

## CONSUMER BEHAVIOR TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD

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**ABSTRACT:** *The last two decades have witnessed growing environmental awareness along with health and food safety concerns which have led people to question modern agricultural practices. This could be seen in the increasing demand for organic produce, which is considered as less harmful to the environment and healthier than their conventional counterparts [Schifferstein, 1998; and Williams, 2001]. Organic foods claim to help serve several benefits including healthiness and sustainable production. But they largely lack customer support and thus less market demand due to the lack of knowledge, trust and information about such food products. The present study is an attempt to find out consumer behavior towards organic food and the role of health consciousness as the moderating variable. The idea is to address the research gap in the extant literature wherein studies have primarily focused on factors influencing the growth of organic foods such as product acceptance, information, higher income, willingness to pay premium price and ethical consumption.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Environmental awareness, healthiness, consumer behavior, food products*

### INTRODUCTION

Interest in organically – produced food is increasing across the world in response to concerns about conventional agricultural practices, food safety and human health concerns, animal welfare considerations and concern about the environment (Chrysosoidis, 2000a and 2000b). Thus examining consumer behavior towards organic foods is one of the inspiring areas of marketing research which involves the psychological processes that consumers go through in identifying the needs, search for information, evaluating the products and making the final purchase.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

The term “**organic**” refers to the way agricultural products are grown and processed. Organic foods refer to those foods which are produced without using pesticides and chemical fertilizers (Allen and Alabala, 2007). Consumers perceive these foods as environment – friendly as they are produced without using pesticides and fertilizers and comply with animal welfare standards (Darnhofer and Lindenthal, 2009). They are grown in safe soil, have no modifications, and must remain separate from conventional products. Farmers are not allowed to use synthetic pesticides, bioengineered genes Genetically Modified Organism (GMO), petroleum –based fertilizers, and sewage sludge – based fertilizers

- Consumers are inclined to buy these foods as they are environment – friendly and health – conscious (Tregear et al., 1994; Davis et al., 1995; and Fotopoulos and Krystallis, 2002a, 2002b) and have safety and quality concerns (Zotos et al., 1999; and Chrysosoidis, 2000a and 2000b) also have nutritional value, taste, freshness, and price (Zanoli, 1998; Zotos et al., 1999; and Chrysosoidis, 2000a and 2000b).

### Factors Influencing Growth of Organic Foods

- The demand for health –claim foods has increased with increase in the income of consumers. Various factors that influence the growth of organic foods are ;
  1. Environment deterioration
  2. Standard of living
  3. Education
  4. Gender and size of family
  5. Pest resistance

### Environment Deterioration:

Pujari and Wright (1996) in their study mentioned the 1990s as “the decade of environment” due to emerging environmentalism issues facing business and the public. Organic foods are produced

without using chemical fertilizers and pesticides and thus reduce pollution ( air, water ,soil ), conserve water, reduce soil erosion , increase soil fertility , and use less energy

**Standard of Living:**

with the increase in income , people prefer more of healthy and hygienic food which has led to an increase in the demand for organic food products ( corsi and Novelli , 2003 ).

**Education:**

Educated people can better understand the significance of healthy eating . past researches have emphasized that people with higher education tend to be more aware and inclined towards organic foods ( Santucci et al ., 1999 : Gracia and Magistris , 2007 : Idda et al ., 2008 : and Holmes , 2010 ).

**Gender and Size of Family :** Krystallis ( 2005 ) emphasized that it is the women who are more health – conscious and are frequent buyers of health foods than men .

Idda et al . ( 2008 ) further mentioned that small families with children are more willing to pay for organic foods ( Reicks et al ., 1997 ; and Thompson and Kidwell , 1998 ).

**Food Safety :** Henson ( 1996 ) observed that people are willing to pay for the food product if they are safe in terms of its usage , risk of food poisoning and individual characteristics . A food product must be duly labeled and certified by the trusted authorities .

**Pest Resistance :** Farmers use tons of pesticides and fertilizers to product their crops from insects . The use of chemicals is harmful for consumers health and poisons the water supply which causes harm to the environment ( Bredahl , 2001) . Thus , organic foods are preferred more by the consumers as well as farmers .

**Conomers Attitude Towards Organic Food Products**

- ❖ Attitude is an emotional propensity that expresses some amount of favor or disfavor towards a particular object . Thus , to understand consumer behavior , it is essential to determine their attitude towards various products and services . Krarup and Russell ( 2005 ) mentioned that consumers attitude and behavior determine their willingness to buy the product or service in a better way .
  - ✚ According to williams ( 2001 ) ,organic foods are those foods which are produced without using chemical fertilizers and pesticides . They are more nutritious than conventional foods and have less risk of food poisoning .They are perceived to be healthier than conventional foods ( Grankvist ,2001 ; Magnusson et al ., 2001 ; and Harper and Makatouni ,2002 )which positively influences attitude towards organic foods .
- ❖ However , price , quality , convience , availability and food safety are considered as significant factors while making the purchase ( Carrigan , 2001 ; and Weatherell , 2003 ) ,whereas ethical factors are considered by only a few consumers . Dobson ( 2007 )further added that environmental policies are aimed at changing consumers ` behavior than their attitude.
- ❖ Consumer nowadays are more concerned about health – related diseases and food safety risks (Arvola ,2008 ) . Latouche et al . (1998) mentioned that , other things being equal , risk perception and purchase likelihood are negatively correlated and in order to avoid perceived risk , consumers either reduce , shift or postpone their purchase decision of the said product. During food scarcity, consumers heavily rely on purchasing branded or quality products or seek advice from trusted sources before buying the food product . Jones et al , ( 2001) further added that consumers consider organic foods as safe and of higher quality which further increases consumption of organic foods .
- ❖ Padel and foster ( 2005 ) and krystallis ( 2005 ) further added that consumers lack trust in the information provided by authorities about labeling , standardization and certification of organic foods which influences their attitude towards them (krystallis , 2005;and padel and Foster ,2005).
- ❖ Zakowska (2011) highlighthed that it is the premium price of organic foods that restrains consumers from buying them. However ,there is a segment of consumers who are health – conscious and

believe that organic foods are more healthy and nutritious than their conventional counterparts ( Fotopoulos , 2002 : Torjusen , 2004 :and pelletier , 2013 ). Thus , they evaluate organic foods on the basis of their nutritional aspect and healthiness (Magnusson , 2003 : Arvola, 2008 :and Aertsens et al ., 2009 ) and are willing to pay premium price for them ( krystallis , 2005 ) .

#### **FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER PURCHASE BEHAVIOUR :**

Consumers are influenced by internal factors ( perception , attitude ,and motivation ) and external factors ( family and peer group influence ) before making purchase decision (solomon , 2014 ). These factors are :

1. Price
2. Functional value
3. Emotion
4. Mood
5. Stone environment

#### **PRICE:**

=>Voss and parasuraman (2003) in their study found that purchase of organic foods is mainly influenced by the price rather than the quality of the product. They found that price is the significant factor that restrains consumers from buying organic foods as they tend to be expensive than conventional foods. Aertsens et al . (2009) highlighted that it is only frequent users who are ready to pay higher price for organic foods, whereas average users might buy such foods ,whereas average users might buy such foods, once or twice for trial purpose .

#### **FUNCTIONAL VAUIE:**

=> Sinha and Banerjee (2003) revealed that indian consumers look more for emotional value than the functional value of shopping .They are more entertainment –oriented , i.e.,they are influenced by the store environment , regularity in buying and by the socioeconomic classification.

#### **EMOTIONS:**

=>Past researches have emphasized on the role of consumers' emotions (Babin, 1992:Holbrook and Gardner , 1993 : and Gracia and Magistris , 2007).Isen and shalker (1992) , explored that people with positive emotional state take less time in decision making .Holbrook and Gardner, ( 1993) explored the emotional responses of television commercials on the consumer purchase decision .Thus ,retailers need to experiment with the formats that are to attract both the emotional shopper as well as the rational shopper.

#### **MOOD:**

=> Belk (1975) found that consumers' purchase decision is influenced by their mood at the time of purchase . previous researches have highlighted that mood influences participation and shopping experience ( Swinyard, 1993 : and Barone and Miniard , 2002). Though the terms emotion , affect and mood can be used interchangeably , some authors suggest that “emotion appears to be the more encompassing term , with affect and mood particular types or examples of emotion “ (Babin,1992) .

#### **STORE ENVIRONMENT:**

=>Baker (1993) investigated how consumers relate store environment with the quality of the product and what factors of store environment influence their buying behavior . Donovan (1994) added that store ambience affects the consumers' mood and behavior . He further suggested that the emotional state of the consumer within the store results in extra time and unplanned shopping . Ryu et al , (2012) in their study found that it is overall image of the store that has an impact on consumer's purchase decision . Thus, these factors together influence the shopping behavior of the consumer (Babin, 1992).

#### **10 ORGANIC FOOD THAT AREN'T WORTH BUYING: WHY BUY ORGANIC ?**

The benefits of eating organic food – from lower pesticide exposure to environmental impact – are well-known. But let's be honest buying organic can be expensive – budget-conscious consumers can get the most organic foods to purchase .

1. Avocados
2. Seafood
3. Onion
4. Quinoa
5. Pineapples
6. Sweet corn
7. Maple syrup
8. Cabbage
9. kiwi
10. Mangoes

### CONCLUSION

=> This study provides a better understanding of what moderates the consumer attitude towards organic food. Empirical results in this study indicate that the consumer concerns about health are the determinants for a consumer to form a positive attitude toward organic foods. The findings are consistent with many previous studies (MCEachern, 2002; Badrie et al., 2006; and Arvola, 2008 ). In addition, the consumer's health consciousness is shown to have a stronger relation to the consumer's attitude toward organic foods . This finding is also in accordance with previous studies where by the consumer's concern for personal health is more important (Weatherell, 2003 : and Aertsens et al ., 2009 )

=> These results clearly imply that the marketer must consider the fact that consumers having health knowledge and organized work schedule are generally more inclined towards organic foods , thus a marketer must create awareness regarding health benefits of organic foods through media and advertisement.

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