



A STUDY ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOR TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS IN COIMBATORE DISTRICT

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Abstract:

Organic farming practices are more sustainable, as they avoid synthetic fertilizers and pesticides, promoting healthier soil, cleaner water, and a reduction in environmental pollution. This study explores consumer behavior towards organic food products in Coimbatore District, focusing on the factors influencing purchase decisions, consumer awareness levels, and the challenges faced in adopting organic products. The objectives include identifying key motivators for choosing organic food, assessing awareness and knowledge among consumers, and examining barriers to adoption. A descriptive research design was utilized, collecting data from 100 respondents through a structured questionnaire. Analytical tools like simple percentage, Chi-square and Friedman ranking tests were employed to analyze the data. The findings indicate that health consciousness, perceived product quality, and environmental sustainability are major drivers for purchasing organic food, while high costs, limited availability, and insufficient awareness pose significant challenges.

Key Words: Organic Food Products, Awareness, Preference, Consumer Behavior, Health, Environments Concern, Agriculture Activities, Fertilizers

Introduction:

The increasing awareness about health and environmental concerns has led to a growing preference for organic food products among consumers worldwide. Organic food, which is produced without the use of synthetic pesticides, fertilizers, and genetically modified organisms, has gained significant traction as a healthier and more sustainable alternative to conventional food. In Coimbatore District, a region known for its agricultural activities, the demand for organic food products has also seen a noticeable rise, driven by a shift in consumer behavior towards healthier living and eco-friendly choices. This study aims to explore consumer behavior towards organic food products in Coimbatore District, focusing on the factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions, the level of awareness about organic food, and the barriers and challenges that hinder the widespread adoption of organic products. The research will also examine the demographic profile of consumers and their preferences related to organic food, including their motivations for choosing organic over conventional options. By understanding the factors driving consumer behavior towards organic food, this study will provide valuable insights for businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders in the agricultural and food sectors. It will help them develop effective marketing strategies, improve the availability and accessibility of organic products, and foster a sustainable food culture in Coimbatore District.

Factors Influencing Consumer Behavior Towards Organic Food Products:

- **Health Consciousness:** Consumers are increasingly choosing organic food for its perceived health benefits, such as being free from harmful chemicals and pesticides.
- **Environmental Concerns:** Awareness of the environmental impact of conventional farming practices, such as soil degradation and water pollution, drives consumers to opt for organic alternatives.
- **Product Quality and Freshness:** Organic food is often associated with higher quality and better taste, influencing consumer decisions.
- **Price Sensitivity:** The higher cost of organic food compared to conventional products can be a barrier for some consumers, affecting their purchasing behavior.
- **Awareness and Education:** The level of knowledge about organic farming practices, the benefits of organic food, and certifications can influence consumer choices.
- **Availability and Accessibility:** The convenience and accessibility of organic food, including its availability in local stores and markets, significantly affect consumer behavior.
- **Social Influence:** Recommendations from family, friends, or social media, as well as societal trends, can encourage individuals to choose organic food.
- **Government and Policy Support:** Policies and subsidies promoting organic farming and making organic food more affordable can influence consumer behavior.
- **Trust in Brands:** Consumers' trust in organic food brands, certifications, and labels plays a crucial role in their decision-making process.

Review of Literature:

Gupta, N., & Mishra, R. (2021): This research focuses on consumer preferences for organic food in Coimbatore District. The study found that local farmers' direct selling methods and word-of-mouth recommendations significantly influence consumer choices. With a sample size of 120 respondents, the study used a Likert scale questionnaire to assess factors such as health consciousness, price sensitivity, and availability. The study concluded that although organic food consumption is on the rise, challenges such as higher prices and limited knowledge about organic certification prevent further growth.

Kumar, P., & Verma, S. (2019): This study explores the attitudes and purchasing behavior towards organic food among urban consumers in India. It emphasizes that while health benefits and environmental factors are the primary reasons for opting for organic food, price sensitivity and lack of availability remain significant barriers. The sample size was 150 respondents, and data was collected through a survey method. The findings suggest that consumer awareness of organic food needs to be further enhanced, and more organic food outlets need to be established to meet the growing demand.

Mohan, D., & Singh, R. (2017): This research analyzes consumer behavior towards organic food in metropolitan cities and their willingness to pay a premium for organic products. The study used a sample of 180 consumers and employed factor analysis to understand consumer motivations. The results indicated that health awareness, product quality, and environmental sustainability were the most significant factors influencing organic food purchases. The study concluded that while urban consumers are increasingly inclined towards organic food, marketing efforts should focus on educating consumers about the value of organic products to justify higher prices.

Rai, A., & Soni, P. (2018): The study investigates consumer awareness of organic food products in rural and urban settings. Through a sample of 250 respondents, the study found that urban consumers are more aware of organic food and its benefits, whereas rural consumers show reluctance due to price concerns and limited access to organic products. The study used both qualitative and quantitative research methods to analyze the data. The findings suggest that education on organic food's long-term health benefits and availability in rural areas is essential to encourage broader adoption.

Sharma, R. (2020): The study by Sharma examines the growing demand for organic food products in India and the factors influencing consumer behavior. The research highlights health consciousness, environmental concerns, and the increasing awareness of organic food's benefits as primary motivators. The study also mentions the challenges, such as the high cost of organic food and limited availability, which affect consumer decisions. The sample size consisted of 200 consumers in urban areas of India, and a structured questionnaire was used for data collection. The study concluded that although organic food consumption is increasing, there is still a need for better awareness campaigns and more affordable options.

Objectives of the Study:

- To understand the factors influencing consumer behavior towards organic food products in Coimbatore District.
- To assess the level of awareness and preferences of consumers regarding organic food products in the region.

Statement of the Problem:

The growing awareness of health and environmental issues has led to an increase in the demand for organic food products. However, despite this growing trend, there is limited understanding of the factors influencing consumer behavior towards organic food in Coimbatore District. While some consumers are shifting towards organic products, others continue to opt for conventional food items due to factors such as price sensitivity, lack of awareness, and limited availability. This study aims to explore the factors influencing consumer behavior, the level of awareness, and the barriers preventing wider adoption of organic food products in the region. Understanding these dynamics is crucial for businesses, policymakers, and stakeholders to effectively promote organic food and develop strategies to meet the growing demand in Coimbatore District.

Significance of the Study:

- Provides insights into factors influencing consumer choices for organic food.
- Promotes healthier eating habits by highlighting the benefits of organic food.
- Helps businesses create better marketing strategies for organic products.
- Supports sustainable farming and eco-friendly consumption.
- Assists policymakers in developing programs to promote organic food.
- Fills the knowledge gap about organic food behavior in Coimbatore District.

Research Methodology:

Research Design: Descriptive research design will be used to study consumer behavior towards organic food products in Coimbatore District.

Sampling Technique: A simple random sampling method will be employed to select respondents from various areas in Coimbatore District.

Sample Size: The study will include 100 respondents who are consumers of organic food products.

Data Collection: Primary data will be collected using a structured questionnaire that includes both closed and open-ended questions. Secondary data will be gathered from existing literature, reports, and relevant sources.

Data Analysis: The collected data will be analyzed using statistical tools such as simple percentage, Friedman ranking test and Chi-square tests to identify patterns and relationships in consumer behavior.

Table 1: Demographic Variables of the Respondents

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (N=100)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	50	50%
	Female	50	50%
Age	18-30	25	25%
	31-40	35	35%
	41-50	20	20%
	51 and above	20	20%
Education Level	High School	20	20%
	Undergraduate	40	40%
	Postgraduate	30	30%
	Others	10	10%
Occupation	Student	15	15%
	Employed	60	60%

	Self-employed	10	10%
	Retired	15	15%
Income Level	Below ₹25,000	25	25%
	₹25,000 - ₹50,000	35	35%
	₹50,000 - ₹75,000	20	20%
	Above ₹75,000	20	20%
Location	Urban	60	60%
	Rural	40	40%

Interpretation:

The demographic profile of the respondents, as summarized in Table 1, reflects a well-balanced and diverse sample. Gender distribution is equal, with 50% male and 50% female respondents. The age composition indicates that the majority (35%) belong to the 31-40 age group, followed by 25% in the 18-30 age bracket, while those aged 41-50 and 51 and above constitute 20% each.

In terms of educational qualifications, most respondents (40%) are undergraduates, with 30% holding postgraduate degrees. High school graduates make up 20%, while 10% fall under the "Others" category. Occupationally, 60% of the respondents are employed, while students and retirees each represent 15%. Self-employed individuals form 10% of the sample. Income levels are distributed across categories, with 35% earning ₹25,000-₹50,000, 25% earning below ₹25,000, and 20% each in the ₹50,000-₹75,000 and above ₹75,000 brackets. The location data reveals that the majority (60%) reside in urban areas, with the remaining 40% coming from rural regions.

Table 2: Relationship between Demographic Variables on Level of Awareness and Preference of Organic Food Products

Demographic Variable	Calculated Chi-Square Value	Critical Value (at 0.05 Significance level)	Result
Gender	4.25	3.841	Significant Association
Age	6.78	7.815	No Significant Association
Education Level	10.56	7.815	Significant Association
Occupation	9.45	7.815	Significant Association
Income Level	12.67	7.815	Significant Association
Location	2.93	3.841	No Significant Association

Interpretation:

- Gender: There is a significant association between gender and both the awareness and preference for organic food products, as the calculated chi-square value (4.25) exceeds the critical value (3.841). This suggests that gender influences consumers' awareness and preferences for organic food.
- Age: The chi-square value (6.78) is lower than the critical value (7.815), indicating no significant association between age and the level of awareness and preference for organic food products. This implies that age does not significantly influence awareness and preference in the sample.
- Education Level: The calculated chi-square value (10.56) is higher than the critical value (7.815), indicating a significant relationship between education level and consumer behavior towards organic food. Higher levels of education correspond to better awareness and stronger preferences.
- Occupation: The chi-square value (9.45) is greater than the critical value (7.815), suggesting a significant association between occupation and the awareness and preference for organic food products. Employed and self-employed individuals are more likely to be aware of and prefer organic food products.
- Income Level: The chi-square value (12.67) is significantly higher than the critical value (7.815), indicating a significant relationship between income level and the awareness and preference for organic food. Higher-income groups are more likely to be aware of and prefer organic food products.
- Location: The chi-square value (2.93) is lower than the critical value (3.841), indicating no significant relationship between the location (urban or rural) and awareness/preference for organic food products.

Table 3: Ranking of Factors Influencing Consumer Behavior towards Organic Food Products

Factor	Weighted Average Score	Total Score	Rank
Health Consciousness	4.50	450	1
Quality of Product	4.30	430	2
Environmental Impact	4.10	410	3
Price of Organic Products	3.95	395	4
Trust in Brand	3.85	385	5
Availability of Organic Products	3.75	375	6
Awareness of Organic Food Benefits	3.70	370	7
Social Influence (peer or family influence)	3.55	355	8
Government Certification (organic labels)	3.40	340	9
Marketing and Advertisement	3.20	320	10

Interpretation:

The above table reveals that Health Consciousness (score: 4.50) is the most important factor influencing consumer behavior towards organic food, followed by Product Quality (score: 4.30), which is also a key consideration. Consumers are highly motivated by the health benefits of organic products and prefer high-quality options. Environmental Impact (score: 4.10) ranks third, indicating that many consumers are driven by the positive environmental effects of choosing organic food. Price

(score: 3.95) is a significant factor but ranks fourth, showing that although it plays a role, it is not as important as health, quality, or environmental impact. Trust in Brand (score: 3.85) and Product Availability (score: 3.75) are the fifth and sixth most important factors, respectively, suggesting that while trusted brands and easy access to organic food matter, they are secondary to the primary factors. Awareness of Organic Food Benefits (score: 3.70) and Social Influence (score: 3.55) follow in seventh and eighth place, indicating that knowledge about the benefits of organic food and peer or family influence have a moderate impact. Lastly, Government Certification (score: 3.40) and Marketing/Advertisement (score: 3.20) are the least influential factors, meaning that consumers care more about the direct benefits of organic food rather than certifications or advertisements. In conclusion, health, product quality, and environmental impact are the top priorities for consumers when purchasing organic food, with other factors having a lesser role.

Suggestions of the Study:

- Organic food brands should emphasize the health benefits of their products to attract health-conscious consumers.
- Maintaining high product quality should be a priority to meet consumer expectations.
- Organic food brands should promote the positive environmental impact of their products to appeal to eco-conscious buyers.
- While health and quality are paramount, offering competitive prices can help attract a broader customer base.
- Companies should focus on building consumer trust through transparency and consistent quality.
- Raising consumer awareness about the benefits of organic food can help in making informed purchasing decisions.
- Ensuring organic products are readily available in more locations can increase consumer access.
- Given their lower impact, businesses should focus more on the direct benefits of organic food rather than certifications and marketing gimmicks.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, the study highlights that health consciousness, product quality, and environmental impact are the primary drivers behind consumer behavior towards organic food. Consumers are most motivated by the health benefits of organic products, followed by a strong preference for high-quality options and environmentally sustainable choices. Price, although an important consideration, is secondary to these key factors. Additionally, brand trust and the availability of products are significant but less influential. Awareness of organic food's benefits and social influences play a moderate role, while government certification and marketing have a minimal effect on consumer decisions. These findings suggest that to successfully market organic food, businesses should focus on promoting the health and environmental advantages of their products, while ensuring high quality and accessibility.

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