

Factors Influencing Consumer Behavior Towards the Purchase of Organic Food Products

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Abstract:

The organic food industry has experienced rapid growth in recent decades. The industry is relatively new to developing countries compared to developed countries. Since India has the potential to produce organic products, it is essential to study factors that influence consumers' intention to buy them. The present study was designed and implemented for this purpose. In this cross-sectional study, 600 consumers were selected from Amritsar, Jalandhar and Ludhiana region of Punjab. This study can be beneficial for the organic product producers as well as marketers in understanding the factors influencing the consumer behavior towards organic products. The present study adopted the descriptive study design, which describes the nature of variable under study and their relationship. The study analyses the Consumer Buying Behaviour towards Organic Food Products in selected area of Punjab (India).

Keywords: Consumer Behaviour, Purchase, Organic Food, Products etc.

1. INTRODUCTION:

India's economy has been classified as agrarian. India has produced agricultural goods not for domestic consumption but rather to guarantee food supply worldwide through our export system. However, food safety is a significant concern as the world's population is growing at a rapid rate. The issue of ensuring a sustainable supply and production of food is intensifying. The concept of mass production has come to pass. But with the world's growing population and rising agricultural product demand, it would be challenging to produce more than the planet could hold. (Nagaraj, S. 2023)

Consumers these days are extremely discerning when it comes to food selections. Put differently, today's consumers are extremely picky. In addition to their taste, likes, and immediate needs, they also worry about the potentially harmful effects of the food on society, the environment, and their own bodies. Producers are more reliant on high yielding cultivars and greater fertiliser use to meet the rising demand for food goods brought on by an increasing population. Climate changes have been observed as a result of environmental deterioration and deforestation, which has also disrupted the natural habitat of grazers and insects alike. Agricultural farmers are increasingly concerned about insects in particular, and to protect their crops, insecticides and pesticides are being used more frequently. This results in bio-magnification, which has negative consequences on health. Certain considerations must be made for the use, storage, and disposal of agricultural materials. In addition to filling their bellies, consumers worry about potential negative effects on the environment and themselves.

Consumer behaviour can be defined as the psychological analysis of an individual's decision to purchase or not purchase a product. It focusses on the reasons behind a person's decision to utilise or reject a product. Customers have been drawn to organic food items by social pressure, lifestyle changes, population expansion, environmental degradation, and potentially harmful health effects. (Mohamed Bilal Basha, C. M. (2022)

2. ORGANIC FOOD IN INDIA

Organic food items are the result of holistic agriculture, which emphasizes the use of chemical-free inputs, soil conservation, health, and sustainability, as well as the preservation and sustainable use of the environment. In India, organic farming has its roots dating back thousands of years. The Indian farmers, used to plant crops keeping in mind several 'Tithis' and 'Nakshatras', as they believed that this attracted positive energies of the earth and helped crops to grow (Sharma, February 2022). It was till 1960s, before the British rule, Indian civilization that thrived on the methods of farming completely organic in nature, was the most prosperous country in the world. The farming in India was purely organic then, based on fertilizers and pesticides obtained from cow dung, animal and plant residues. It was during 1950s because of rapidly increasing population and impact of natural calamities, India was bound to import food from other countries to serve the starving nation. In order to increase the home production of food, Green Revolution then came into force in India under the championship of M. S. Swaminathan.

Although the nation's food crisis was greatly alleviated by the green revolution, its side consequences included the

substitution of chemical fertilizers with organic ones, the use of hybrid seeds, and the conversion of thousands or perhaps millions of acres of uncultivated land. The negative effects of the green revolution included the soil losing its fertility, farmers becoming infertile due to prolonged exposure to chemicals on their fields, people developing chronic allergies and other lifestyle diseases, and farmers becoming indebted due to the high cost of chemical inputs and expensive seeds for their fields. Arguments about how organic food is pricey and out of reach for many people are tiring, but the costs of medications because of the negative effects of chemicals are more concerning. The consumer today is getting aware and is ready to pay a higher price or premium for eating healthy. Global organic movement is growing its popularity and several developments in the area of organic farming like crop use of crop rotation, polyculture, agro-economy is gaining pace in India. An Indian company Pralshar Bio Products, is associated with the produce of bio enzymes that yield an output of 22 ton per acre which is way more than traditional NPK manure which produces 18 ton per acre. (Shivani Kalra, 2019)

The present Indian government under the leadership of Prime Minister Shree Narendra Modi, has left no stone unturned to lift and boost organic farming India. The Indian Government has allotted 5,00,000 hectares of land for organic farming. Various monetary schemes like Pradhan Mantri Mudra Bank loan scheme are launched to boost organic farming sector in India.

Globally, the demand for organic food and its production have only increased. The overall amount of farmland used for organic cultivation has been rising over the past three decades, starting in 1985. With 35.65 million hectares of organic land, Australia has the most organic land, followed by India, which came in eighth place with 1.78 million hectares of total organic land. (Usharani, R. G., 2021)

3. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS:

Studying the numerous hypotheses and theories put forth to explain phenomena and the psychological and societal pressures consumers face while choosing, purchasing, and utilizing organic products might help us understand consumer behavior with regard to these items. The hypotheses also hold true for food items that are organic.

3.1 Theories of Consumer Behavior

Various attempts have been made to understand the distinct behavior shown by consumers among which Neumann and Morgenstern (1947) is widely accepted who adopted utility theory to explain the consumer behavior (Richa Mishra, 2016). The approach was prototype in nature and hence it was named as Early Empiricist Phase and hence it was named as Robert Aitken, L. W (2020). By its very nature, the concept was strictly economic in nature, arguing that buyers base all of their purchasing decisions on the anticipated advantages. The fundamental tenet of this strategy is that all customers are well-informed about the product, market, cost, rivals, and advantages. Therefore, when a rational buyer with complete knowledge (full discloser) is going to maximize their utility under the constraint of minimum cost, that buyer will make a purchase decision. It is thought that customers are able to accurately estimate a product's perceived utility and utilize that information to purchase goods that will best meet their current wants and well-being at the lowest possible cost.

The theory of consumer behavior backed by utilitarian economic theory received numerous criticisms arguing that consumers are not always very rational while making a buy decision. It has also been observed that, consumers are not very consistent in their buying and often they are influenced by social relations, values and might be triggered by emotions (Simon, 1997). In many cases, it has been observed that consumers choose what seems satisfactory to them and in almost all cases, it is below the optimal line. In order to account the satisfactory and optimal behavior Herbert Simons proposed Satisficing theory whereas Prospect Theory Two (Kahneman and Tversky) was given for optimal utility and in both the theories rationality of the buyer as a key input was embraced.

According to Simon's Satisficing Theory, which was presented in the middle of the 20th century, a consumer considers satisfying and sufficient when weighing the options on the market and continues to do so until he or she passes the minimal barrier for acceptance (Simon, 1979). When the threshold is crossed and the customer finds what he was seeking for, he ends his search and evaluation process. Bounded rationality, which considers consumer behaviour beyond economic considerations and considers psychological and clinical psychology, was introduced with the development of psychological theories.

3.2 The future of Organic Food

In India, the market for OFPs is at niche level, which is expected to grow by leaps and bounds. Though India keeps to grow strong technologically, but keep health and various environmental factors in mind, Indians are going back to the roots. The increased demand for OFPs in India is accelerated by various factors which includes health concerns, quality in food, increased awareness about sustainable use of soil for generations to come, environmental concerns and many more. Hamzaoui and Zahaf, 2008, found support for local farmers and healthy lifestyle a major factor for increase in the demand

for organic food products across the globe. A report (Research, 2021) published by FSSAI found following factors responsible for the growth of organic food in India:

- Fitness & Well-being
- Health Concerns
- Harmful effects of pesticides
- Use of antibiotics in crops
- Effects of consuming unsafe food
- Norms on food safety
- Environmental factors
- Increased nutrition value in food.

Through its most recent initiative, the National Project on Organic Farming (NPOF) scheme, the Indian government has significantly contributed to the promotion of organic food in the country. With an initial investment of Rs 57 crores, the initiative was introduced in October 2004 and its budget has grown significantly since then. The worldwide market has also seen a sharp rise in the demand for OFPs. The demand is projected to increase at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 9.7% from \$201.77 billion in 2020 to \$221.37 billion in 2021. Numerous regulatory agencies, such as the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), have listed a number of benefits of eating organic food, including a lower chance of hazardous and poisonous elements being exposed to humans, animals, and the environment. Additionally, it has approved \$5 million annually for researchers studying organic food.

Today people are willing to even pay a premium for consumption of organic food. The middle class in India is ready to pay a price difference of up to 15% for buying OSPs. The reasons for this are growing awareness amongst consumers for healthy life style and protection of environment

The introduction of various government schemes in India has helped in the boost of organic food in the country. The government schemes promoting organic farming in India are:

- Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY):** promotes certification for organic farming and provides financial assistance Rs 50,000 per hectare for three years to the farmers indulging in organic farming practices.
- Mission Organic Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER):** promotes third party certification in organic food specially in north eastern region of India. The scheme aims to foster exports and provides a financial assistance starting from Rs 25000 up to Rs2 Cr for building organic farming related infrastructure.
- Capital Investment Subsidy Scheme (CISS) under Soil Health Management Scheme:** The scheme provides 100% assistance to state governments setting up of mechanized fruit and vegetable market waste, agro waste compost production unit up to a maximum limit of Rs 190 lakh per unit (3000 Total Per Annum TPA capacity)
- National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP):** The scheme provides a subsidy of up to 50% for purchase of bio-fertilizers, supply of Rhizobium culture, Phosphate Solubilizing Bacteria (PSB), Zinc Solubilizing Bacteria (ZSB), Azotobacter, Mycorrhiza and vermi compost.
- National Food Security Mission (NFSM):** The scheme provides financial assistance for promoting bio fertilizers in agricultural produce.

4. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

While a study carried out on over 1300 respondents from Chennai & Bangalore by (Lal, 2023) identified following factors to have a significant impact on consumer buying intention towards organic food:

- Environmental Concerns
- Health and Life style
- Product quality
- Support towards local farmers
- Convenience and price
- Safety and trust

- Subjective norms

The report also pointed out that insufficient consumer accessibility is a contributing factor to the state's lower sales of organic food and that policymakers should start educating the public about the health advantages of eating organic food. According to a study done in China by **Mark X. James (2023)**, young consumers in particular were more interested in buying organic tea than conventionally farmed tea since it was seen as a "status symbol." Additionally, consumers with higher levels of education expressed stronger purchase intentions and thought organic tea was healthier than regular tea.

Robert Aitken, L. W. (2020), found that demand OFPs in US market is not affected by Income, lifestyle, education or presence of children. Researchers found that the demand for organic food is positively impacted and stimulated to purchase it when consumers have a strong tendency towards the environment and health consciousness. According to the study, consumers who purchase organic goods are willing to spend more for them than they would otherwise. The major obstacles identified for the lesser demand were:

- Availability- Organic products are not invariably available in all the supermarkets or stores.
- Organic products have higher grower prices than conventionally grown products, the stores end up stocking organic products.
- There is no proper labeling or certification done, for the consumer to know that it is organically produced.

The study concluded with the noting that consumers are willing to pay higher prices for healthy and safe food, but it is the distribution channel, which is to be blamed for the lack of availability.

A research study was conducted by (**Meike Janssen, 2018**) to identify the determinants organic food purchase. He in his study found out naturalness, healthiness, environmental protection, preference for local and domestic food, high quality food and enjoyment of eating to have positive influence on the demand for organic food while price consciousness and convenience orientation had negative effect.

Attitude and perception of Chinese consumers toward organic food was reported to be influenced by internal & external factors (**Chu, 2018**). The purchase intention towards organic food in China was majorly driven by subjective norms and marketing communication being external factors & environmental awareness, health consciousness & price perception being internal factors. Moreover, long term effect on organic farming on environment, health benefits, and social status symbols were also identified as drivers affecting demand of OFPs in the country.

Teenagers in Thailand were found to demand ready to cook organic food over conventionally grown food majorly because of health benefits attached with organic food as reported by **Jiumpanyarach, (2018)**. The research found out good quality, safety for consumers, and available in the market as the major factors responsible for the demand of organic food in the country. While willingness to pay higher prices for organic food specially egg, meat and pork had negative impact but opinion to consume organic had positive impact.

Sharma, Dewan, Bali (2016) discussed that the purchase behavior, preference & factors affecting organic food. This study was based on primary data using a structured questionnaire which covered 100 respondents living in the Chandigarh & Panchkula. The questionnaire was designed in such a way which covered food safety concerns, frequency of buying behavior, from where they buy the products, awareness, attitude, factors effecting buying behavior, price effect on purchasing, behavior towards organic food and effectiveness of sources for organic information. This study found that consumers are aware about organic food as they are free from chemicals resulting reducing stress level and maintaining a healthier lifestyle so they are ready to pay a higher price but lack of accessibility is the major issue for not consuming organic food

Basha, Mason, Shamsuddin, Hussain & Salem (2015) The awareness about the health has raised the demand for organic food products. The researchers identified some factors which affected the demand of organic products. The major factors identified were

1. Environmental care: Consumers were favorable towards environmental care and their buying intentions were affected by concerns towards environment. They were willing to buy food products which were less harmful to the environment.
2. Health Concern and lifestyle: Yet another determinant was the consciousness toward health. Consumers were facing various diseases because of unhealthy lifestyle and ready to pay higher price for getting safe food products.

3. Product Quality: It was found out those consuming organic products were less price sensitive and had more concerned over quality than he was getting

4. Subjective Norms: The research also found the peers and reference groups have a positive impact on the demand for organic food

5. HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

There is no significant difference between the factors influencing consumer behavior towards the purchase of organic food products

6. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research at hand is primarily empirical, that is based on the basis of fact findings and data collection. Primary data has been used to carry out the research and the data was collected through questionnaires and personal interaction. Methodologies for tackling research problems are defined as systematic approaches to the issue. Researcher has adopted a variety of approaches to solving a problem, and this guide explains the logic behind each one. Using the research technique, the data collecting process is organized to meet the study's goals. The sample size of the research is 600 respondents i.e. 200 each from Amritsar, Jalandhar and Ludhiana region from Punjab. The technique adopted for the purpose of study was judgmental sampling. It is a technique that is based on the wisdom of the researcher, wherein the researcher finds out a suitable subject that could be included in the sample. This technique helps in minimizing the non-sampling error and a higher degree of response rate can be achieved.

7. DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table-1
Difference between the factors influencing consumer behavior towards the purchase of organic food products

	Statements	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Health Conscious	Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic	101	2.676	0.401	.158	.875
	Doctor's advice	117	2.684	0.374		
Preserves EcoSystem	Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic	101	2.926	0.839	1.342	.181
	Doctor's advice	117	2.782	0.741		
Subjective Norms	Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic	101	2.574	0.625	.713	.477
	Doctor's advice	117	2.513	0.643		
Consumer Knowledge	Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic	101	2.894	0.777	.577	.565
	Doctor's advice	117	2.835	0.747		
Personal norms	Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic	101	3.035	1.209	.345	.730
	Doctor's advice	117	2.974	1.348		
Problems	Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic	101	3.175	0.486	1.637	.103
	Doctor's advice	117	3.062	0.523		
Consumer Satisfaction	Benefits of organic food as compared					

various factor	with non-organic	101	3.036	0.489	.245	.807
	Doctor's advice	117	3.051	0.453		
Consumer Satisfactionvarious Information	Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic	101	2.856	0.699	.875	.383
	Doctor's advice	117	2.944	0.775		

Result of table-1 depict that there is no significant difference between the factors influencing consumer behavior towards health Conscious as a feature of organic food as t-ratio ($t=.158$) was found insignificant. In other words, there is no significant difference between the awareness level and consumer buying behavior towards the health consciousness.

For Health Conscious, mean scores and standard deviation for 'Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic' option were 2.678 and 0.0.401 and mean scores and standard deviation for 'Doctor's advice' option were 2.684 and 0.0.374 respectively. When mean scores were compared, it was found that the participants with doctor's advice are little more aware about health consciousness towards the purchase of organic food products.

Result of table depict that there is no significant difference between the factors influencing consumer behavior towards Preserves Eco System as a feature of organic food as t-ratio ($t=1.342$) was found insignificant. In other words, there is no significant difference between the awareness level and consumer buying behavior towards the Preserves Eco System.

For Preserves Eco System, mean scores and standard deviation for 'Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic' option were 2.926 and 0.374 and mean scores and standard deviation for 'Doctor's advice' option were 2.782 and 0.741 respectively. When mean scores were compared, it was found that the participants with benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic are little more aware about preserves eco-system towards the purchase of organic food products.

Result of table depict that there is no significant difference between the factors influencing consumer behavior towards Subjective Norms as a feature of organic food as t-ratio ($t=.713$) was found insignificant. In other words, there is no significant difference between the awareness level and consumer buying behavior towards the Subjective Norms.

For Subjective Norms, mean scores and standard deviation for 'Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic' option were 2.574 and 0.625 and mean scores and standard deviation for 'Doctor's advice' option were 2.513 and 0.643 respectively. When mean scores were compared, it was found that the participants with benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic are little more aware about Subjective Norms towards the purchase of organic food products.

Result of table depict that there is no significant difference between the factors influencing consumer behavior towards Consumer Knowledge as a feature of organic food as t-ratio ($t=.577$) was found insignificant. In other words, there is no significant difference between the awareness level and consumer buying behavior towards the Consumer Knowledge

For Consumer Knowledge, mean scores and standard deviation for 'Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic' option were 2.894 and 0.777 and mean scores and standard deviation for 'Doctor's advice' option were 2.835 and 0.747 respectively. When mean scores were compared, it was found that the participants with benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic are little more aware about Consumer Knowledge towards the purchase of organic food products.

Result of table depict that there is no significant difference between the factors influencing consumer behavior towards Personal norms as a feature of organic food as t-ratio ($t=.345$) was found insignificant. In other words, there is no significant difference between the awareness level and consumer buying behavior towards the Personal norms.

For Personal norms, mean scores and standard deviation for 'Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic' option were 3.035 and 1.209 and mean scores and standard deviation for 'Doctor's advice' option were 2.974 and 1.348 respectively. When mean scores were compared, it was found that the participants with benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic are little more aware about Personal norms towards the purchase of organic food products.

Result of table depict that there is no significant difference between the factors influencing consumer behavior towards problems as a feature of organic food as t-ratio ($t=1.637$) was found insignificant. In other words, there is no significant difference between the awareness level and consumer buying behavior towards the problems.

For Problems, mean scores and standard deviation for 'Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic' option were 3.175 and 0.486 and mean scores and standard deviation for 'Doctor's advice' option were 3.062 and 0.523 respectively. When mean scores were compared, it was found that the participants with benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic are little more aware about Problems towards the purchase of organic food products.

Result of table depict that there is no significant difference between the factors influencing consumer behavior towards Consumer satisfaction various factor as a feature of organic food as t-ratio ($t=0.245$) was found insignificant. In other words,

there is no significant difference between the awareness level and consumer buying behavior towards the Consumer satisfaction various factor.

For Consumer satisfaction various factor, mean scores and standard deviation for 'Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic' option were 3.036 and 0.489 and mean scores and standard deviation for 'Doctor's advice' option were 3.051 and 0.453 respectively. When mean scores were compared, it was found that the participants with benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic are little more aware about Consumer satisfaction various factor towards the purchase of organic food products.

Result of table depict that there is no significant difference between the factors influencing consumer behavior towards Consumer Satisfaction various information as a feature of organic food as t-ratio ($t=.875$) was found insignificant. In other words, there is no significant difference between the awareness level and consumer buying behavior towards the Consumer Satisfaction various information.

For Consumer Satisfaction various information, mean scores and standard deviation for 'Benefits of organic food as compared with non-organic' option were 2.856 and 0.699 and mean scores and standard deviation for 'Doctor's advice' option were 2.944 and 0.699 respectively. When mean scores were compared, it was found that the participants with Doctor's advice are little more aware about Consumer Satisfaction various information towards the purchase of organic food products.

Therefore, Hypothesis: "There is no significant difference between the factors influencing consumer behavior towards the purchase of organic food products" is accepted.

Conclusion:

The study discovered that the desire to buy organic food was directly impacted by attitude, environmental concern, and sensory attributes. However, the effects of age, household size, expertise, and perceived cost were only marginally significant. Subjective norms, health consciousness, perceived ease of purchasing, and educational attainment all had an attitude-based direct and indirect impact on the desire to buy these products. With the exception of perceived price, every research variable had a positive impact on purchase intention. The biggest influence was on health consciousness, which was followed by education level and arbitrary norms.

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