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Attitudinal analysis of consumers towards organic food: A farmers' perspective

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Abstract

Since the 1990s, as education has grown and people's perspectives on life have changed, there has been an increase in interest in organic food. Modern consumers' attitudes about nutrition have changed as a result of the increased prevalence of lifestyle disorders like stress and depression, preferring organic over conventionally cultivated food. As disposable income has increased, consumers have become more health concerned and are buying organic food in an effort to improve their quality of life. Organic food production, however, has numerous difficulties since farmers lack the tools and expertise necessary to safeguard their crops. Due to customers' scepticism of organic food's claimed high quality and farmers' lack of direct contact to consumers, demand for organic food is increasing even as supply is decreasing due to consumers' preference for conventionally cultivated food. Because they are less accessible and don't know the growers, consumers are sceptical of the advantages of organic food. Additionally, the knowledge of the food's organic component is limited among the shops that sell it. This essay explores the factors that have contributed to a change in Indian consumers' perceptions of organic food as well as the options available to organic farmers to change their perception.

Keywords: Organic food, consumer attitudes, eco-friendly products, green products

1. Introduction

In the past, farmers never produced food using synthetic fertilisers, insecticides, or other crop- preserving agents. They were actually unaware of these methods of food production because they thought that food grown naturally without the use of synthetic ingredients was healthier. There are numerous different words for organic food in the literature, including "natural," "local," "fresh," "pure," and "desi" food (Chan, 2001) ^[7]. Despite being aware of the benefits of organic food, farmers prioritised efficient and intensive food production using conventional techniques in response to the severe famine that inspired the Green Revolution of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. As a result, customers chose to buy conventionally cultivated food instead of organic food because it was more readily available and less expensive (Mutlu, 2007) ^[30].

But since the 1990s, with the rise of education consumers took an interest in organic food as their attitude towards life changed. The high incidence of lifestyle diseases, such as stress and diabetes, alerted consumers as to nutrition's imperativeness. Concurrently, customers began to demand high nutritional content, quality, and safety from food as they learned how traditional food negatively impacted their health and the environment (Suprpto & Wijaya, 2012) ^[40]. Because of this, organic food has become more popular in emerging nations like India, just as it did in developed ones like Europe and North America (Indian Organic Food Market Forecast and Opportunities, 2017) ^[20].

Over time, chemical-based farming caused the environmental conditions in the countries, particularly in the Indian subcontinent, to worsen. The soil is no longer fertile. Farmers began applying more potent pesticides as some areas of the land had developed resistance to them over time. Farmers began obtaining loans from moneylenders as costs rose. Farmers were thereafter required to repay the loans by selling their produce to these moneylenders. Farmers began to consider other systems. As a result of the use of extremely potent pesticides and chemical fertilisers on farms, consumers were also receiving food that was nutritionally deficient. As a result, both customers and farmers were considering going back to organic farming.

This change in consumer behaviour has also happened as a result of organic food meeting current customers' expectations. Because of the corresponding development in disposable money, people are now more health and quality concerned and buys organic food in the hopes of improving their quality of life (Kriwy & Mecking, 2012) ^[22]. However, farmers lack the tools and knowledge necessary to protect their crops, making it difficult to produce organic food (Oger, Woods, Jean & Allan, 2001) ^[33]. Due to customers' scepticism of organic food's claimed high quality and farmers' lack of direct contact to consumers, demand for organic food is falling along with supply as consumers have begun to choose conventionally cultivated food (Gil, Gracia & Sanchez, 2000) ^[12]. Due to the weak financial sustainability of organic farming, farmers are also reluctant to adopt it.

Questions about consumer attitudes and farmer options are necessary to determine whether it is possible to increase its popularity. This study explores the factors that have contributed to a change in Indian customers' perceptions of organic food as well as the choices available to organic farmers to address this perception.

2. Global factors affecting consumer attitudes

Food industry experts believe there to be enormous potential in the organic food market (Gumber & Rana; 2021) ^[16]. This is evident in the adoption of organic farming by over 175 countries. Also, global retail sales of over USD 97 billion have been estimated for organic food wherein developed countries, including United States (US), Germany, and France, have emerged as its largest consumers (Tandon *et al.* 2020) ^[41]. Demand and preference for organic food has gained tractions since the creation of USDA's NOP.

Numerous factors affecting the demand for organic food at various times have been covered in the literature that is currently available. Higher quality, safety, and freshness are some studies' suggested primary demand factors (Loureiro, McCluskey, & Mittelhammer, 2001; Botonaki, Polymeros, Tsakiridou & Mattas, 2006; Kihlberg & Risvik, 2007) ^[25, 3, 21, 42]. Environmental concerns are included in these researches as an additional demand motivator since organic food, which is produced without the use of pesticides and other crop-preserving agents, is thought to be more environmentally friendly.

However, the primary factor driving demand for organic food is its perceived superior nutritional worth (Kihlberg & Risvik, 2007; de Magistris & Garcia, 2008) ^[21, 9]. Health awareness has been found to play a significant role in decisions to buy organic foods in several researches that have examined the relationship between demand for organic foods and health awareness. In other words, as consumers got more health-conscious, they were better able to differentiate between the nutritional content of conventional and organic foods, and as a result, they bought more organic food (Harper & Makatouni, 2002; O'Donovan & McCarthy, 2002) ^[18, 32]. Due to increased health consciousness, Indian consumers have developed an interest in organic food as a way to enhance and protect the health of their family members, especially their children (Latacz- Lohmann & Foster, 1997) ^[24].

Organic farming is becoming more popular in industrialised nations like the United States, where it is rising by 12% a year. However, in a developing nation like India, the approved area only contains 10% cultivable land (0.50

million hectares), with the remaining 90% (4.71 million hectares) being forest and wild land used to harvest minor forest products. India now holds the tenth-place spot among the top ten nations in terms of the amount of land that can be used for organic farming. Knowing the underlying causes that foster a favourable attitude toward organic food appears essential given the market's rapid and accelerated growth.

3. Changes in consumers' attitudes toward organic food

Recent media attention and exposure on a worldwide scale have increased consumer awareness of their health and desire for a higher quality of life. A societal movement and the emergence of "green" customers have resulted from rising environmental costs and their effects on both humans and animals (Peattie & Ratnayaka, 1992) ^[34]. With the growth of education, affluence, and globalisation, consumers concentrated on leading healthy lifestyles and sought nourishing food and anticipated safe food products, same as in nations in Central and Eastern Europe (Anderson, 2000; Zakowska-Biemans, 2011) ^[1, 44]. Indian customers flocked toward organic food because they questioned conventional growing practises, thought conventional food was unsafe, and believed they were partly to blame for the rising incidence of lifestyle disorders like obesity and Type 2 diabetes (Cummins, 2001; Schmidt, 1999; Birchard, 2001; Hansen, Alroe, Kristensen, & Wier, 2002) ^[8, 37, 2, 17]. In light of the fact that informed consumers are willing to pay more for risk-free food (Roitner-Schobesberger, Darnhofer, Somsook & Vogl, 2008; Tsakiridou, Boutsouki, Zotos & Mattas, 2008) ^[36, 42], many retail grocery stores have ceased the practise and created specific store sections or aisles for organic food products (Nasir & Karakaya, 2014) ^[31].

A positive attitude among customers toward organic food is being hampered by issues including low awareness, lack of financial sustainability, and high price (Brennan & Kuri, 2002; Maguire *et al.* 2001; Greene & Kreman 2003) ^[4, 26, 13].

4. Farmers' perspective on influencing consumer behaviour

There are some obstacles preventing customers from having a good attitude toward organic food, including low awareness, lack of financial feasibility, and high price (Brennan & Kuri, 2002; Maguire *et al.*, 2001; Greene & Kreman, 2003) ^[4, 26, 13]. The lack of effective distribution and promotion systems also severely affects the availability of organic food (Rana & Paul, 2017; Malkanthi, 2020) ^[35, 28]. Providing the necessary conditions such as arranging better marketing facilities with useful market information, a continuous supply of organic foods with reasonable price levels, and enhancing consumer knowledge, will motivate the consumers to purchase more organic food (Malkanthi, 2020) ^[28]. Farmers can improve the market for organic food by better segmenting the organic food supply's distribution channels, which will broaden the consumer base (Canavari, Centonze, and Nigro, 2007) ^[6]. Farmers should pursue the government-issued certification to foster a favourable attitude among consumers. This builds consumer trust (Deliana, 2012) ^[10]. Farmers should focus on boosting consumption among the demographics that value organic food's advantages the most (Gil, Gracia & Sanchez, 2000) ^[12]. Because domestic markets are expected to increase in the future, they should concentrate on them (Gil, Gracia & Sanchez, 2000) ^[12]. Farmers should attempt selling directly

to specialty shops and customers in order to lower retailer margins and ensure that customers are aware of what they are eating (Gil, Gracia & Sanchez, 2000) ^[12]. Farmers can improve the market for organic food by better channel division of the organic food supply, which can expand the big consumer base. In 2007 Canavari, Centonze, & Nigro ^[6], Farmers should pursue government accreditation in order to foster positive attitudes among consumers. This fosters consumer confidence (Deliana, 2012) ^[10]. Because they are able to purchase organic food, middle-class and affluent people are the market objectives for it. When organic farming is practised on a big scale rather than as a little portion of organic agriculture, consumers will be more favourable toward organic food (Hinteregger, 2006) ^[19]. That will contribute to the availability, acceptance, and sustainability of food.

5. Conclusion

Our study points to a wide range of potential areas for future research that could aid in expanding the market for and acceptance of organic food around the world. According to our research, customers in developing nations are equally eager to buy organic food because it is fairly popular in rich nations, but they lack efficient distribution and promotion systems.

Health consciousness is the better indicator of attitudes and behaviours toward organic food, as it fosters a favourable attitude toward reducing health risks through organic food consumption and influences consumer preferences for organic food.

It has been seen as a safer food option, served as a foundation for purchase consideration for infrequent buyers, and has a favourable correlation with purchasing behaviour and attitude. Environmental concern has also emerged as the most significant, key motivating factor, main motive, and primary reason that positively affected consumer attitude formation. The research's facts can be used by environmentalists and NGOs to bolster their arguments.

Academics, opinion leaders, and the government all have a crucial role to play in raising knowledge of organic farming and encouraging more farmers to participate in it. Marketers can share and use the research's findings to select their target markets. They might solely concentrate on such customers. Farmers who are informed and support establishing a community agriculture system with the assistance of consumers and other small farmers may use this material. The current study may benefit not only policy makers, but also the food sector, tourism industry, retailers, and consumers.

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