CONSUMERS' PERCEPTION TOWARDS ORGANIC FRUITS AND VEGETABLES

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Abstract

In rising trends of Organic food products, it is very important to gain insight to identify the consumers' perception towards organic food. This particular study is aimed to explore the Perceptual factors influencing consumers' to purchase organic fruits and vegetables. A structured questionnaire using 5-point Likert scale was administered to 150 respondents by convenience sampling method from selective organic stores and departmental stores in The Nilgiris. Data collected were analyzed using descriptive analysis and exploratory factor analysis. The result showed food attributes, Consumers' attitude, perception, consumers'quality consciousness and barriers for purchase as the most important factors influencing consumers' preferences towards organic fruits and vegetables. This finding would help stakeholders involved in the organic fruits and vegetables business to understand the underlying pattern of consumer perception leading to decision towards purchasing organic fruits and vegetables in The Nilgiris.

Keywords: Organic food, Consumers' perception, Consumer Behaviour, organic fruits and vegetables.

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Introduction

Among the different organic products, organic fruits and vegetables are the major consumer food products. Consumption of good quality fruits and vegetables has always been a matter of concern for keeping a better health for most of the Indian consumers. However, increasing health awareness and prevalent diseases will mark a boom to the variants such as Organic fruits and vegetables with more natural flavours, Fruits and Herbal Infusions.Currently, the organic sector is one of the fastest growing sectors of the food industry in many countries. The market for organic products has grown a lot in the last 10 years, however it is still very small compared to the conventional products market. Generally, pesticides or synthetic fertilizers are not used in organic foods. Presumably organic food contains fewer chemical residues and veterinary drugs compared to conventional food. Environmental contaminants however are likely to be found in food of both productions. Organic food contains only one third of pesticides that conventional food does (Baker et al, 2002)

As organic farm-produce is generated using inputs and methods that do not harm the producers' and consumers' health and the environment as well, these are becoming increasingly popular not only in developed but also in developing countries (Altarawneh 2013)

Literature Review

The results show that the attitudes of individuals towards the consumption of organic fruits and vegetables is directly and positively influenced by the information that individuals have about the characteristics of organic products, their personal needs and motivations, but also by external influences, and the purchase barriers do not represent elements with a strong enough influence on the attitude and intention.In developing countries, the growth of sales of fresh fruit and vegetables in supermarkets tends to lag behind the increase in sales of processed food, as most households continue to buy fruits and vegetables from traditional retailers (specialized stores and agri-food markets), even if they buy many other products in supermarketsThe purchase motivation has also been the subject of

numerous studies. Thus, most studies have indicated that the main reason for buying organic fruits and vegetables is health, because organic products have fewer pesticides, additives, fertilizers and more vitamins and minerals. Other researchers also highlighted the same reasons for buying organic fruits and vegetables, such as the health of the products compared to conventional food options as well as their freshness, and taste, organic products taste more natural, intense and rich flavour. Organic products are perceived as being of a higher quality, being premium products, as such and their price is higher than that of conventional products. Results show that consumers perceive organic fruits and vegetables as very healthy, tasty, and of good quality. Among the purchase motives quality, freshness, nutritional value, organically grown and safety products were indicated as the most important reasons of purchasing organic fruits and vegetables in EU member state

A recent study by AC Nielen shows that even the Indian consumers are progressively aligning towards friendly, natural and organic usage. it did not happen because of the pandemic over the last two years almost but will soon get there with more and more consumers towards usage of organic products. A study also shows that though 86 per cent of Indian consumers consider natural and organic products, only 44 per cent of them actually buy and use them. Even this is big and definitely underlines a trend very strongly for a huge boom in not distant future. The comparatively lower conversion rate to organic product buying is primarily due to higher cost and expense associated with organic products and his is precisely why many brands with 100 per cent natural and organic products were launched in India with global vision to bring organic products within the affordable reach of the critical mass with an accessible price point.

There is a growing demand for organic fruits and vegetables and an tendency to purchase immunity-based products and related ingredients. Further, the Indian organic food sector presents an attractive investment proposition and investors are bullish on investing in this space., stated Gaurav Manchanda, founder and managing director, The Organic World, a Nimida Group company, According to the Indian Organic Industry Market Report - 2021, India's organic agricultural, food, and retail sectors are going strong despite the Covid-19 pandemic in market year 2020/2021. The pandemic has brought about a paradigm shift in the domestic consumption of organic food products. Consumers are now driven by their growing preferences for healthy, natural and immunity-building foods. Through the pandemic, we have noticed a surge in the demand for organic fruits and vegetables as well as other organic and natural food products. The pandemic has put a focus sharply on health and immunity, helping people to become more aware of what they are eating and urging them to look for healthier alternatives. Consumers now rely on organic, natural and immunity-based super foods for their daily needs. The organic food supply chain is limited as compared to its growing demand. One of the foremost challenges is that the production costs for organic products are higher in comparison to conventional products due to the greater labour input, intensive levels of processing and transportation. Since organic products are chemical and preservative free, they have a low shelf life which is also one of the reasons why organic products are more expensive. Transport, storage and stocking of organic and natural food products also add to the increase in costs. Affordability will pave the way for more consumers.

It is important for retailers to create awareness about the compromise consumers' end up making when choosing conventional, chemical laden products. It is important for retailers to take a more responsible approach with respect to offering consumers safe, transparent, better choices.

The new research finds that 62 per cent in India are willing to spend a premium on sustainable products, but nascent understanding, high price, availability issues, and lack of sustainable options are currently challenging purchase follow-through

Sustainability is also a growing concern for Indian consumers, 20% of consumers in India are environment and socially conscious while 49% are health conscious. The trigger that has motivated the Indian consumer to move towards sustainable products has been the personal impact due to environmental issues, followed closely by family and friends who have influenced their choices.

Sustainability is equally important across age and income groups. While one may have expected that consumers identifying as either environmentally/socially conscious and health conscious would have predominance in certain subsections of the society, the fact is that it is equally prevalent across income, age and gender (across demographics).

The real challenge is these barriers are not occurring in isolation, and most consumers face a number of these barriers within a single purchase journey. For example, they may have trouble identifying sustainable products, be unclear on the credibility of the claims, and face gaps in the product range to meet their needs—these are in addition to the likely higher price. It leads to high consumers drop out despite the high intent to shop sustainably

Sooraj S Narayan (2018) Health, Quality, safety, nutrition, taste, environmental consciousness and price are the factors influence the consumer to buy organic food products, those variables have directly linked with consumers' perception.

Silvia Cachero-Martínez (2020) the study shows that the objective of this research is to analyze the relationship between attitude, satisfaction, trust and word-of-mouth intentions towards organic products. In relation to the behavioural variables, satisfaction is the variable that has the greatest influence on purchase intentions and word of mouth intentions. In addition, a moderating effect of environmental concern is observed on the proposed relationships

Objectives

1. To know consumers' perception towards organic fruits and vegetables.

2. To identify the factors influencing Consumers' perception towards purchasing organic fruits and vegetables

3. To analyze consumer purchase behaviour towards organic fruits and vegetables

Materials and Methods

Exploratory research design was adopted for literature review. Primary Data required for the study was collected by convenience sampling using structured questionnaire. The study was conducted in the region of The Nilgiris district, predominately in area with more educated and working professional are situated. In consideration with the objectives both secondary and primary data collection technique has been employed. The Data was collected using Survey method using the questionnaire and analyzed further using SPSS and the analysis tools like descriptive analysis and exploratory factor analysis.

Table 1: Demographic Factors of Respondents

Particulars		Frequency	Percent
Age	Less than 18	17	11
	18 – 25	18	12
	26 – 35	49	33
	36 – 50	66	44
	Total	**150**	**100**
Gender	Male	80	53
	Female	70	47
	Total	**150**	**100**
Education	High School	17	11
	UG	50	33
	PG	70	47
	Others	13	9
	Total	**150**	**100**

Family Income	20001 – 30000	18	12
	30001 – 40000	66	44
	40001 – 50000	66	44
	Total	**150**	**100**
Marital Status	Single	52	35
	Married	98	65
	Total	**150**	**100**
Occupation	Employed	88	59
	Self Employed	32	21
	Professional	30	20
	Total	**150**	**100**

The table 1 presents a demographic profile of respondent. In the table the age has been grouped in to four category in less than 18 (school education), 18-25 (final stage of education and is in early adulthood), 25-35 (initial stage of carrier and start getting mature) and above 35 (matures as a person and in economic stability). The family income groups were classified in to three categories and income. As per the table, among the presents sample majority of respondents (44 percent) were in the age group of above 36 to 50 years. Male (53%) and female (47%) were almost equally represented, whereas in case of income majority respondents (44 %) were in category of 30,001and 50,000 per month. About 65% of respondents are married, Majority (59%) of the respondents are employed as far the occupation is concerned.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test

KMO and Bartlett's Test

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.573
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	1072.488
	Df	15
	Sig.	.000

Based on KMO measure of sampling adequacy test in table 2, it was found that the factor analysis data was appropriate with the value of 0.573, which falls between the ranges of being great and appropriate of factor analysis data. Bartlett‟s Test was utilized with the result which indicates a highly significant result with p=0.000 (p<0.05) and therefore factor analysis is appropriate.

Table 3: **Consumers' Perception towards organic fruits and vegetables**

Factor Loading					
	Component				
	F1	F2	F3	F4	F5
Food Attributes					
Tasty	.823				
Organic store	.602				
Price	.624				
Trusted	.834				
Status symbol	.858				
Less variety	.784				
Attitude					
Preservative free		.780			
Price Barrier		.729			
Health		.432			
Perception					
Availability			.868		
Expensive			.586		
Adulteration			.544		
Wealth			.535		
Consumer Quality consciousness					
Hygienic				.507	
Quality				.545	
Affordable				.525	
Package				.549	
Barrier					
lack of awareness					.253
Eigen value	5.992	4.302	3.095	2.255	1.523
% of variance	31.535	22.640	16.288	11.866	8.016
Cumulative % of variance	31.535	54.175	70.464	82.330	90.346

Inference

An initial analysis was conducted to obtain Eigen values for each component in the data. Five components had Eigen values over Kaiser‟s criterion of one and are considered significant, which in combination explained a cumulative of 90.346% of the variance (Table 3). Those with Eigen value less than one are considered insignificant and therefore discarded. As shown in Table 3, 19 items or variables were extractable from the analysis along with their

initial Eigen values, the percentage of variance attributed to each factors and the cumulative of the factors. Five factors were identified from the 19 items as well as their factor loadings, Eigen values and variance. Accordingly, Factor 1 was labelled asFood Attributes as all the variables contributing to it emphasized tasty, organic store, price, trust and less variety in relation concerning to consuming organic fruits and vegetables . The first factor component had six significant variables all of which were positively correlated and the Eigen value was 5.992, The total variance explained was 31.535%. This result therefore implied that one of the major considerations of a consumer in purchasing organic fruits and vegetables food attribute to be derived. Factor 2 was labelled consumers‟ attitude as all the variables contributing to it emphasized preservative, price barriers and health in relation concerning to buying organic fruits and vegetables. The second factor component had three significant variables all of which were positively correlated and the eigenvalue was 4.303, the total variance explained was 22.640%. This result therefore implied that the major considerations of a consumer in purchasing organic fruits and vegetables are the consumers‟ attitude. Factor 3 was labelled consumers‟ perception as all the variables contributing to it emphasized trust, status symbol and affordable in relation concerning to buying organic fruits and vegetables. The third factor component had three significant variables all of which were positively correlated and the Eigen value was 3.095, the total variance explained was 16.288%. This result therefore implied that the considerations of a consumer in purchasing organic fruits and vegetables are the perception. Factor 4 was labelled quality consciousness to purchase as all the variables contributing to it emphasized hygienic, quality, affordable and package in relation concerning to buying organic fruits and vegetables. The fifth factor component had one significant variables which is a barrier correlated and the Eigen value was 1.523, the total variance explained was 8.016%. This result therefore implied that the considerations of a consumer in purchasing organic fruits and vegetables are the barrier to purchase.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this study was to explore the perceptual factors influencing consumers' to purchase organic fruits and vegetables in The Nilgiris. Understanding consumers' behaviour and decision making towards organically grown fruits and vegetables products has been found out to be consistent with the notion that consumers motive is based on the food attributes, Consumers attitude, perception, consumers quality consciousness and barriers. Basically consumers' perception is determined by the availability, cost, adulteration and wealth. And more importantly there are certain barriers for the consumers to purchase organic fruits and vegetables are lack of awareness. It can be concluded that consumers are health conscious they give high priority to their health and the company has to focus on the product attributes of organic fruits and vegetables and availability by more supply and avoid deceptive package, since organic is itself an ethical means.

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