

CONSUMER BEHAVIOR TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD: A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT PERSPECTIVE IN HIGHER EDUCATION BASED ON LITERATURE REVIEW

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Abstract

Consumers' eating habits are evolving globally, and they increasingly choose to eat food devoid of artificial chemicals, fertilizers, and pesticides; in other words, they prefer to eat organic food, which is both environmentally beneficial and sustainable for their health. Due to farmers' reduced production of organic produce, which raises the cost of organic food on the market, organic products are not as popular with customers. While raising public knowledge of the benefits of organic food items and encouraging their use are important, the most important thing is to encourage farmers to switch to organic farming. The growing organic food market in India and around the world may benefit from a study on customer perceptions of organic food. Numerous insights for the study have been obtained from the review of relevant literature in the field of consumer perception and the organic food market. Additionally, it has given guidance for the current study's design. The desire for organic food products in India and around the world has been noted by several researchers. Additionally, a number of characteristics that affect how consumers see organic food items have been found. Preference, knowledge, and contentment with organic food items have also been the subject of some research. The investigator felt compelled to conduct the current examination after reviewing multiple studies and identifying the gap.

Keywords: *organic food market, organic food products, consumer perception, India*

Introduction

Organic farming, which has been used by farmers from ancient times, refrains from using synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, growth regulators, or additives for animal feed. The FAO/WHO Codex Alimentarius Commission (2007) [3] defines organic agriculture as an integrated production management strategy that promotes and enhances the health of the agro-ecosystem, including soil biological activity, biological cycles, and biodiversity. It emphasizes the use of natural inputs, mineral and products made from plants.

The giving up of artificial pesticides and fertilizers. Organic agriculture differs from conventional farming systems in that it adheres to the principle of sustainability through the use of natural inputs, environmentally friendly practices like crop rotation, mulching, and intercropping, as well as improvements in soil fertility and structure. Organic farming is becoming more and more popular, and it is currently practiced in practically every nation on earth. The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) stated that a significant national and international concern is the rapidly shifting trend from chemical-based agriculture to organic and environmentally friendly farming systems. India has 6,50,000 organic growers and 5.2 million hectares of organic land,

according to the most recent survey. The world's biggest producer of organic products is India.

A product from an organic farming system that does not employ synthetic pesticides and fertilizers is referred to as organic food. The demand for organic food is rising as a result of consumers' support for this shift in the direction of organic agriculture due to their increased awareness of health risks. Globally, customers are increasingly consuming organic food products. Consumer knowledge of environmental and health issues is the cause of this trend. Demographic characteristics such as availability, health, and education have a beneficial impact on consumers' attitudes toward purchasing organic food. Customers are generally more satisfied with organic food than with artificial food (Paul and Rana 2012) [13]. However, given the current state of affairs, the Indian organic product market is still in its infancy, and many consumers are ignorant of the advantages of both the products and the environment. In order to penetrate the organic product market in India, marketers must concentrate on the two main obstacles to organic product purchases: price and availability (Laheer and Arya, 2015) [5]. Research Design: Although the demand for organic food items is still rising, consumers' opinions about buying and eating organic food are a common worry. To understand and meet the demand for

organic food goods, it will be crucial for stakeholders (farmers) and retailers (business owners) to study perception, attitude, and behavior regarding purchasing organic food items. The primary goal of the current study is to offer a comprehensive picture of consumer opinions regarding organic food items, as there have been several studies on organic products over the past several years.

Objectives of the study

Based on the literature review, the specific objectives of the present study are as follows:

1. To study a current and effective analysis of the organic food and market (world and Indian scenario)
2. To use scholarly research articles to examine different aspects of customer perceptions of organic food items.

Data source and methodology

Information about the global and Indian organic markets was acquired from a variety of research articles published in reference journals and electronic databases in order to review the vast body of material. Afterwards, a thorough analysis of the literature was carried out to find out how consumers felt about organic food items. The journals offer the excellent work of numerous academics from across the world, which eventually aids in conducting their work in a desirable way. Furthermore, an effort was made to track down references mentioned in a number of published studies and articles about organic food items. The majority of the information was gathered from primary and secondary sources.

Findings from the literature

The organic agriculture sector has experienced significant global growth over the past two decades. According to IFOAM – Organics International and the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL) (2024), approximately 4.5 million organic producers cultivated nearly 96.4 million hectares of land worldwide in 2022, accounting for around 2% of total agricultural land. Oceania holds the largest share of organic farmland, followed by Europe, Latin America, and Asia. Australia ranks first in terms of organic land area, while India ranks second and has the largest number of organic producers globally. However, despite the large number of producers, organic farming still represents a relatively small proportion of total agricultural activity in India.

The global organic food market has also expanded rapidly due to increasing consumer awareness of health, food safety, and environmental sustainability. Global retail sales of organic

products reached approximately USD 142 billion in 2022, with North America and Europe dominating the market. The United States is the largest market for organic food, followed by Germany and China (IFOAM & FiBL, 2024). Similarly, APEDA (2025) reported that India had around 4.5 million hectares of land under organic certification in 2024, indicating strong potential for further development of the organic sector in the country.

Earlier studies have also documented the expansion of organic agriculture globally. Dibakar Mahanta, Bisht, and Kant (2021) reported that more than 71.5 million hectares of land worldwide were under organic management, with Australia leading in terms of area under cultivation. Similarly, Lernoud and Willer (2016) noted that certified organic land increased significantly from 11 million hectares in 1999 to over 43 million hectares in recent years, highlighting the rapid growth of organic agriculture worldwide.

Several studies have emphasized the growing demand for organic food products due to increasing health awareness among consumers. Yadav (2010) observed that the organic food market had experienced steady growth globally, with increasing production and consumption in Europe and the United States. The National Programme for Organic Production (2012) also indicated strong market growth in regions such as the European Union, the United States, and Canada. These markets continue to experience increasing demand for organic products, creating opportunities for developing countries like India to expand their production and exports.

Despite the growth of organic farming and international markets, domestic consumption of organic food in India remains relatively low. Balaji and Injodey (2017) highlighted that although India is among the leading countries in terms of organic producers, domestic awareness and consumption of organic food products remain limited. Similarly, Manaloor et al. (2016) stated that the Indian organic food market is still at an early stage of development, but rising income levels and increasing health consciousness among consumers are gradually boosting demand for organic food products.

Research has also focused on factors influencing consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior toward organic food. Magnusson et al. (2001) and Wier et al. (2003) identified demographic factors such as age, gender, income level, education, and family structure as key determinants of organic food purchasing behavior. Hughner et al. (2007) further suggested that health concerns, environmental protection, food safety, superior taste, and animal

welfare are among the major motivations behind consumers' preference for organic food products.

Similarly, Shafie and Rennie (2012) found that consumer perceptions of organic food are strongly influenced by sensory attributes such as taste, freshness, and nutritional value, along with concerns regarding health and environmental sustainability. However, the study also highlighted that high prices remain one of the major barriers preventing consumers from purchasing organic food products.

Other studies have emphasized the importance of trust, product information, and accessibility in shaping consumer attitudes. Mehra and Ratna (2014) identified six major factors affecting consumer attitudes toward organic food: perceived product quality, accessibility, value for money, product knowledge, health consciousness, and trust. Their findings also suggested that women and younger consumers tend to have a more favorable perception of organic food products.

In the Indian context, Sharma and Bali (2014) found that urban consumers are generally more aware of organic food products and associate them with health benefits and chemical-free production. The study also indicated that many consumers are willing to pay a premium price for organic food due to its perceived health advantages.

Similarly, Pandurangarao et al. (2017) identified several factors influencing consumers' purchase decisions for organic food, including product labeling, environmental concerns, health consciousness, brand reputation, price, availability, freshness, and store location. Among these factors, health and environmental concerns were found to be the most significant drivers of organic food consumption.

Overall, the existing literature indicates that the global organic food market is expanding rapidly, driven largely by increasing consumer awareness of health, food safety, and environmental sustainability. However, factors such as high prices, limited availability, lack of awareness, and trust issues continue to influence consumer purchasing decisions, particularly in developing countries like India.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study sought to ascertain Indian customers' perceptions about organic food. Health, safety, flavor, and environmental concerns were determined to be the most significant factors influencing consumers' attitudes and preferences for buying organic products. Reviewing the survey also showed that consumers' tastes and decisions to buy organic food goods might be influenced by

market availability. Therefore, it is imperative that producers, traders, consumers, and the government itself concentrate on the organic niche market since this article offers crucial information on the increased demand for organically cultivated food products in the future.

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