




Online Purchase Intentions for Fresh Agricultural Products in China

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Abstract. This paper integrates two perspectives: behavioural (self-identity and long-term orientation) and social approach (deontology and collectivism) to examine the purchase intention of fresh agricultural products. A strong sense of self-identity and long-term orientation is expected to affect purchase intention. Meanwhile consumers who emphasize adherence to ethical principles and rules, who have tendency to prioritize group interest and societal value are anticipated to buy fresh agricultural products. Survey questionnaire was used to collect data. A total of 384 respondents from China participated in the study. Multiple regression analysis was conducted, and the research results show that all four variables have significant positive impact on purchase intention ($p < 0.05$). The long-term orientation was found to have the strongest effect on purchase intention of fresh agricultural products. This implies that the consumers' perception on future and long-term benefits play a crucial role in influencing their purchase intention. In conclusion, the farmers and agricultural marketers in China can enhance consumers' purchase intentions and promote sustainable consumption practices by focusing on these drivers in their marketing strategies and communication efforts.

Keywords: Fresh Agricultural Products, Green Products, China

1 Introduction

The internet users in China have been growing steadily and reached 1.01 billion in 2021 with the nation's penetration rate of 71.6 percent. Such growth has proliferated online commerce largely due to its convenience. Cang and Wang [1] found that the Internet accessibility via mobile has become a popular choice of shopping method especially with the development and maturity of payment mechanism over mobile phones.

In fact, when it comes to buying products, be it necessities or non-essential items, many people have chosen to do it via virtual networks instead of getting them from physical stores. T-mall and JD.com have then ventured into the field of fresh agricultural products. From the perspective of buyers, the agricultural product sold over e-commerce platform successfully removes intermediary link-ages, lowers transaction costs, and reduces supply and demand information asymmetry, thus is more cost effective. Robina-Ramirez et al. [2] highlight the need to provide reliable information to promote buying behavior on agricultural products in the Spain e-marketplace.

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The sellers, including the farmers or agricultural marketers, can also benefit greatly from the online platform mainly because of expanded market reach and increased visibility. They can now directly promote their products to a wider range of consumers. What is more, through online platforms, they can showcase their products with high quality images, product details and customer review to attract potential customers. Selling online helps sellers to reduce the costs of setting up physical store/stall and transportation, and these savings can be transferred to customers making the pricing even more attractive. At times, sellers can also revise the product prices easily based on the farm supply, production costs and market demand. While e-commerce platform connects the farmers and customers directly resolving the trade issue and costly sales, selling agricultural products over e-commerce platform involves more than buyers and sellers. The parties involved includes marketplace managers and supervisors who play a role in ensuring the purchase and sale transaction data are verified and secured [3].

Fresh agricultural products are highly sought by all. Trading of agricultural goods over e-commerce platform has emerged as a main initiative for China to revitalize the rural areas and to reduce poverty, the online retail sales of agricultural commodities has reached about 397.5 billion yuan in 2019, an increment of 27% compared to 2018. Since online shopping for fresh food offers great convenience to many particularly to people with busy lifestyle. They can save time from visiting supermarkets, getting the products, and queuing for checkout. With the availability of mobile apps, people can now conveniently make online purchases for fresh agricultural products using their mobile phones at any time [3].

When comparing online businesses, online agricultural products activities are still relatively less mainly due to their perishable nature. Fresh agricultural products are generally referred to fresh vegetables, fruits, seafood, poultry, and meat products. Previous studies such as Wu and Liu [4]; Yang et al. [5] investigated online shopping behaviours on fresh agricultural products. They utilized the Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) as the primary framework for their research. Perceived usefulness and ease of use are common variables used in studying online shopping behavior due to the element of online/ Internet adoption. However, another perspective that warrants our attention when studying buying behavior for fresh agricultural products is rooted in psychological and behavioural theories, particularly in relation to concepts like self-identity and long-term orientation. This is because how individuals perceive themselves and how their orientation towards long-term goals influences their choices.

Therefore, by including variables from the social perspective, such as deontology and collectivism, we recognize the significance of supporting practices that prioritize environmental sustainability and the preservation of the ecosystem through the consumption of fresh agricultural products. This is particularly important because literature has revealed that green purchase decision might not be attributed to their awareness on environmental sustainability [6]. On the other hand, study by Zia et al. [7] also cited social influence as one of the key factors for sustainable consumption and online purchasing of agricultural products. Hence, this research incorporates both behavioural and social approach to examine the factors influencing China consumers on their online purchase intentions for fresh agricultural products.

2 Literature Review and Hypothesis Development

In studying the online purchase decision, many researchers have used the Theory of planned behavior or Technology Acceptance Model (TAM) to predict consumer's intention or behavior. Our study incorporated behavioral and social perspectives where variables like self-identity, long-term orientation, deontology and collectivism were included in the conceptual framework. These variables and their relationship with purchase behavior are explained below.

2.1 Self-identity and purchase behavior

The self-perception of an individual can influence his or her behavior and motivate the ways they act. Self-identity relates to the social roles in which individuals identify themselves and it also corresponds to the things that they acquire [8–9]. Previous study found that self-identity was a significant predictor of dietary choices [10–11]. According to Fielding, McDonald and Louis [12], self-identity can influence ecological purchase intention. Health-conscious customers are more inclined to buy ecologically friendly fresh agricultural goods [11]. In fact, green customers who are environmentally conscious tend to choose ecologically sustainable products; and they are concerned about climate changes, shying away from products that causes danger to animals, threat to human survival, and thus we are witnessing more demand for organic products.

The theory of planned behavior (TPB), a classical theory, is commonly used to examine purchase behavior. In previous studies, researchers also added self-identity and social identity as additional constructs to improve the TPB model in predicting outcomes [13–14]. Using Iranian students as the respondents, Yazdanpanah and Forouzani [14] found that self-identity and moral standards were additional predictors to TPB, considerably enhancing the original theory's predictive validity. Interestingly, Hasan and Suciarto [8] coins the phrase 'fresh agricultural goods identity' and argue that health, environmental, and social awareness have positive influence on behavioral intention via the purchase of 'fresh agricultural products identity'. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H1: Self-identity has a positive relationship with consumer's fresh agricultural product online purchase intention.

2.2 Long-term orientation and purchase behavior

Long-term orientation is a mindset in which an individual is preoccupied with the future. When it comes to cultural dimensions, they may be broken down into time and geography as well as environmental concerns/ attitudes [15]. Albloushy [16] defines long-term orientation as the likelihood that a person believes that a society will be able to address its problem in the future. It is mainly about the importance of the long-term perspective instead of short-term viewpoint [17]. According to Hofstede and Minkov [18], this concept is drawn on the temporal orientation framework. This suggests an orientation that places an emphasis on the benefits that will be received in the future.

Many studies use the phrases "long-term orientation" and "future orientation" interchangeably in exploring the impact of temporal orientation on individual attitudes and actions [19]. People who focus on long term are more likely to highlight the potential benefits in future of their present choices.

Albloushy [16] states that individuals with a long-term orientation are more inclined to adopt beliefs and attitudes that prioritize the preservation of the natural environment. In fact, choosing environmentally friendly eating habits has been associated with long-term benefits that contribute to overall well-being for an individual and for society at large [15]. One of the characteristics of individuals who are long-term orientated usually demonstrates greater health awareness since they are more conscious and concerned about their existing and future well-being. This results them to choose fresh agricultural goods because they wish to maintain or enhance their current level of health [17]. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H2: Long-term orientation has a positive relationship with consumer's fresh agricultural product online purchase intention.

2.3 Deontology and purchase behavior

Deontology is characterized by an emphasis on adherence to autonomous principles, moral norms, or obligations. This is regardless of the rules themselves and the consequences they yield [20]. A deontological person often acts morally as if they are adhering to the requirement. According to Davari, Iyer and Strutton [21], deontology is the foundation of moral principles. Over time, these ethical principles have developed into universal norms that are determined by human choice: both action and behavior. They are in fact independent of the consequences resulting from these actions whether they are perceived as good or evil.

The main objective of deontology is to encourage a socially responsible and ethical approach in decision-making and behavior including purchase decision. When it comes to considering human values, deontology is an extremely important concept in the context of addressing ecological problems. Leonidou et al. [22] argue that consumers who adopt a deontological perspective believe that they have a moral obligation to protect the environment, living things and the overall ecosystems. Fresh agricultural products are viewed to be more apt to fulfill the needs of humans as compared to manufactured food. Consumers are sensitive to the deterioration of the environment and are frequently consuming fresh agricultural commodities as a means to contribute towards addressing these challenges [23]. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H3: Deontology has a positive relationship with consumer's fresh agricultural product online purchase intention.

2.4 Collectivism and purchase behavior

Family, friends, coworkers, political parties, religious organizations, and other such organizations may influence a person's behavior [24]. Especially in the context of collectivist society, much greater value is placed on the interests and goals of the group instead of the individual. Their behaviors are often motivated by society norms which encourage openness and sharing with others [25]. In fact, being members of a collectivist community, they feel it is important to remain in close contact with one another.

Goodrich and De Mooij [26] point out that people who live in societies that value individualism are more likely to use electronic media to research about their personal health. The social interactions that take place among these members are not particularly robust. On the other hand, those who live in societies that value collectivism is more likely to engage in forums to seek different view-points. Here, these referents can play a significant role in affecting a person's behavior. For example, if the referent group believes that consumption of fresh agricultural products is positive, it will likely affect their intentions to buy. Collectivism is found to be a key predictor of customer behavior [27]. This is even more influential in China community where word-of-mouth is the primary factor that determines a consumer's desire to buy [28]. Goodrich and De Mooij [26] explain that such experience relates closely to collective cultures like China where people tend to place a high value on keeping peace and “good face” and seems to refrain from directly com-plaining to the service provider. Therefore, it is hypothesized that:

H4: Collectivism has a positive relationship with consumer's fresh agricultural product online purchase intention.

Based on the literature review, four hypotheses were developed. The research model is shown in Fig. 1.

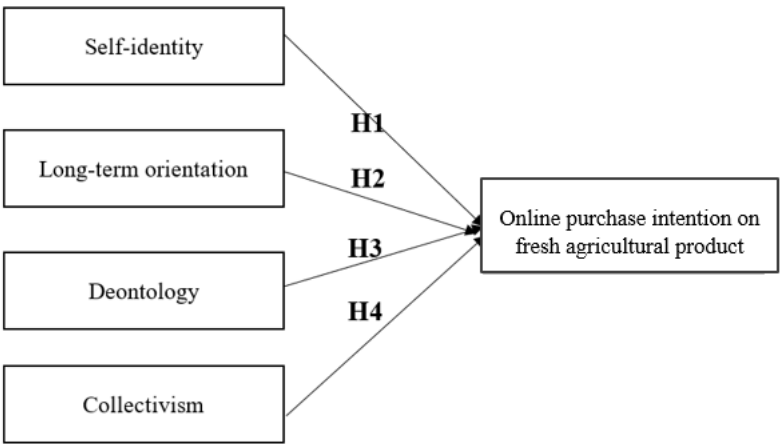


Fig. 1. Research Model

3 Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Data Collection

This quantitative approach was chosen to address the research objective of the study. This study is located on the positivism paradigm because the research aims to collect large number of data to test the relationships of these four independent variables namely self-identity, long-term orientation, deontology, collectivism, and the dependent variable - purchase intention for fresh agricultural products. The data was collected between May to June 2022 using an online survey (Questionnaire Star Docs).

3.2 Sampling and Data Collection

In this study, a convenient sampling technique was adopted largely due to the unknown sampling frame as the statistics on exact population is unavailable. Thus, the sample size was determined by Krejcie and Morgan [29] which population estimated to be more than 1 million yielding a total of 386 participants from different parts of China. The online survey questionnaire was shared with the researcher's contact via social media platform by inviting them to participate in the study. The independent and dependent variables were measured using a 7-level Likert scale (ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree").

Table 1. Scale measurements and sources

Variable	Code	Item	References
Self-identity	S1	Use e-commerce platform as first choice.	[10]
	S2	Share experience consuming agricultural products.	
	S3	Spend time on agricultural products on e-commerce platform.	
	S4	Pay attention to the online business station.	
Long-term orientation	LTO1	Plan for long term	[30]
	LTO2	Work hard for success in the future	
	LTO3	Don't mind giving up today's fund for success in future	
	LTO4	Persistence is important.	
Deontology	D1	Consistent with my principles.	[21]
	D2	I have moral duty to behave that way.	
	D3	The behavior is right.	
	D4	The alternative is morally forbidden.	
Collectivism	C1	Respect majority's wish.	[25]
	C2	Support my family whether they are right or wrong.	
	C3	Respect decision made by my family	
	C4	Maintain harmony in my family	
Online purchase intention	PI1	Will buy agricultural product online	[31]
	PI2	Intend to buy agricultural product from an online store	
	PI3	Likely to transact with an online store for agricultural product soon	

4 Data Analysis and Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics

The respondents who participated in the study have experienced buying products online from various provinces in China. Their gender, age, marital status, educational and income level are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Demographic profile of respondents

	Classification	Sample size	Percentage
Gender	Male	206	53.65%
	Female	178	46.4%
Age	20-29	88	22.9%
	30-39	177	46.1%
	40-49	85	22.1%
	Over 50	34	8.9%
Marital status	Married	239	62.2%
	Single	145	37.8%
Educational level	High school	63	16.4%
	Diploma or equivalent	73	19.0%
	Bachelor's degree	160	41.7%
	Master's degree or higher	88	22.9%
Income level	Below 4000RMB	68	17.7%
	4001RMB – 5000RMB	117	30.4%
	5001RMB – 6000RMB	123	32.8%
	Over 6000RMB	73	19.0%

4.2 Results of Reliability Test

The SPSS software was used to process and analyse the data. Table 2 shows the values of Cronbach's alpha and correlations of the variables. They are all greater than 0.7 and 0.6 respectively. This proves that the questionnaire has a good reliability and internal consistency.

Table 3. Cronbach's alpha values and correlation for study variables

Variable	# <i>item</i>	α	1	2	3	4	5
1.Self-identity	4	0.899	-				
2.Long-term orientation	4	0.930	0.688*	-			
3.Deontology	4	0.934	0.631*	0.698*	-		
4.Collectivism	4	0.943	0.614*	0.664*	0.607*	-	
5.Online Purchase Intention	3	0.876	0.679*	0.705*	0.640*	0.594*	-

Note: * $p < 0.01$

4.3 Results of Multiple Regression Analysis

In this study, the multiple regression analysis was conducted using the SPSS software. The value of $R^2 = 0.592$ indicating a substantial association between these four factors and the dependent variable. The F-value of 137.26 which is significant at p-value <0.05 suggesting that the model for self-identity, long-term orientation, deontology, and collectivism influencing the online purchase intention of fresh agricultural products is well-described.

Table 4. Results of multiple regression analysis

Variable	β	Std Er- ror	t	Hypothesis
(constant)	.510	.180	2.827**	
H1: Self-identity> Online purchase intention	.299	.050	5.968**	Accept
H2: Long-term orientation> Online purchase intention	.327	.056	5.865**	Accept
H3: Deontology> Online purchase intention	.175	.048	3.619**	Accept
H4: Collectivism> Online purchase intention	.092	.043	2.121*	Accept

Note: ** $p < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

The estimated regression equation can be expressed as follow:

$$Y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 SI + \beta_2 LOT + \beta_3 D + \beta_4 C + \varepsilon$$

Legend:

SI = Self-identity

LOT = Long-term orientation

D = Deontology

C = Collectivism

Y = Online purchase decision

As shown in Table 4, it was found that all the β values for the independent variables are significant ($p < 0.05$). The four hypotheses were accepted. The SI, LOT, D and C have positive β values indicating positive relationship with online purchase decision. This means self-identity, long-term orientation, deontology, and collectivism have positive relationships with online purchase intention of fresh agricultural products. Among all, long-term orientation has the highest β value (0.327) indicating the strongest impact on the dependent variable.

5 Discussion, Conclusion and Implications

This study aimed to examine the relationships between four factors self-identity, long-term orientation, deontology, collectivism, and online purchase intention for agricultural products. First, the research finding is consistent with previous research that an individual's sense of self-identity significantly influences their inclination to buy fresh agricultural goods [32]. Such purchase might correspond to their self-image of being

health conscious. In addition, consumers who value green practices will have a positive perception towards purchasing fresh agricultural commodities online because of the opportunity to purchase green goods online versus other online goods. This is in line with Deng and Gu [33] findings that Chinese customers who have greater concern for environment would buy environmentally friendly food to establish an identity for their country's fresh agricultural goods.

Secondly, the long-term orientation is found to have a positive impact on the intention to purchase fresh agricultural products. The more consumers think about future and long-term benefits, the greater their purchase desire. This suggests that people who have a long-term orientation mindset will buy fresh agricultural products [34]. As this is the dominant factor found in current study, we propose that agricultural marketers to effectively communicate the long-term benefits using visual cues that convey natural and freshness to potential consumers. Nutritional value and information related to the potential long-term health benefits by incorporating fresh produce into a balanced diet and promoting overall well-being can be appealing to the consumers.

Meanwhile, our findings are aligned with previous study conducted by Freestone and McGoldrick [23]. We also found that the deontological value of consumers has an impact on their desire to buy fresh agricultural products. They tend to demonstrate greater responsibility to safeguard the environment by consuming fresh agricultural commodities since it contributes to sustainable farming practices and promotes biodiversity. Supporting the local farmers can help to preserve the ecological balance as well. It is important for the agricultural marketers to focus on environmental awareness in their promotional programs and campaigns.

Fourthly, collectivism was found to positively affect the online purchase intention of agricultural products. The attitudes and standards held by the referent group, especially family members regarding consuming fresh agricultural products have strong potential to influence the collectivistic consumers' decision making. Therefore, we recommend the agricultural marketers to focus on the communal value and influence of the referent group by highlighting the social and cultural aspects of sharing to engage with collectivistic consumers in their decision-making process.

From the theoretical standpoint, this study went beyond the perspective of TAM and provided insights on how behavioral attitude and social factors influence a consumer's online purchase intention on fresh agricultural products. We believe that it contributes to the field of study. On the other hand, the suggestions presented can be valuable to the farmers and agricultural marketers. The practical implications provide greater support for decisions-making in promoting the agricultural products. We hope future studies can conduct in-depth interviews with farmers and agricultural marketers on resolving logistics challenges to ensure quality products with reasonable price for consumers.

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