

Significant factors affecting consumer preference towards organic food products and purchase behaviour

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Abstract

Organic products are now considered healthy by the majority of buyers because they are made of natural substances. Organic products are grown without the use of synthetic fertilizers, chemicals, or pesticides. Despite its infancy, the Indian organic food market has begun to grow rapidly. Organic food is preferred by consumers due to safety, human health, and environmental concerns, as well as attributes such as nutrition value, taste, freshness, and appearance. The environment has recently emerged as a hot topic for societies, governments, and business organizations. Its importance stems from the growing environmental degradation caused by solid waste, ozone depletion, global warming, and air pollution. Organic foods are those that are grown without the use of modern synthetic inputs such as pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Organic foods are not also subjected to irradiation, industrial solvents, or chemical food additives. Diet has a significant impact on both health and disease. Organic foods are those that are grown without the use of modern synthetic inputs such as pesticides and chemical fertilizers. Organic foods are not also subjected to irradiation, industrial solvents, or chemical food additives.

Keywords: Consumer Preference and Availability, Factors, Organic Food Products, environmental concerns

Introduction:

With the growing awareness among Indian consumers to eat healthily, a few restaurant owners have begun to serve organic food in order to remain competitive. The rising preferences indicate that an organic food franchise in India can be a profitable business opportunity for those looking to start a business in the Food and Beverage industry. According to ASSOCHAM, the current market for organic foods in India is worth Rs 2,500 crores and is expected to grow to Rs 6,000 crores by 2015. Even so, India will only have 1% of the global market, indicating the enormous potential for India's nascent organic sector. People prefer organic food for a variety of reasons, including the fact that it is healthier and does not contain pesticides or fungicides when grown. Furthermore, these organic products are grown on land that contains no traces of chemicals, and organic animals are not treated with antibiotics or hormones. Chemicals are unlikely to be present in organic products. Consumers today prefer to purchase products that do not contain modern synthetic inputs and will benefit them in the long run. That is why organic product stores are constantly expanding. Organic and natural foods are those that are grown without the use of chemical fertilizers, pesticides, or additives. Organic foods were traditionally grown on small, family-run farms, with sales limited to small grocery stores and farmers' markets. Natural foods are becoming increasingly popular and widely available, as evidenced by the increasing number of natural/organic retailers such as Whole Foods Market (WFMI) and Wild

Oats Markets (OATS). Organic and natural food sales have also increased significantly, outpacing conventional food sales growth.

Organic Food Preference:

Consumers generally base their decisions on product information, product attributes, and weighing the risks of using the product. Consumers consider health to be an important factor before purchasing a product. There are numerous reasons why consumers prefer to purchase organic food. Because of certain demographic characteristics, consumers prefer organic food. Households with graduates were less likely to buy organic produce, whereas households with children under the age of 18 were more likely to do so. Females and those with higher levels of education and income are more aware of and knowledgeable about hazardous foods. According to the study, the organic consumer profile includes demographic factors, lifestyle choices, and environmental attitudes. The average organic food consumer is well-educated, wealthy, and from a higher social class. It was discovered that there is a strong correlation between increasing consumption of organic food and formal education level. Organic consumers are willing to pay a 10% premium for organic food products, with women paying an average of 9.5 percent and men paying 11.4 percent. A widely held belief in the organic trade is that price and income do not always correspond to organic sales. There are numerous factors that influence consumer preferences for organic food products.

Organic Products are Healthy and Safe for Consumption:

According to the research, consumers buy organic products because they believe they are healthier than other options. According to the findings of the study, consumers are highly health conscious and place less emphasis on food safety concerns and religious factors when purchasing organic food products. According to a survey of organic purchasers, the most important reasons for purchasing organic food were health and children. A plethora of studies discuss various consumer motivations for purchasing organic food, such as food safety, sensory variables, environmental concerns, ethical concerns, and value structure.

Organic Products Have Good Nutrition Value:

The health factor is the most important reason for choosing organic food, followed by environmental and animal welfare concerns. Some customers purchase organic food because they notice a difference in food quality and nutritional value. Sensory parameters are the most commonly expressed, followed by safety and nutrients. Organic product purchases have increased due to a variety of factors such as the fact that organic food products are tastier than conventionally produced food, health concerns, nutritional value, and environmental concerns. Concerns about the use of chemicals and pesticides in conventional farming, erosion of land, and concern for animal welfare are also factors.

Organic Products Friendliness to the Environment:

Alternative lifestyles include environmentalism, alternative medicine, and vegetarianism, as well as organic consumption. Herbicides, pesticides, and antibiotics are not used in the production of organic food. Growth hormones and chemical fertilizers. Because of their environmentally conscious behavior, consumers are willing to pay higher prices for organic food products that are also environmentally friendly. According to the study, Spanish consumers believe that genetically modified foods have no special benefits and are harmful to the environment. Organic food, on the other hand, serves a useful purpose; it is healthy and environmentally friendly.

Consumer Ready to Pay Premium Prices:

According to the survey, consumers in Spain are still adjusting to the higher prices of organic food and are willing to pay similar to current prices. Organic food consumers place less emphasis on price than consumers who have never purchased organic food before. The higher prices for organic food are justified by food safety, taste, and environmental conservation. Few consumers believe that they must pay a higher price for healthier food, and others simply believe that organic food is not affordable.

Trust in Product Certification and Labels:

According to a study conducted in Greek cities, factors such as food quality and security, trust in certification, and, in some cases, brand name had a stronger correlation with willingness to pay than price or socioeconomic variables. High premium prices, a lack of information, and a lack of trust in organic certification quality and schemes are the main barriers to purchasing organic food. In addition, a lack of organic food availability contributes to a lack of organic food purchases. According to a Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) report, 14000 tonnes of organic food produce in India comes from certified organic farms. However, there are more organic farm areas than the FAO lists. Organic food is sometimes not recognized even though it was grown in organic farms because farmers have not registered their names or paid the registration fees for official certification.

Availability of the Organic Food Products:

One of the most significant barriers to consumer purchasing is the lack of organic food in stores. Because of availability and price, consumers have a negative attitude toward organic food. High prices, satisfaction with conventional food, limited choice and availability, lack of perceived value, and lack of trust are all important factors that prevent consumers from purchasing organic food.

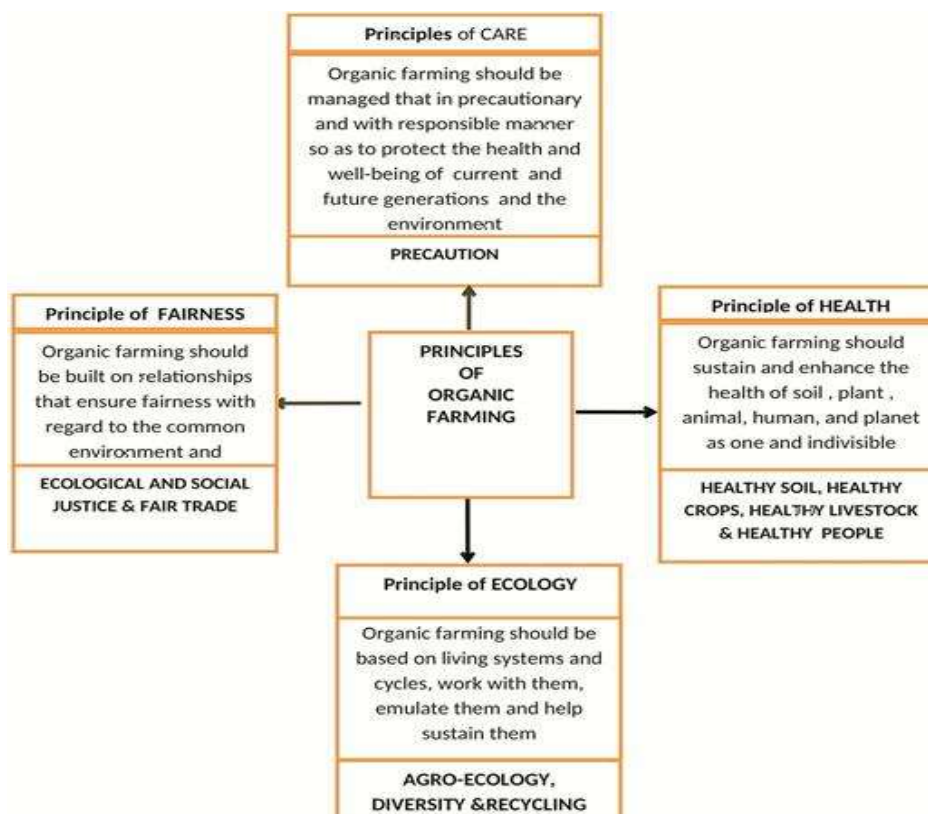
Advantages of the Natural Organic Foods:

- **Safer:** Natural organic foods are grown without the use of chemical pesticides and additives that are common in conventional foods. Natural food advocates argue that this makes organic foods safer, which the general public believes. Though not explicitly proven, the belief that organically grown foods pose fewer health risks persists.
- **Better-Taste:** Organic apples were found to be sweeter, with better texture and firmness than conventionally grown apples in a 2001 study at Washington State University. Such studies have contributed to the belief that organic foods are not only healthier, but also taste better than conventional foods.
- **Environment Friendly:** Organic farms use less energy and generate less waste than conventional farms. Furthermore, natural farming avoids the use of synthetic pesticides, some of which are harmful to the environment and wildlife.
- **Farmer Friendly:** Farmers who grow crops traditionally use pesticides, which have been linked to a variety of health issues ranging from headaches to cancer. Again, this is not scientific evidence, but it is used as yet another reason to purchase organic and natural foods.

Organic Farming Process:

Organic farming and food processing practices are diverse, necessitating the development of a food production system that is socially, ecologically, and economically sustainable. The International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements (IFOAM) has proposed four basic principles of organic farming: health, ecology, fairness, and care (Figure 1). The main principles and practices of organic food production are to inspire and improve biological cycles in the farming system, to maintain and improve deep-rooted soil fertility, to reduce all types of pollution, to avoid using pesticides and synthetic fertilizers, to conserve genetic diversity in food, to consider the vast socio-ecological impact of food production, and to produce high-quality food in sufficient quantity (IFOAM, 1998).

Agriculture requires specific prerequisites for both crop cultivation and animal husbandry, according to the National Organic Programme implemented by the USDA Organic Food Production Act (OFPA, 1990). Crops must be grown in lands free of synthetic pesticides, chemical fertilizers, and herbicides for three years before harvesting, with a sufficient buffer zone to reduce contamination from neighboring farms.



Above image showing Principles of organic farming (adapted from IFOAM, 1998).

Genetically modified foods, sewage sludge, and ionizing radiation are all strictly forbidden. Soil fertility and nutrient content are primarily managed through farming practices such as crop rotation and the use of cover crops boosted with animal and plant waste manures. Pests, diseases, and weeds are primarily controlled through the use of physical and biological control systems that do not rely on herbicides or synthetic pesticides. Organic livestock should be raised without the use of growth hormones or antibiotics on a regular basis, and they should have adequate outdoor access. Preventive measures such as routine vaccination and vitamin and mineral supplementation are also required (OFPA, 1990).

Nutritional benefits and health safety:

According to Magnusson et al. (2003) and Brandt and Molgaard (2001), the growing demand for organically farmed fresh products has sparked consumer and producer interest in the nutritional value of organically and conventionally grown foods. According to an AFSSA (2003) study, organically grown foods, particularly leafy vegetables and tubers, have higher dry matter than conventionally grown foods. Woese et al. (1997) and Bourn and Prescott (2002) obtained comparable results. Organic cereals and products contain less protein than conventional cereals, but they have higher quality proteins with higher amino acid scores. The lysine content of organic wheat has been reported to be 25%–30% higher than that of conventional wheat (Woese et al., 1997; Brandt et al., 2000).

Organically grazed cows and sheep have less fat and leaner meat than conventionally grazed counterparts (Hansson et al., 2000). According to Nurnberg et al. (2002), organically fed cow's muscle contains four times more linolenic acid, a recommended cardio-protective ω -3 fatty acid, with a decrease in oleic acid and linoleic acid. Pastushenko et al. (2000) discovered that meat from organically grazed cows is high in polyunsaturated fatty acids. Milk from organic farms contains more polyunsaturated fatty acids and vitamin E. (Lund, 1991). Organic milk contains a nutritionally beneficial amount of vitamin E and carotenoids (Nurnberg et al., 2002). Organic virgin olive oil contains more oleic acid (Gutierrez et al., 1999). Organic plants have significantly higher levels of magnesium, iron, and phosphorus. They also have more calcium, sodium, and potassium as major elements and trace elements such as manganese, iodine, chromium, molybdenum, selenium, boron, copper, vanadium, and zinc (Rembialkowska, 2007). Organic products contain more dry matter, minerals, and antioxidants such as polyphenols and salicylic acid, according to a review by Lairon (2010) based on the French Agency for food safety (AFSSA) report. In comparison

to conventionally grown foods, organic foods (94–100%) contain no pesticide residues. Fruits and vegetables contain a wide range of phytochemicals, including polyphenols, resveratrol, pro-vitamin C, and carotenoids, which are plant secondary metabolites. According to Lairon (2010), organic fruits and vegetables have 27% more vitamin C than conventional fruits and vegetables. Because these secondary metabolites have significant regulatory effects at the cellular level, they have been found to be protective against certain diseases such as cancer, chronic inflammation, and others (Lairon, 2010). Some organic foods, such as corn, strawberries, and marionberries, have more than 30% of cancer-fighting antioxidants, according to the Food Marketing Institute (2008). Organic fruits and vegetables have higher levels of phenols and polyphenolic antioxidants. Organic plants are thought to contain twice as many phenolic compounds as conventional plants (Rembalkowska, 2007). Organic wine has been shown to have higher levels of resveratrol (Levite et al., 2000).

According to Rossi et al. (2008), organically grown tomatoes contain more salicylic acid than conventionally grown tomatoes. Salicylic acid is a naturally occurring phytochemical that has anti-inflammatory and anti-stress properties, as well as the ability to prevent artery hardening and bowel cancer (Rembalkowska, 2007; Butler et al., 2008).

Environmental impact:

Organic farming contributes to environmental conservation. The environmental impact of organic and conventional agriculture has been extensively researched. Organic farming is thought to be less harmful to the environment because it does not allow synthetic pesticides, the majority of which are potentially harmful to water, soil, and local terrestrial and aquatic wildlife (Oquist et al., 2007). Furthermore, due to crop rotation practices, organic farms are better than conventional farms at sustaining biodiversity. When compared to conventional farming, organic farming improves soil physico-biological properties such as more organic matter, biomass, higher enzyme, better soil stability, enhanced water percolation, holding capacities, less water, and wind erosion (Fliebsbach & Mader, 2000; Edwards, 2007; Filebach et al., 2007). Organic farming consumes less energy and generates less waste per unit area or yield (Stolze et al., 2000; Hansen et al., 2001). Furthermore, organically managed soils have higher water retention capacity, resulting in higher yield in organic farms even during drought years (Pimentel et al., 2005).

Socioeconomic impact:

Organic farming necessitates more labor, resulting in more income-generating jobs per farm (Halberg, 2008). According to Winter and Davis (2006), an organic product typically costs 10%–40% more than comparable conventional crops, and the price is determined by a variety of factors in both the input and output arms. On the input side, factors that raise the price of organic foods include the high cost of obtaining organic certification, the high cost of field labor, and the lack of subsidies on organics in India, as opposed to chemical inputs. However, as health awareness grows, consumers are willing to pay a premium. Some organic products are also in short supply due to high demand, resulting in a cost increase (Mukherjee et al., 2018).

Because bio fertilizers and pesticides can be produced locally, farmers' annual inputs are also low (Lobley et al., 2005). Because organic farm laborers are less likely to be exposed to agricultural chemicals, their occupational health improves (Thompson and Kidwell, 1998). Organic food has a longer shelf life than conventional food because it contains fewer nitrates and more antioxidants. Nitrates accelerate food spoilage, whereas antioxidants help to extend food shelf life (Shreck et al., 2006). Organic farming is now a growing economic sector as a result of the profit made by organic produce, which has led to a growing farmer preference for organic agriculture.

Organic Agriculture and Sustainable Development:

Sustainable agriculture aims to achieve three major goals: environmental health, economic profitability, and social and economic equity. The concept of sustainability is based on the principle that we must meet the needs of the present without jeopardizing future generations' ability to meet their own needs. Organic farming is the only way to ensure long-term economic viability, and because of its higher market price, organic farming is more profitable. The use of pesticides and fertilizers in conventional farming raises the cost of production and has a negative impact on farmer health, affecting economic balance in a community, with benefits going only to the manufacturer of these pesticides. Continuous degradation of soil fertility by chemical fertilizers causes production loss and thus raises

production costs, rendering farming economically unsustainable. Implementation of a strategy encompassing food security, rural employment generation, poverty alleviation, natural resource conservation, adoption of an export-oriented production system, sound infrastructure, active participation of government, and private-public sector will be beneficial in reviving agricultural economic sustainability (Soumya, 2015).

Social sustainability:

It is defined as a process or framework that promotes the well-being of an organization's members while also supporting future generations' ability to maintain a healthy community. Social sustainability can be improved by allowing the rural poor to benefit from agricultural development, respecting indigenous knowledge and practices alongside modern technologies, promoting gender equality in labor, full participation of vibrant rural communities to boost their confidence and mental health, and thus decreasing farmer suicide rates. Organic farming appears to generate 30% more employment in rural areas, with higher returns per unit of labor input (Pandey and Singh, 2012).

Organic farming in India has grown slowly, with only 41 000 hectares of organic land accounting for only 0.03 percent of total cultivated area. Organic farming produced approximately 14 000 tonnes in India in 2002, with 85 percent of it exported (Chopra et al., 2013). The most significant barrier to the advancement of organic agriculture in India was the lack of a firm decision by the government to promote organic agriculture. Furthermore, there were several major drawbacks in the growth of organic farming in India, including a lack of awareness, a lack of good marketing policies, a lack of biomass, insufficient farming infrastructure, high farming input costs, inappropriate marketing of organic input, inefficient agricultural policies, a lack of financial support, an inability to meet export demand, a lack of quality manure, and low yield.

Zero Budget Natural Farming (ZBNF) is a farming method that reduces costs by eliminating external inputs and using local resources to rejuvenate soils and restore ecosystem health through diverse, multi-layered cropping systems. It requires 10% less water and 10% less electricity than chemical and organic farming. Cow dung microorganisms (300–500 crores of beneficial microorganisms per gram cow dung) decompose the dried biomass on the soil and convert it into ready-to-use plant nutrients. Since 2015–16, the Government of India has implemented the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana and the Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana under the ZBNF policy (Sobhana et al., 2019). According to Kumar (2020), the organic and natural farming sector received Rs 687.5 crore in the Union Budget 2020–21, up from Rs 461.36 crore the previous year.

Organic food consumption and popularity are increasing globally on a daily basis. More than two-thirds of US consumers purchased organic food in 2008, with more than one-fourth purchasing it on a weekly basis. Organic crop consumption in the United States has more than doubled since 1997. Organic foods are preferred by consumers because they have higher nutritional values, fewer or no additive contaminants, and are grown in a more sustainable manner. Families with younger consumers prefer organic fruits and vegetables more than any other age group (Thompson et al., 1998; Loureino et al., 2001; Magnusson et al., 2003). Organic foods are popular because of their nutritional and health benefits, as well as their positive impact on the environment and socioeconomic status (Chopra et al., 2013). According to a UN Environment Programme survey, organic farming methods produce lower yields (on average 20% lower) than conventional farming methods (Gutierrez et al., 1999). Organically grown foods are more expensive because their yields are low. Many consumers found it difficult to purchase organic foods due to the higher prices (Lairon, 2010). Because chemical fertilizers are not used in organic farming, it requires far more land to produce the same amount of organic food produce as conventional farming does. Organic agriculture does little to address the issue of global climate change. Organic food consumption has gradually increased in recent decades, particularly in Western countries (Meiner-Ploeger, 2005).

Conclusion:

Organic food products are preferred by consumers because they believe they are healthy and safe, nutritious, and environmentally friendly. To entice more consumers to purchase organic food products, marketers must develop strategies and design elements of the marketing mix to make organic products easily accessible to consumers. There is also a need to increase consumer trust and obtain proper government certification for organic food products. Organic agriculture produces more nutritious and safe food. Organic food is becoming increasingly popular as consumers seek out organic foods that are thought to be healthier and safer. As a result, organic food may ensure

food safety from farm to plate. Organic farming is more environmentally friendly than conventional farming. Organic farming promotes consumer health by keeping soil healthy and maintaining environmental integrity. Furthermore, the organic produce market is now the world's fastest growing market, including India. Organic agriculture promotes a nation's consumer health, ecological health, and economic growth by generating income in a holistic manner. India is currently the world's largest organic producer (Willer and Lernoud, 2019), and we can conclude that encouraging organic farming in India can help build a nutritionally, ecologically, and economically healthy nation in the near future.

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