that these perceptions influence whether information is processed in abstract or concrete terms (Trope & Liberman, 2003). Research on environmental behavior shows that when consequences are perceived as psychologically distant, emotional engagement and behavioral responsiveness tend to weaken, whereas perceived proximity increases involvement and action (Spence et al., 2012). In the organic food context, empirical evidence indicates that construal-consistent framing and reduced psychological distance can improve message credibility, perceived relevance, and purchase intention (Jager & Weber, 2020; Loebnitz et al., 2022). Psychological distance therefore helps explain when emotional and altruistic motives remain abstract values and when they become concrete drivers of consumer behavior.

Despite growing scholarly attention to emotion, green altruism, and psychological distance, the literature remains fragmented in ways that limit theoretical advancement. First, many studies examine these constructs in isolation or combine them only partially, which makes it difficult to explain how affective, moral, and contextual mechanisms jointly shape the intention–behavior gap in organic food consumption. Second, several prior reviews have addressed organic food purchase intention, green purchasing, or sustainable consumption more broadly, yet they have not clearly theorized how emotion, green altruism, and psychological distance interact within a unified explanatory framework. Third, the existing evidence remains contextually uneven, because a large share of studies has been conducted in Western or developed-market settings, which may limit the generalizability of current conclusions to developing countries characterized by

different cultural norms, income structures, and food access conditions. These limitations indicate that the key gap is not simply the absence of synthesis, but the absence of a more precise integrative explanation of how internal motives become behaviorally actionable in organic food consumption.

Accordingly, this study conducts a systematic literature review not merely to summarize prior findings, but to develop an integrative psychological explanation of organic food consumption. Specifically, the review seeks to explain how emotion functions as an affective activation mechanism, how green altruism operates as a moral legitimization mechanism, and how psychological distance conditions whether these motives are perceived as immediate, concrete, and behaviorally actionable. By reviewing peer-reviewed studies indexed in Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect between 2015 and 2025, this study identifies dominant patterns, conceptual inconsistencies, and theoretical convergences across the literature. In doing so, it moves beyond descriptive synthesis and advances a more explicit explanatory logic for understanding why favorable attitudes toward organic food do not always lead to consistent purchasing behavior.

This review contributes to the sustainable consumption literature in three ways. First, it sharpens the conceptual boundaries among emotion, green altruism, and psychological distance, thereby reducing conceptual overlap that has weakened prior discussions. Second, it integrates these constructs into a unified explanatory framework in which emotion activates affective motivation, green altruism provides moral justification, and psychological distance determines whether these motives are translated into action. Third, it clarifies why the intention–behavior gap persists even when consumers hold positive attitudes toward organic food, namely because favorable values and intentions require not only internal motivation but also psychologically proximate and contextually credible conditions to become sustained behavior. Through this contribution, the review provides a stronger theoretical foundation for future research and offers a clearer basis for designing more effective sustainability communication and behavioral interventions.

### **1.1. Organic Food Consumption as Value-Laden Sustainable Consumption**

Organic food consumption is increasingly understood as a value-laden form of sustainable consumption in which purchasing decisions are shaped not only by functional evaluations, but also by health concerns, ethical commitments, environmental values, and identity-related meanings (Kushwah et al., 2019; Leyva-hernández et al., 2025; Rana & Paul, 2017). In this context, consumers do not evaluate organic food merely as a product with utilitarian attributes; they also interpret it as a symbolic expression of responsible consumption and personal moral orientation. This perspective helps explain why organic food often carries meanings that extend beyond nutrition, price, or product performance.

Recent reviews consistently show that consumers prefer organic food because they associate it with health protection, environmental responsibility, and product integrity, whereas high prices, limited availability, and skepticism toward certification or organic claims remain persistent barriers to adoption (Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2017; Bazhan et al., 2024; Kushwah et al., 2019; Rana & Paul, 2017). However, these drivers and barriers do not operate in purely economic terms. Their effects are filtered through consumers' perceptions, values, and interpretations, which means that the same market conditions may produce different behavioral outcomes across consumer groups and contexts.

Nevertheless, a substantial body of recent research continues to document a persistent intention–behavior gap, whereby consumers express favorable attitudes and purchase intentions toward organic food but fail to translate them into consistent buying behavior (Ayyub et al., 2021; Bazhan et al., 2024; ElHaffar et al., 2020). This pattern is particularly important because it shows that positive evaluations of organic food do not automatically generate repeated purchase behavior. The gap also suggests that rational explanations alone, including price sensitivity and perceived quality, cannot fully explain why consumers act inconsistently despite endorsing organic food as desirable and responsible.

Accordingly, understanding organic food consumption as value-laden sustainable consumption requires a more explicit focus on the psychological processes that connect values to action. In particular, affective responses, moral motivation, and contextual interpretation appear to determine whether favorable attitudes remain abstract preferences or develop into concrete purchasing behavior. This insight provides the conceptual basis for examining emotion, green altruism, and psychological distance as interrelated mechanisms that shape organic food consumption beyond rational choice.

### **1.2. Emotion as an Affective Mechanism in Organic Food Choice**

Affective processes are increasingly recognized as central to sustainable consumption, but the concept of emotion requires greater conceptual precision. In this review, emotion is treated as a set of distinct affective mechanisms, including anticipated emotions, moral emotions, emotional attitudes, and broader affective evaluations, each of which shapes how consumers assign meaning to organic food choices, anticipate self-evaluative outcomes, and derive psychological rewards from acting in line with their values.

Across green and organic purchase contexts, anticipated and moral emotions—particularly pride and guilt—consistently shape purchase intention by strengthening self-congruence, perceived personal impact, and moral meaning. More recent evidence also shows that these emotions become especially influential when consumers perceive organic consumption as an expression of responsible identity rather than merely a product choice (Haj-Salem et al., 2022; Konuk, 2021; Pompili et al., 2025).

Within organic food consumption, emotion operates through at least three analytically distinct pathways. First, positive affective responses such as pride, pleasure, reassurance, and emotional value can amplify perceived value and reinforce a morally desirable consumer identity, thereby strengthening purchase intention even under less favorable cost conditions (Curvelo et al., 2019; Ismael & Ploeger, 2020; Rütelionė & Bhutto, 2024). Second, negative moral affect such as guilt can motivate corrective behavior by highlighting discrepancies between pro-environmental values and actual consumption practices, especially when consumers perceive personal responsibility for the consequences of their choices (Konuk, 2021; Pompili et al., 2025). Third, emotion shapes information processing by directing attention to ethical, health, and environmental cues; however, these affective responses remain vulnerable when product credibility is uncertain or when situational constraints override motivational readiness (ElHaffar et al., 2020).

The literature further indicates that emotional effects are heterogeneous, socially embedded, and often indirect. Emotion-driven intentions depend not only on product authenticity, label trust, and perceived behavioral control, but also on whether organic consumption is socially validated through norms, peer endorsement, and culturally acceptable meanings. When trust is weak, social support is absent, or situational constraints remain salient, emotional motivation may fail to develop into consistent purchasing behavior, thereby reinforcing the intention–behavior gap (Curvelo et al., 2019; ElHaffar et al., 2020; Rana & Paul, 2017; C. Wang et al., 2024).

The reviewed evidence also suggests that emotional responses are not merely individual reactions, but socially conditioned processes. Feelings such as pride, guilt, reassurance, and attachment tend to intensify when sustainable consumption is publicly visible, culturally endorsed, or associated with desirable moral status. Conversely, when peer groups do not support organic consumption or when social norms favor conventional purchasing practices, emotional motivation may remain internal and fail to translate into action. This pattern helps explain why similar emotional appeals can produce different outcomes across cultural settings, market contexts, and consumer segments.

### 1.3. Green Altruism and Moral Motivation

Alongside affective mechanisms, organic food consumption has also been linked to moral motivation, particularly through green altruism. In this review, green altruism is defined as a voluntary orientation toward protecting environmental and collective welfare even in the absence of immediate personal benefit. This construct should be distinguished from prosocial motivation, which refers more broadly to helping-oriented motives, and from moral norms, which refer to internalized perceptions of obligation. Clarifying these conceptual boundaries is important because each construct reflects a different motivational logic in sustainable consumption.

In organic and green food contexts, altruistic orientation is generally associated with stronger purchase intention and more favorable evaluations because consumers interpret organic consumption as a socially and environmentally responsible act (Guiao & Lacap, 2022; Saleki et al., 2019; X. Wang et al., 2019). The moral basis of organic food choice is further supported by value-based frameworks showing that ethical concern, moral self-perception, and internalized responsibility strengthen sustainable consumption intention, especially when consumers perceive their choices as meaningful, socially legitimate, and capable of contributing to collective outcomes (White et al., 2019).

However, the reviewed evidence also shows that altruism alone does not guarantee consistent purchasing behavior. The effect of altruistic motivation often weakens when consumers face price and convenience constraints, doubt the effectiveness of their individual contribution, or question the credibility of organic claims and certification systems (Ayyub et al., 2021; Bazhan et al., 2024; Kushwah et al., 2019). In this regard, moral concern does not automatically become action; rather, it must be supported by conditions that make responsible consumption appear feasible and consequential.

Taken together, these findings suggest that moral motivation becomes behaviorally meaningful only when it is supported by favorable contextual conditions, such as trust, perceived efficacy, social endorsement, and psychologically proximate benefits. In other words, green altruism may legitimize organic food consumption morally, but it does not become behaviorally effective unless consumers also perceive their action as feasible, credible, and consequential.

The reviewed studies also suggest that the strength of altruistic motivation varies across cultural and market contexts. In settings where collective responsibility, environmental identity, and social approval are salient, green altruism is more likely to strengthen organic food intention. By contrast, in contexts marked by economic pressure, lower trust in institutions, or weak normative support for sustainable consumption, altruistic concern may remain symbolic rather than behaviorally operative. This variation indicates that the moral meaning of organic food is not universal, but conditioned by consumers' social environment, institutional trust, and perceived capacity to make a meaningful difference.

### 1.4. Psychological Distance and Construal Level Theory

A key explanation for variability in emotional and altruistic effects is provided by Construal Level Theory (CLT), which explains how individuals interpret outcomes differently depending on whether they are perceived as psychologically near or distant across temporal, spatial, social, and hypothetical dimensions. In

the context of this review, psychological distance is treated primarily as a construal-based framing and moderating mechanism rather than as a direct predictor of organic food consumption.

When consequences are psychologically distant, consumers tend to rely on abstract and decontextualized mental representations; when those consequences are perceived as close, they process information more concretely and with greater action orientation. This distinction is theoretically important because it helps explain why consumers may endorse the long-term value of organic food yet still fail to treat it as an immediate and actionable purchase decision.

Research in environmental communication shows that perceived proximity tends to increase concern, engagement, and responsiveness, whereas psychological distance can weaken motivational intensity. However, this general pattern should be applied cautiously to organic food consumption, because food-related decisions involve additional considerations such as trust, product authenticity, price sensitivity, and everyday purchasing routines.

Within the organic food domain, the available evidence suggests that psychological distance most often operates through message framing and construal-consistent communication. Experimental studies indicate that concrete framing and reduced temporal or social distance can improve perceived credibility, relevance, and purchase intention. For example, Jager & Weber (2020) show that combining benefit-based arguments with concrete framing increases advertisement credibility for organic food, whereas Loebnitz et al (2022) demonstrate that manipulating temporal and social distance in organic-related advertising changes consumer responses in ways consistent with CLT.

The reviewed studies also indicate that psychological distance does not operate uniformly across the literature. In some studies, it acts as a moderator that strengthens or weakens the effect of emotional and moral appeals; in others, it functions as a framing mechanism that alters how consumers interpret the benefits of organic food; and in a smaller number of studies, it appears as a mediating process linking broader environmental beliefs to purchase intention. This variation suggests that the theoretical contribution of psychological distance lies less in its direct effect and more in its capacity to explain when internal motivation becomes behaviorally consequential.

Taken together, these studies suggest that psychological distance functions less as a stand-alone explanatory variable and more as a conditioning mechanism that shapes whether emotional and moral motivations are perceived as immediate, personally relevant, credible, and behaviorally actionable. In this sense, psychological distance helps explain when favorable values remain abstract commitments and when they are translated into organic purchase intention or actual behavior.

## 2. RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs an integrative Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to identify, screen, appraise, and synthesize prior research on the roles of emotion, green altruism, and psychological distance in organic food consumption. The SLR approach is appropriate because it provides a transparent, structured, and replicable way to synthesize fragmented literature while reducing the subjectivity commonly associated with narrative reviews (Snyder, 2019; Tranfield et al., 2003). In addition, systematic and integrative reviews are particularly useful for theory development in multidisciplinary fields such as sustainable consumption and consumer behavior, where conceptual and empirical evidence is dispersed across journals and disciplines (Paul & Criado, 2020; Snyder, 2019).

This review follows the PRISMA 2020 guidelines to ensure transparency in study identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and final inclusion (Page et al., 2021). The review design also draws on prior methodological guidance emphasizing explicit search protocols, predefined inclusion and exclusion criteria, and sufficient procedural detail to enhance replicability and rigor (Tranfield et al., 2003; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

### 2.1. Data Sources and Search Strategy

The literature search was conducted using three major academic databases: Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect. These databases were selected because they offer broad coverage of peer-reviewed research in management, consumer behavior, and sustainability-related fields. The search was limited to the 2015–2025 period in order to capture recent theoretical and empirical developments in organic and sustainable food consumption. To improve replicability, the search used explicit Boolean search strings, as recommended in systematic review methodology (Tranfield et al., 2003; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The core search formula was: (“organic food” OR “sustainable food” OR “green food consumption” OR “organic purchase intention”) AND (“emotion” OR “moral emotion” OR “anticipated pride” OR “guilt” OR “emotional attachment” OR “affective attitude”) AND (“green altruism” OR “altruism” OR “prosocial motivation” OR “moral norm”) AND (“psychological distance” OR “construal level theory” OR “CLT”). Database-specific refinements were applied where syntax requirements differed. Backward and forward snowballing were also used to identify additional relevant studies from key articles retrieved in the initial search (Tranfield et al., 2003).

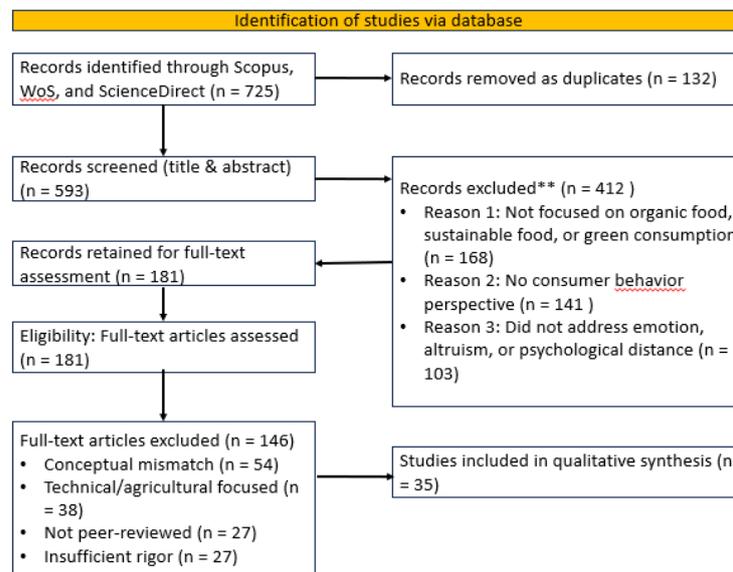


Figure 1. Flowchart Literature Review using PRISMA

## 2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies were included if they met four criteria: (1) they were peer-reviewed journal articles; (2) they were published between 2015 and 2025; (3) they focused on organic food or sustainable food consumption from a consumer behavior perspective; and (4) they examined at least one focal construct, namely emotion, green altruism, or psychological distance. Seminal pre-2015 works were retained only for foundational theories and key conceptual definitions and were not treated as part of the core empirical evidence base. Studies were excluded if they were non-journal publications, focused primarily on agronomic or technical aspects of production, or examined green products in general without clear relevance to food-related consumption. Defining inclusion and exclusion criteria in this way is consistent with methodological guidance for rigorous systematic reviews (Page et al., 2021; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

## 2.3. Study Selection Process

The study selection process consisted of four sequential stages: duplicate removal, title–abstract screening, full-text review, and final inclusion. All stages were documented using a PRISMA 2020 flow diagram (Page et al., 2021). Following this process, 35 studies met the eligibility criteria and were included in the qualitative synthesis. To improve reporting transparency, the PRISMA flow diagram should explicitly state the number of records identified from each database, duplicates removed, records excluded during title–abstract screening, full-text articles excluded with reasons, and the final number of studies retained for synthesis (Page et al., 2021).

## 2.4. Selection Reliability and Quality Appraisal

To strengthen selection reliability, the screening and eligibility assessment were cross-checked independently before discrepancies were resolved through discussion until consensus was reached. This procedure follows the broader recommendation that systematic reviews should document how selection consistency was maintained during the screening process (Xiao & Watson, 2019). In addition to eligibility screening, a basic quality appraisal was applied to the included studies by assessing clarity of research objectives, conceptual alignment with the focal constructs, methodological transparency, and relevance to organic or sustainable food consumption. Studies that lacked sufficient conceptual relevance or methodological clarity were excluded during full-text review. Including this appraisal step helps distinguish a rigorous SLR from a broader narrative review (Snyder, 2019; Xiao & Watson, 2019).

## 2.5. Data Extraction and Analysis

A structured data extraction protocol was applied to all included studies using a standardized coding sheet. The extracted information included authorship, publication year, study context, food category, research objectives, theoretical framework, construct operationalization, methodological design, sample characteristics, analytical approach, and key findings. The extracted data were analyzed through thematic synthesis by grouping findings into the three focal domains of emotion, green altruism, and psychological distance (Snyder, 2019). A second-stage conceptual integration was then conducted to identify recurring explanatory patterns, theoretical convergences, boundary conditions, and empirical inconsistencies across studies (Paul & Criado, 2020; Snyder, 2019).

## 2.6. Methodological Rigor

Methodological rigor was ensured through standardized database searches, explicit inclusion and exclusion criteria, a documented PRISMA-based screening process, structured data extraction, thematic coding, and basic quality appraisal (Page et al., 2021; Tranfield et al., 2003; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The review also distinguished between recent empirical evidence and older seminal references used only for conceptual grounding. Through these procedures, the study aims to provide a transparent and theoretically meaningful synthesis of the literature on organic food consumption.

## 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The reviewed literature indicates that research on organic food consumption has progressively moved beyond purely rational and utilitarian explanations toward more psychologically and morally informed perspectives. Across the 35 included studies, organic food consumption is most commonly framed as a value-laden and ethically embedded behavior in which affective responses, moral orientations, and contextual interpretations jointly shape consumer decision-making. At the same time, the evidence base remains uneven. The reviewed studies are more heavily concentrated on purchase intention and attitudinal outcomes than on repeated purchase, loyalty, or observed consumption behavior. This imbalance is important because it helps explain why the literature is more conclusive about intention formation than about actual behavioral consistency.

A second pattern concerns contextual concentration. Much of the reviewed evidence is drawn from Western or developed-market settings, while fewer studies examine developing-country contexts, lower-income consumers, or markets characterized by weaker institutional trust and more constrained food access. As a result, the transferability of current findings should be treated with caution. The psychological drivers of organic food consumption may not operate with the same strength across cultural settings, market maturity levels, or economic conditions. This limitation is particularly relevant when interpreting the intention-behavior gap, because the feasibility of translating favorable attitudes into actual purchase depends not only on internal motivation but also on contextual affordability, trust, and social support.

### 3.1. Emotional Mechanisms in Organic and Green Food Consumption

The first dominant theme in the reviewed literature is the role of emotion as an affective mechanism in organic food consumption. The evidence shows that emotions do not merely accompany decision-making; they actively shape how consumers interpret the meaning of organic food and whether they experience such consumption as morally rewarding and personally relevant. In particular, anticipated pride, guilt, and emotional attachment repeatedly emerge as the most salient affective mechanisms. These emotions strengthen purchase intention by reinforcing self-consistency, internal moral standards, and identity-related meanings attached to responsible consumption (Haj-Salem et al., 2022; Konuk, 2021; Pompili et al., 2025).

The reviewed studies further suggest that emotional mechanisms operate through at least three pathways. First, positive affective responses such as pride, reassurance, pleasure, and emotional value increase perceived product value and strengthen a desirable self-image associated with ethical consumption (Curvelo et al., 2019; Ismael & Ploeger, 2020; Rütelioné & Bhutto, 2024). Second, negative moral emotions such as guilt can motivate corrective intention by highlighting discrepancies between pro-environmental values and actual food choices (Konuk, 2021; Pompili et al., 2025). Third, emotion shapes information processing by increasing sensitivity to health, ethical, and environmental cues, although this effect weakens when consumers doubt product credibility or face strong situational barriers (ElHaffar et al., 2020).

Importantly, the reviewed evidence indicates that emotional effects are neither uniform nor purely individual. Emotional mechanisms become more behaviorally consequential when they are supported by trust in certification, perceived product authenticity, health relevance, and socially mediated influences such as descriptive norms, injunctive norms, and peer endorsement (Curvelo et al., 2019; C. Wang et al., 2024). This pattern directly addresses one of the central weaknesses in the literature: emotion often predicts intention more strongly than actual purchase because affective activation alone is insufficient when consumers do not perceive supportive social validation or practical feasibility. In this sense, emotion should be interpreted as an affective activation mechanism rather than a sufficient cause of sustained organic food behavior.

### 3.2. Green Altruism and Prosocial Motivation as Moral Foundations

The reviewed literature consistently identifies green altruism and prosocial motivation as key moral drivers underpinning green and organic food consumption. Consumers with strong altruistic orientations are more likely to perceive green purchasing as a socially responsible act that benefits the environment and future generations (Ali et al., 2020; Nguyen et al., 2023). This moral framing enhances purchase intention, particularly when consumers believe their actions contribute meaningfully to collective environmental outcomes.

Several studies explicitly integrate altruism with emotional processes. Chao & Yu (2024) demonstrate that emotions and green altruism jointly explain green purchase intention, suggesting that altruism

strengthens the emotional rewards associated with ethical consumption. Extensions of the Theory of Planned Behavior further reveal that green altruism and self-efficacy enhance intention by reinforcing moral norms and perceived behavioral control (Tiwari et al., 2024).

In the context of organic food, altruistic motives are closely linked to moral norms, identity, and value orientation. Empirical studies show that organic food purchase intention is driven by consumers' desire to act responsibly toward society and the environment (Saleki et al., 2019; X. Wang et al., 2019). Related research on organic tea and other organic products further supports the role of affective–prosocial pathways in shaping repurchase and loyalty intentions (Tian et al., 2022). Together, these studies establish green altruism as a moral foundation that legitimizes organic food consumption, albeit with varying strength across contexts.

### 3.3. Psychological Distance and Construal Level in Food-Related Decisions

An important contribution of the reviewed literature is the identification of psychological distance, grounded in Construal Level Theory (CLT), as a critical explanatory and moderating mechanism. Research shows that when environmental or health benefits of organic food are perceived as temporally, socially, or spatially close, consumers adopt more concrete mental representations, leading to higher purchase (Jager & Weber, 2020; Loebnitz et al., 2022).

Multiple studies demonstrate that message framing aligned with consumers' construal levels enhances green and organic food evaluations. For example, construal-consistent advertising messages improve persuasion effectiveness in green contexts (Chang et al., 2015, 2019). Similarly, packaging cues and product presentation interact with construal level to influence organic food choice (Liang et al., 2022).

Recent studies extend psychological distance research to local food, online channels, and traceability technologies, showing that perceived proximity increases acceptance and trust (Bouwman et al., 2024; Yuan et al., 2025). Psychological distance has also been shown to mediate the relationship between environmental beliefs and pro-environmental purchase intention (Shabnam et al., 2021), while channel characteristics and message concreteness further condition distance effects (Duong et al., 2024). Although a limited number of studies from adjacent sustainable-consumption domains were consulted to strengthen theoretical interpretation, the core synthesis should prioritize evidence directly related to organic food, green food, local food, or sustainable food consumption. Studies from unrelated domains such as tourism, electronics, or health decision-making should be excluded from the main analytic claims unless they are used solely as supporting theoretical references (Engel et al., 2024; Tang, Zheng, et al., 2025).

### 3.4. Integrating Emotion, Green Altruism, and Psychological Distance

Synthesizing across themes, the literature suggests that emotion, green altruism, and psychological distance should be conceptualized as interdependent mechanisms within a sequential explanatory framework rather than as isolated predictors. More specifically, emotion can be positioned as an affective activation mechanism, green altruism as a moral legitimization mechanism, and psychological distance as a construal-based conditioning mechanism that determines whether internal motives are translated into concrete intention and behavior.

Studies on organic food intention consistently show that attitudes, trust, and values alone are insufficient to guarantee purchase behavior. This finding also aligns with broader behavioral perspectives, which suggest that intention must interact with perceived behavioral control, repeated behavioral routines, internalized motivation, and post-decisional consistency mechanisms before it can develop into sustained consumption behavior (Ayyub et al., 2021; Bazhan et al., 2024; Kamboj, 2023; Khan et al., 2022; Li et al., 2021). Instead, behavioral translation depends on how emotionally engaging and psychologically proximate organic food benefits are perceived to be. Research on value–attitude–behavior models and imagery further support the role of affective and cognitive integration in green purchasing (Cheung et al., 2019; Septianto et al., 2019).

Recent studies in sustainable food systems and green advertising reinforce this integrative perspective by showing how emotional appeals and value framing shape organic food intentions across contexts (Leyva-hernández et al., 2025; Sun et al., 2025). Collectively, the 35 reviewed studies converge on the conclusion that reducing psychological distance amplifies the impact of emotional and altruistic motivations, thereby mitigating the intention–behavior gap in organic food consumption.

Beyond Construal Level Theory, the reviewed findings can also be interpreted through several complementary behavioral frameworks. The Theory of Planned Behavior helps explain how emotional and moral evaluations are translated into intention through attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control. Habit formation theory clarifies why favorable intentions may still fail to produce repeated organic purchases when consumers remain locked into conventional shopping routines. Cognitive dissonance theory explains how discrepancies between pro-environmental values and actual purchasing behavior may evoke discomfort, which in turn motivates post hoc justification or behavioral adjustment. Self-determination theory further suggests that organic food consumption becomes more stable when consumers internalize sustainable consumption as part of their autonomous values rather than merely responding to external cues.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review synthesizes evidence from 35 peer-reviewed studies to examine how emotion, green altruism, and psychological distance shape organic and green food consumption. The findings demonstrate that organic food consumption is best understood as a psychologically embedded and morally driven behavior, rather than a purely rational or utilitarian choice.

The review reveals that emotional mechanisms, particularly moral and anticipated emotions such as pride, guilt, and emotional attachment, play a central role in motivating organic food consumption by reinforcing self-identity and perceived moral consistency. These emotional drivers enhance purchase intention but remain sensitive to contextual conditions, including trust, perceived value, and health relevance.

Furthermore, the findings confirm that green altruism and prosocial motivation provide a moral foundation for organic food consumption by framing purchasing decisions as socially and environmentally responsible acts. However, altruistic motives alone do not consistently translate into behavior, especially when consumers perceive their individual contributions as ineffective or distant.

A key contribution of this review is the identification of psychological distance, grounded in Construal Level Theory, as a critical boundary condition. When organic food benefits are perceived as psychologically close, emotional engagement and altruistic concern become more salient and behaviorally effective. Conversely, high psychological distance weakens both affective and moral motivations, contributing to the persistent intention–behavior gap documented in the literature.

Overall, the review advances a holistic conceptual understanding in which emotion provides affective motivation, green altruism supplies moral justification, and psychological distance determines the perceived relevance and concreteness of organic food benefits. This integrative perspective not only offers a robust theoretical foundation for future research on sustainable food consumption, but also generates practical implications for firms, policymakers, and environmental organizations seeking to reduce the intention–behavior gap in organic food markets.

For businesses, the findings suggest that effective organic food marketing should move beyond functional claims and emphasize emotionally resonant, morally meaningful, and psychologically proximate messages. Firms should communicate immediate and personally relevant benefits, such as family health, product safety, and local environmental impact, rather than relying solely on distant ecological narratives. For policymakers and environmental organizations, interventions should combine information campaigns with norm-based and context-sensitive strategies, including local community engagement, visible certification systems, and social endorsement mechanisms that strengthen trust and reduce the psychological distance of sustainable consumption. Such efforts are likely to improve the translation of positive attitudes into repeated purchasing behavior.

This review has several limitations. First, although the review follows a rigorous PRISMA-based procedure, much of the included evidence comes from Western or developed-market settings, which limits contextual generalizability. Second, while the review integrates emotion, green altruism, and psychological distance, other behavioral mechanisms such as habit strength, cognitive dissonance, self-determination, and subjective norms remain underexplored in the organic food context. Future research should therefore examine these constructs in more diverse cultural settings, particularly in developing countries, and test how emotional, moral, social, and habitual processes jointly shape repeated organic food purchasing behavior.

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