

Leveraging Digital Platforms for Consumer Education and Engagement in Organic Food Products: An Ecosystem Approach

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ABSTRACT

In today's digitally-driven world, the landscape of consumer decision-making has undergone an important transformation. Emergence and proliferation of digital platforms have reformed how consumers network with products, brands, and information. This paper explores the complex relationship amid digital platforms and consumer behaviour, particularly focusing on the notion of "organic" within this context. This study investigates into the dynamics of organic consumer behaviour in Vellore City, focusing specifically on their utilization of digital platforms. A sample size of 360 respondents was meticulously gathered through a combination of stratified and convenience sampling methods. Data was collected using a structured questionnaire comprising 31 close-ended questions, employing categorical, ordinal, and continuous scales including Likert scales. With visual material and user evaluations having great impact, social media becomes the most efficient tool for raising awareness of organic products. Age, education level, and gender significantly influence consumer interactions with organic products on digital platforms. Although concerns regarding product freshness and quality pose obstacles, promotional discounts and offers effectively encourage engagement. The results of the study throw light on the specifics of organic consumer behaviour in the digital environment of Vellore City, therefore providing insightful information for companies, legislators, and scholars equally.

Keywords- Organic food products, Consumer behaviour, Digital platform, Purchase decision.

INTRODUCTION

Indian consumers' growing health consciousness significantly drives the market for organic food. Consumers being more aware of the nutritional worth and quality of their food have driven demand for organic products. The growing awareness of the probable health risks connected to the use of chemicals and pesticides in conventional food production is driving demand of organic food variants. In today's environment, where cell phones and computers are as common as morning coffee, consumers' purchasing decisions have shifted. Even for natural products like organics, digital media—including the internet and social media—has grown to be a major determinant of customer decisions. One of the key objectives of digital platforms is to disseminate information and promote contact between customers and businesses. Consumers can interact with brands, obtain product reviews and recommendations, and learn more about numerous products and services using channels such as social media. This increased access to information enables consumers to make more educated purchasing decisions.

Role of Digital Platforms in Shaping Consumer Behaviour

Digital platforms are online venues or tools that allow users to engage, communicate, and transact with each other. These platforms exist in a variety of forms, including:

- Social media like Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter enable users to connect, exchange content, and interact with one another.
- E-commerce websites like Amazon, Flipkart, and Myntra make shopping easier.

- Review websites like MouthShut, 62 Review Hub, and Google Reviews allow users to leave feedback and ratings on products and services.
- Informational websites like Blogs, forums, and news websites provide information and resources on certain themes, such as organic food and sustainable agriculture.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Iryna Novytska et al. (2021) investigate the early stages of digital marketing for promoting organic products, with an emphasis on the European Union's experience and the prevalence of social networks as significant marketing platforms. The main conclusions are: i) Digital marketing in promoting organic products is still in its initial stages. ii) Social networks are becoming significant as main avenues for digital marketing of organic product companies because of their economy. iii) The structure of producers, which are frequently family farms or small farm enterprises, influences the development of digital marketing strategies in this industry.

Ms. U. Gayathri and Dr. P.Poongodi (2021) describe that the COVID-19 outbreak has altered many consumers' perceptions. People are increasingly aware of the dangers of not caring for the environment. Before the pandemic, there was a rise in environmental awareness and sustainability, but COVID-19 has expedited this trend and pushed more people to take responsibility. This study aims to apply planned behaviour theory to the use of organic food goods in India. A poll of 195 consumers found that contentment and attitude impact trust levels. Satisfaction has a significant impact on purchase and word-of-mouth intentions.

K Uma and Dr. Rechanna (2020) analyse the function of social media in India's natural sector, evaluate its value as a tool for several stakeholders, and underline among respondents their awareness of several kinds of organic products accessible on digital platforms. The key conclusions are that boosting stakeholder knowledge, assessing their efficacy, and advertising natural products depend on social media networks. The awareness level of respondents regarding certain kinds of organic products accessible on the internet platform correlates with their social media activity.

Sergey Yekimov (2020) investigates the effects of contemporary agricultural technology on the environment, the demand for ecologically friendly food items, and the part society networks play in promoting these goods via premium virtual content. Agricultural technologies have a negative influence on soils and the environment, yet social networks may boost competitiveness by luring consumers with high-quality content and informing consumers about the reimbursements of goods and services is critical.

You. J. (2020) discusses the causes and consequences of social media influence on consumers' organic food selection, emphasising the role of task and technology characteristics in confirming expectations and perceived usefulness, with implications for organic food promotion on social media platforms. The main conclusions of the study are Task-Technology Fit (TTF) and The Post-Acceptance Model (PAM) which help to assess the elements influencing consumer acceptance of organic food information via social media. The research discovered that both task and technology features have a considerable impact on task-technology fit. The study contributes to theoretical assessment by establishing a framework for understanding consumers' uptake of organic food information via social media.

Scuderi, A., and Sturiale, L. (2014) Emphasising the need of online selling strategies for Italian organic farms as well as the generation of social media-based communication tools, investigate customers' buying attitudes in both traditional and virtual environments. Underlining the great development possibilities of online selling for organic farms in Italy and the usefulness of direct selling online channels for high-quality agrifood commodities, the results of the research include customers' purchase behaviours in both traditional and virtual contexts.

M. Pechrova et al. (2015) propose social media as a useful marketing tool for organic farmers, highlighting its underutilization and making advice for using platforms such as Facebook to market organic products. The primary conclusion is that social media can be a useful marketing tool for organic farmers, but its full potential is not yet being realised. The distribution of fans on Facebook sites promoting organic products follows a "long tail" pattern, with one page having a significantly higher number of fans than others. Facebook rules have changed to allow for the organisation of competitions directly on Facebook pages, allowing organic farmers with limited funds to engage with their audience and improve their popularity.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- How do consumers process information about organic products on various online platforms?
- What role do Digital platforms play in shaping consumers' trust and perceptions regarding organic products?

PRIMARY OBJECTIVE

- To understand the extent to which digital platforms is effectively educate and engage consumers, thereby promoting the growth and sustainability of the organic food market.

SECONDARY OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To examine how digital platforms affect consumers' awareness and understanding of organic food products.
- To evaluate the reliability of information about organic food goods on digital platforms and its influence on consumer buying decisions.
- To determine the most prominent digital modes for educating consumers in consumption of organic food products.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

- Research Design – Descriptive research design.
- Population – Organic consumers using digital platforms in Vellore City.
- Sample Size – 360 (390 Questioners were circulated among organic consumers. Some questionnaires were not complete properly and some respondents didn't return the questionnaire. By avoiding this finally the researcher got 360 samples)
- Sampling method – Mixed method
First Vellore city is divided into four zones: East, West, North, and South (Cluster sampling – Probability sampling method). In each cluster Snowball sampling method is used by the researcher.
- Data-collection tools – Structured Questionnaire
The questionnaire consists of 31 Close-ended questions. The scales used in the questionnaire are categorical, Ordinal and continuous scale (Likert scale).
- Data Analysis – Instruments employed for data analysis and hypothesis testing are the Percentage analysis, Chi-square test, ANOVA, Mann-Whitney Test, Friedman Test, Independent t-test and correlation.
- Statistical instrument applied for data analysis – IBM SPSS software.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

- H_{01} : There is no significant difference in consumers' awareness and understanding of organic food products influenced by digital platforms across different age groups.
- H_{02} : There is no significant variation in the reliability of information about organic food products on digital platforms across different education levels.
- H_{03} : There is no significant association between gender and the preference for digital venues in creating awareness about organic food products.

DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Demographic Analysis

Table No. 1

Demographic analysis

S. No.	Options	No. of the Respondents	Percentage
Age			

1	Below 20	30	8.3
2	21 - 30	114	31.7
3	31 - 40	132	36.7
4	41 - 50	66	18.3
5	Above 50	18	5.0
	Total	360	100.0
Gender			
1	Male	156	43.3
2	Female	204	56.7
	Total	360	100.0
Marital Status			
1	Married	238	66.1
2	Unmarried	122	33.9
	Total	360	100.0
Qualification of the respondents			
1	Secondary and Higher Secondary	24	6.7
2	Degree	133	36.9
3	Master Degree	124	34.4
4	Professional course	49	13.6
5	Doctorate	30	8.3
	Total	360	100.0
Occupation of the respondents			
1	Unemployed	6	1.7
2	Government Employee	24	6.7
3	Private employee	182	50.6
4	Self Employed	56	15.6
5	Students	72	20.0
6	Home Maker	20	5.6
	Total	360	100.0
The monthly income of the respondents in Rupees			
1	Below 20,000	84	23.3
2	20,001 - 30,000	158	43.9
3	30,001 - 40,000	25	6.9
4	40,001 - 50,000	87	24.2

5	Above 50,000	6	1.7
	Total	360	100.0

Source: Primary Data

The greatest recorded proportion among the respondents falls between the ages of 31 and 40, 36.7 percent. Of the responders, 56.7 percent are female. Of the responders, 66.1 percent are married. The largest noted proportion among the respondents—36.9 percent—are those of graduates. Of the responders, 50.6% work for themselves privately. The largest reported proportion among the respondents—43.9% fell in the income range of Rs. 20,001 – 30,000.

Features of digital information are most influential in promoting organic food products.

Table No. 2

Features of digital information

S. No.	Options	No. of the Respondents	Percentage
1	Visual content	90	25.0
2	User reviews and ratings	48	13.3
3	Targeted advertisements	12	3.3
4	Convenience of online ordering	12	3.3

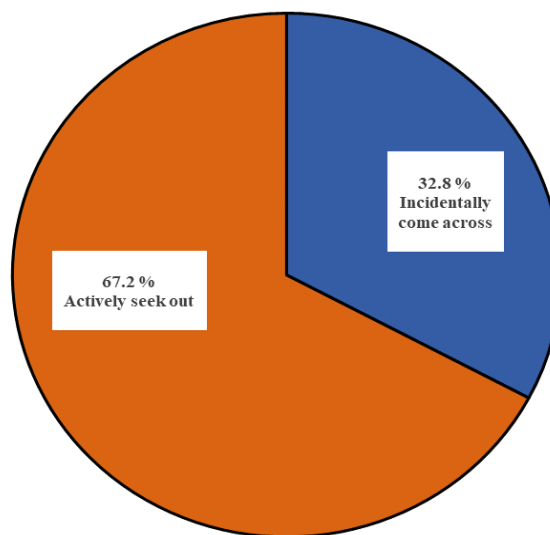
5	Interactive elements	18	5.0
6	Visual content and User reviews and ratings	96	26.7
7	Visual content, Targeted advertisements, Convenience of online ordering and Interactive elements	42	11.7
8	Visual content, User reviews and ratings, Targeted advertisements, Convenience of online ordering	6	1.7
9	Visual content, Targeted advertisements	6	1.7
10	Visual content, User reviews and ratings, Convenience of online ordering	6	1.7
11	User reviews and ratings, Convenience of online ordering,	18	5.0
12	Visual content, Targeted advertisements, Interactive elements	6	1.7
	Total	360	100.0

Source: Primary Data

The above table shows that 26.7 per cent of the respondents felt Visual content and user reviews and ratings are the most influential aspect of digital platforms in promoting organic food products. An effective digital platform to promote organic products is visual content and user reviews and ratings.

Source of information

Chart No. 1
Source of Information



The greatest recorded percentage of respondents, 67.22%, obtain knowledge about organic items by unintentionally stumbling across them when surfing the web platform. Thirty-two percent of respondents actively search internet platforms for information on organic products.

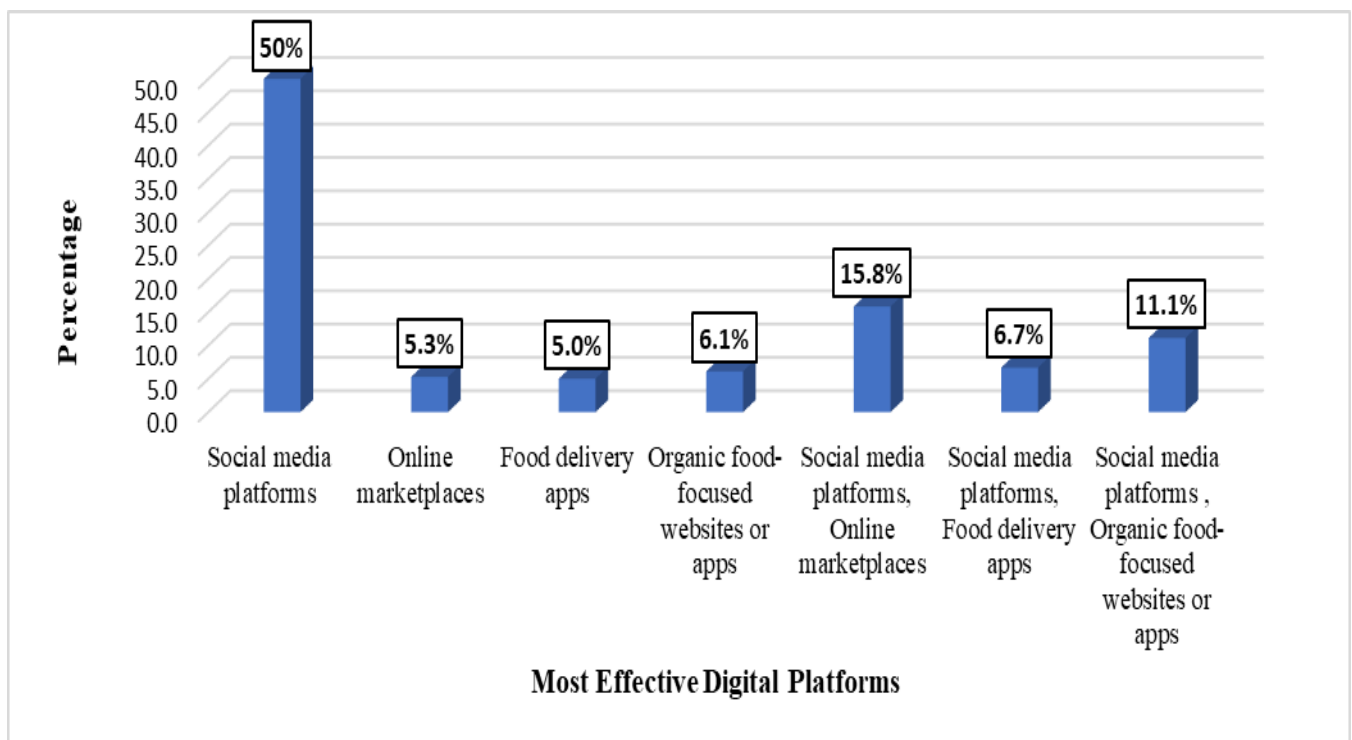


Chart No. 2

Digital platform respondents felt most effective for promoting organic food products

From the above chart, it is depicted that the majority of the respondents felt social media is an effective tool to promote Organic food products. 15.8 percent of respondents prefer combination of social media and online marketplaces. 11.1 percent of respondents prefer combination of social media and organic focused website or apps.

HYPOTHESIS TESTING

H₀: There is no significant difference in consumers' awareness and understanding of organic food products influenced by digital platforms across different age groups.

H₁: There is a significant difference in consumers' awareness and understanding of organic food products influenced by digital platforms across different age groups.

ANOVA

Table. No. 3

Descriptives of Age and Role of Digital Platforms in improving consumer awareness and understanding

<i>Digital platforms have improved consumers' awareness and understanding of organic food products</i>								
Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Below 20	30	3.60	0.498	0.091	3.41	3.79	3	4
21 - 30	114	3.79	0.836	0.078	3.63	3.94	2	5
31 - 40	132	3.77	0.675	0.059	3.65	3.88	3	5
41 - 50	66	4.12	0.734	0.090	3.94	4.30	3	5
Above 50	18	4.06	0.236	0.056	3.94	4.17	4	5
Total	360	3.84	0.729	0.038	3.76	3.91	2	5

Source: Computed data

The mean and standard deviation of the respondents' age on their thoughts on the statement "Digital platforms have improved consumers' awareness and understanding of organic food products" revealed above table.

Table. No. 4

ANOVA for Age and Role of Digital Platforms in improving consumer awareness and understanding

Age	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	8.814	4	2.203	4.302	0.002
Within Groups	181.842	355	0.512		
Total	190.656	359			

Source: Computed data

With a f value of 4.302 and a significant value of 0.002—less than 0.05—the ANOVA table reveals. The alternative hypothesis is thus accepted while the null hypothesis is disproved. The customers' awareness and knowledge of organic food items affected by internet platforms across several age groups shows a noteworthy correlation.

ANOVA

H_0 : There is no significant variation in the reliability of information about organic food products on digital platforms across different education levels.

H_1 : There is a significant variation in the reliability of information about organic food products on digital platforms across different education levels.

Table. No. 5

Descriptives of Qualification and perceived quality of information provided in digital platforms

Quality of information								
Educational Qualification	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Secondary and Higher Secondary	24	4.17	0.702	0.143	3.87	4.46	3	5
Degree	133	3.91	0.743	0.064	3.78	4.04	3	5
Master Degree	124	3.81	0.769	0.069	3.68	3.95	1	5
Professional course	49	3.47	0.915	0.131	3.21	3.73	1	5
Doctorate	30	3.63	0.669	0.122	3.38	3.88	2	5
Total	360	3.81	0.785	0.041	3.73	3.89	1	5

Source: Computed data

The table above displays the mean and standard deviation of the respondents' age on their thoughts on the statement "Quality of information about organic food products in the digital platform". When compared to Degree holders, persons who have finished merely schooling believe information which is given on digital platforms since the mean value of Secondary and higher secondary is 4.17 which is close to 5.

Table. No. 6

ANOVA for Qualification and perceived quality of information provided in digital platforms					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	11.000	4	2.750	4.646	0.001
Within Groups	210.155	355	0.592		

Total	221.156	359			
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Source: Computed data

With a f value of 4.646 and a significant value of 0.001—less than 0.05—the ANOVA table indicates. Consequently, the alternative hypothesis is adopted while the null hypothesis is disproved. The dependability of information about organic food products on internet platforms varies significantly depending on the educational level.

Chi-Square Tests

H₀: There is no significant association between gender and the preference for digital venues in promoting organic food products.

H₁: There is no significant association between gender and the preference for digital venues in promoting organic food products.

Crosstabs

Table. No. 7

Successful digital platform in reaching its target audience in promotions of organic food products * Gender of the respondent's Crosstabulation

Successful digital platform in reaching its target audience in promotions of organic food products	The gender of the respondents		Total
	Male	Female	
Social media platforms	90	129	219
Online marketplaces	6	25	31
Food delivery apps	29	20	49
Organic food-focused websites or apps	31	30	61
Total	156	204	360

Source: Computed data

Table. No. 8

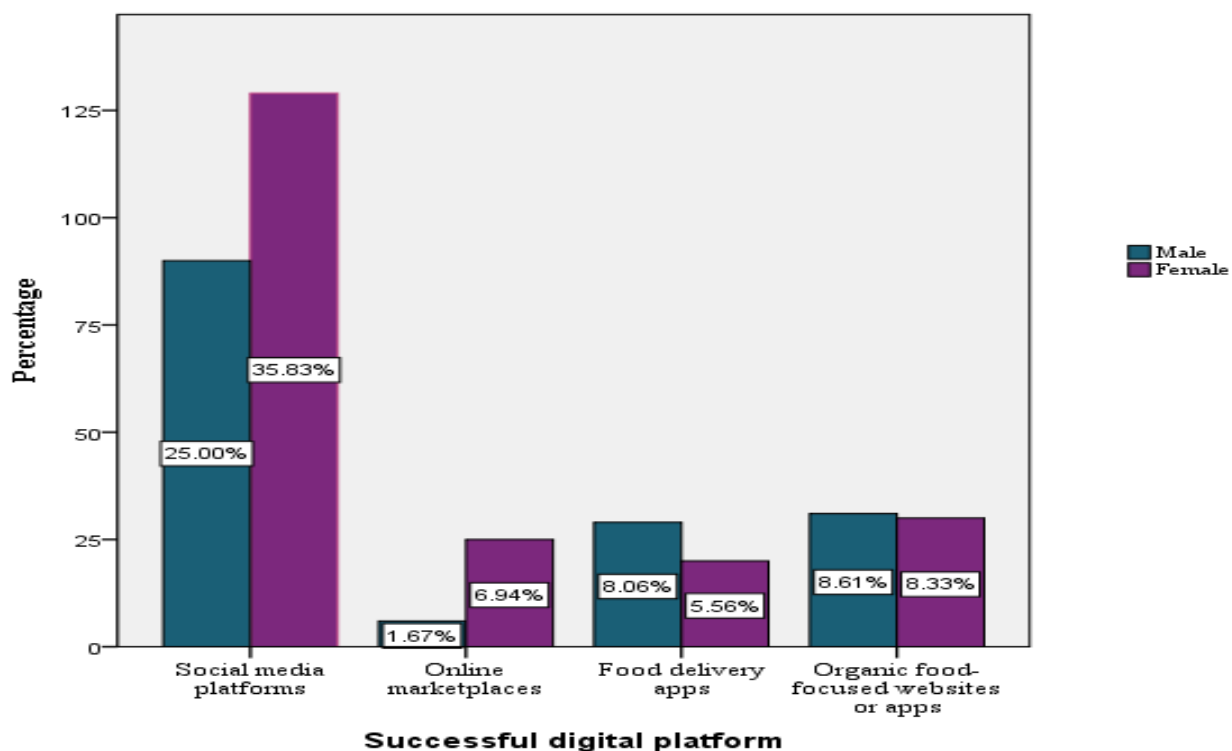
Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	14.111 ^a	3	0.003
Likelihood Ratio	14.755	3	0.002
Linear-by-Linear Association	3.817	1	0.051
N of Valid Cases	360		
a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count of less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.43.			

Source: Computed data

The chi-square value shown above is 14.111; the significant value is 0.003, less than 0.05 hence the null hypothesis is disproved. Gender and the inclination for digital platforms in advertising organic food goods have a relationship..

Chart No. 3

Successful digital platform in reaching its target audience in promotions of organic food products * Gender of the respondent's



Mann-Whitney Test

Table. No. 9

Descriptive Statistics of Motivating Factors

Motivating Factors	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Convenience of online shopping	360	3.93	0.664
Access to a wider variety of organic products	360	3.85	0.573
Personal health considerations	360	4.22	0.673
Environmental concerns	360	4.01	0.690
Influence of friends or influencers on social media	360	3.71	0.894

Source: Computed data

The table above displays the mean and standard deviation of elements inspiring customers to interact with organic food goods online. Personal health and consideration as well as environmental concern have the highest mean among the elements; these are the main reasons why customers search for information about organic products on internet channels.

Table. No. 10**Ranks**

Factors	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Convenience of online shopping	Male	156	198.36	30944.00
	Female	204	166.84	34036.00
	Total	360		
Access to a wider variety of organic products	Male	156	197.12	30750.00
	Female	204	167.79	34230.00
	Total	360		
Personal health and considerations	Male	156	162.41	25336.00
	Female	204	194.33	39644.00
	Total	360		
Environmental concerns	Male	156	162.36	25327.50
	Female	204	194.38	39652.50
	Total	360		
Influence of friends or influencers on social media	Male	156	198.48	30963.00
	Female	204	166.75	34017.00
	Total	360		

Source: Computed data

The above tables depict the mean rank of the male and female consumers' opinions on factors motivating consumers to engage with organic food products through digital channels. The difference in mean rank among male and female consumers denotes that the motivating factors for both of them are not the same.

Table. No. 11**Test Statistics**

	Convenience of online shopping	wider variety	Personal health considerations	Environmental concerns	Influence of friends
Mann-Whitney U	13126.000	13320.000	13090.000	13081.500	13107.000
Wilcoxon W	34036.000	34230.000	25336.000	25327.500	34017.000
Z	-3.198	-3.147	-3.238	-3.250	-3.060
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	0.002	0.001	0.001	0.002

Source: Computed data

The table above lists every factor's Z-value and p-value. Convenience of internet buying has a z value of -3.198 and a p-value of 0.001. The factor's z-value is -3.147 and its p-value is 0.002, therefore allowing a greater range of organic compounds. The Factor's z-value Personal health and factors come out as -3.238 with a p-value of 0.001. Environmental consideration's z-value is -3.250, while p-value of the factor is 0.001. With a p-value of 0.002 and a z-value of -3.060 the factor Influence of friends or influencers on social media is Therefore, gender of the respondents affects the elements driving customers to interact with organic food goods online.

Friedman Test

Table. No. 12

Ranks	
Barriers	Mean Rank
Lack of trust in online transactions	2.34
Limited access to digital platforms	2.65
Difficulty navigating online shopping platforms	1.91
Concerns about product freshness and quality	3.11

Source: Computed data

The above table shows the mean rank of the barriers that prevent consumers from engaging with organic food products through digital channels. The mean rank of concern about product freshness and quality is 3.11 which is the highest mean rank hence it is considered as the major barrier for the consumers to engage in digital platforms.

Group Statistics					
Purchasing decisions for organic food products based on conflicting information found on digital platforms		N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Quality of information	Yes	130	3.94	0.706	0.062
	No	230	3.74	0.820	0.054

Table. No. 13

Source: Computed data

The above table depicts the Chi-square value and p-value of the Friedman test. The chi-square value is 244.816 and the p-value is 0.001 which is less than 0.05. This shows the overall statistically significant difference between the mean ranks of the related groups.

T-Test

Table. No. 14
Independent Samples Test

		Quality of information	
		Equal variances assumed	Equal variances not assumed
Levene's Test for Equality of Variances	F	7.019	
	Sig.	0.008	
t-test for Equality of Means	t	2.186	2.278
	df	358	301.639
	Significance	One-Sided p	0.015
		Two-Sided p	0.029
	Mean Difference		0.187
	Std. Error Difference		0.086
	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	Lower	0.019
		Upper	0.356

Source: Computed data

The above table shows the result of the independent sample t-test. The f value is 7.019. The t value is 2.186 and the significant two-tailed p value is 0.029 which is less than .05. The mean value of the consumers who say yes to change in purchase decision based on the conflicting information found in digital media is 3.94. As a result, it has been statistically proved that consumers who are likely to change their purchase decision due to contradicting information found on digital platforms believe the quality of information supplied on digital platforms is high.

Correlation

Table. No. 15
Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Promotions or advertisements for organic food products on digital platforms	2.58	1.007	360
Promotional discounts or offers encourage consumers to interact with organic food products on digital platforms	2.54	1.009	360

Source: Computed data

Table. No. 16

Correlations

		Frequency of promotions or advertisements for organic food products on digital platforms	Promotional discounts or offers encourage consumers to interact with organic food products on digital platforms
Frequency of promotions or advertisements for organic food products on digital platforms	Pearson Correlation	1	.724**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.000
	N	360	360
Promotional discounts or offers encourage consumers to interact with organic food products on digital platforms	Pearson Correlation	.724**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	
	N	360	360
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Source: Computed data

The table above displays correlation test output. The significant value is 0.000, less than 0.05; the Pearson correlation value is 0.724, near to 1. Therefore, it is demonstrated that there is a substantial positive correlation between the frequency of promotions or advertising for organic food items on digital platforms and promos, which inspire consumers to connect with organic food goods on digital platforms.

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

The most of the respondents fell between the ages of 21 and 40, hence the key results are those ones. The most of the responders are female. The most of the responders are married. Most of the responders are grads and/or post-graduates. The most of the responders are private workers. Most of the responders fall under the 20,000– 30,000 monthly salary range. Customers think that social media is the best digital tool available for advertising natural products. Customers felt that user ratings and reviews as well as visual content were the most powerful elements of digital platforms. Most consumers use digital tools once a week to find natural food products. Most consumers search on internet media for health benefits information about organic goods. Most customers verify the accuracy of organic food product information by means of several sources and depending on reliable user comments and reviews. Most consumers saw misleading claims or false information about organic food products on digital media. Once erroneous information is presented to most customers, their opinion of organic products stays the same.

The majority of consumers believe that organic food products offered through digital platforms are as credible as those sold in traditional brick-and-mortar businesses. The majority of customers recommend organic food products to others via Digital media. There is a considerable relationship between consumers' awareness and understanding of organic food items and digital platforms across different age groups. There is a significant association between the reliability of information regarding organic food products on digital platforms at various educational levels. There is a link between gender and a preference for digital platforms for promoting organic food products. The gender of the respondents determines the factors that motivate customers to interact with organic food items through digital media. Concerns regarding product freshness and quality are a significant barrier to customer engagement with digital platforms. Consumers who are inclined to change their purchase decisions as a result of contradictory information found on digital platforms believe that the information provided on digital platforms is of high quality. There is a substantial positive association between the frequency of organic food product promotions or commercials on digital platforms and promotional discounts or offers that encourage customers to interact with organic food items on such platforms.

CONCLUSIONS

The study digs into the convergence of consumer behaviour, digital platforms, and the organic food market, revealing intriguing insights into the mechanics of consumer decision-making in the digital era. Across demographics, it is clear that cyberspace plays an important role in shaping attitudes and influencing decisions about organic products. The study indicates a complex relationship between customers' demographic features, such as age, gender, and education level, and their interactions with digital platforms in organic product consumption. These findings highlight the need for targeted and specialised marketing tactics that appeal to certain customer demographics, as well as the effective use of digital platforms to maximise reach and engagement.

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