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CONSUMER PERCEPTION TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS (OFPS) IN INDIA: WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO UDAIPUR CITY

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ABSTRACT

Consumers worldwide are becoming health conscious and are concerned about nutrition (Hart, 2000) and the quality of food consumed. Consumers are also increasingly concerned with food safety issues taking into consideration Gil, Gracia and Sanchez (2012) have investigated that consumers are getting health conscious and are paying more attention to quality of food consumed. Therefore, food must deliver an added value that are sought after by consumers besides basic hedonistic and functional needs such as nutrition, taste, health, favorable price-quality ratio, etc., in the selection of food. This added value may be perceived in the form of ecological, social and individual benefit. The history of the organic food industry explores an effort to establish a foundation pertinent to the succeeding information. The study looks into consumers' perceptions towards organic food examined. A study on consumer perception towards organic food products may add insight into the nascent but emerging organic food industry in India. The review of related literature in the area of organic food products and consumer perception studied has provided many insights for the study. A number of researchers have identified various factors that influence consumer perception of organic food products mainly in developed countries. Some studies have also been undertaken in Asian countries like Malaysia and Indonesia. Very few researchers have attempted to focus in detail the various factors that influence consumer perception towards organic food. Having reviewed several studies and having identified the gap, the investigator felt an imperative need to undertake the present investigation.

KEYWORDS

Organic Food Products (OFPS) and Psychographic Factors & Demographic Factors Influencing Consumer Perception.

INTRODUCTION

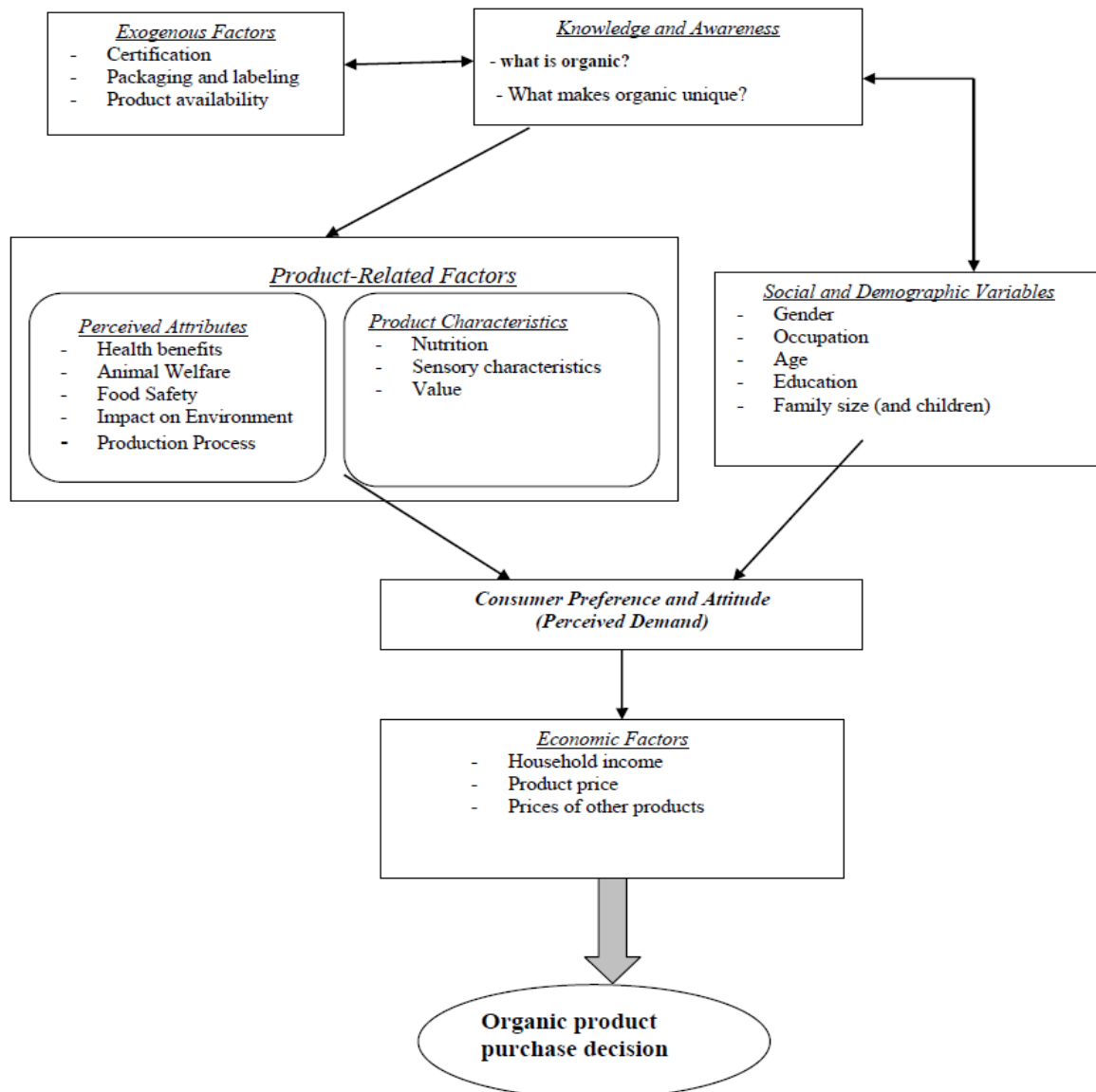
The organic food market in India is at a nascent stage. Country specific research undertaken by A.C. Nielsen in 2006 has indicated that Indians are among the top ten buyers of food with health supplements but lack access to organic food products. Due to high logistic cost & low volume operation, organic food products are costly. However, India is an emerging player in the export market with billions of export potential. Also the domestic market is characterized by limited retail presence, low certified branded produce and a small range of organic product offerings with respect to varieties though marginal growth is becoming evident.

Four main factors may have contributed to the growth of the organic markets in India:

- An increasing level of consumer knowledge about organic, in parallel with increasing dissatisfaction with conventional food and environmental concerns;
- Higher levels of consumer trust in the organic origin and in the certification labels of the products;
- Increasing demand of organic produce, especially due to the recent European food crisis and scandals; and
- The involvement of big food retailers in Organic is another factor that can explain an increasing proportion of organic foods in the total amount of food consumption in India.

Some of the exclusive retail outlets selling organic food products in and around Udaipur are Down to earth, shristhi organics, sanjeevani stores, ADITYA Birla group's More outlet etc. Branded organic food products like ProNature, Navadarshanam, ITC's Aashirvaad Organic Spices, etc., are also available at most super-markets. Arogya, Jaivika Krishik Society, Econet, Janodaya, shristhi organics, sarkari super markets, Green Channel, Health Foodzone.

Figure 1. Framework of factors which affect organic consumer attitudes and purchase decisions



REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Mukul, A.Afrin S & Hassan, M.M. (2013) factor affecting consumers perception about the organic food & their preferences and relevance's. This is basically related to perception for the buying & purchasing of the organic product good for the health.

Schifferstein & Ophuis, (2011) Research has found that organic produce is perceived by consumers to be less damaging to the environment and healthier than conventionally grown food" Retrieved on April 2011

Liu, (2007), "It is also important to connect consumers' knowledge to buying decisions and locate any other buying influences that are driving consumers spending habits".

Organic food market in the South East Asian region constitutes average consumption of 20% per annum, while the organic industry is valued at US \$25 million (Ramli, 2005; Organic Monitor, 2006).

Makatouni (2002) studied that organic food is closely associated with not just health, but also with social, economic and ecological sustainability. Organic food products is amongst the fastest growing areas of the food market in Europe, Northern America, Australia and Japan with sales exceeding \$114.5 billion in 1999 (Ebrahimi, 2007) with plenty of international growth potential according to agricultural & food industry experts.

Organic food is a topic of great interest in the USA (Greene, 2000), Europe (Food and agriculture Organization, 1999) and the market is fast growing in other parts of the globe (Yussefi and Willer, 2002).

Crutchfield and Roberts (2000) expressed that the last one decade has witnessed growing public concern towards issues such as health, nutrition and safety. Introduction of genetically modified organisms, spread of Escherichia coli infections, etc., have lead to the association of risk with the consumption of conventionally grown produce amongst consumers (Williams and Hammitt, 2001).

RESEARCH GAP

Based on the above literature review, the following research gaps could be identified and have been suggested as follows:

- Due to very rapidly growing sector and greater inclination of consumers towards the organic food attracts me to study on this current affair related to the organic food industry and of course ongoing trends and anticipated growth in present an coming years studies should be made over it.
- Fear over food scandals and certain technological advances such as genetic manipulation and food irradiation has heightened consumer concern on safety issues giving rise to a growing demand for quality guarantees and additional information about production methods.

- Despite concern towards safety of food consumed, consumers do not completely trust organic food products on this parameter and hence it is imperative to conduct a study to identify the present scenario.
- Country specific research undertaken by A.C. Neilsen has indicated that, 'Indians amongst the top ten buyers of food with "health supplements" globally but lack access to organic food products.'

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The market for organic food products in India has emerged because of the following two reasons.

- To tap the lucrative export markets for organic products in the developed countries.
- Organic processed food products represent higher 'added value'.
- Producers and Consumers general concern for environment and ideologies

Incidentally, in India, most of the organic produce is grown to be exported to the \$25-30 billion global market. The rest is sold at predetermined retail outlets. So, if the trend for organic products is growing among producers then, its benefits must naturally reach the local population of a country.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the study is on consumer perception towards organic food products in Bangalore are as follows:

1. To study the organic food market in Udaipur city.
2. To study the relationship between demographics of customer and factors of perception of consumers towards organic food products.
3. To identify the influence of factors of perception on the customer's satisfaction towards organic food products.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY

The following hypothesis is used to test the effect of perceptual factors on the consumer's satisfaction towards organic food products (OFP).

1. There is no significant influence of factors on the overall satisfaction of customers towards organic food products
2. There is no significant difference between demography of customers & factors of perception
3. There is no significant correlation among factors of perception

SAMPLE SIZE

For the present study, questionnaires were distributed to around 300 respondents, from whom 222 correctly completed questionnaires have been obtained, yielding a response rate of 74 percent.

ANALYSIS

TABLE 1: DISTRIBUTION OF THE SAMPLE ACCORDING TO GENDER, AGE, EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION, AVERAGE SPENDING PER MONTH AND FREQUENCY OF CONSUMPTION

Gender	Frequency	%
Male	145	65
Female	101	45
Age	Frequency	%
Below 30	132	59
31-50	90	41
50 Above	24	11
Educational Qualification	Frequency	%
Undergraduate	50	23
Graduate	80	36
Post- Graduate	62	28
Spending	Frequency	%
0-500	95	43
500-1000	93	42
1000 and Above	58	26
Frequency of Consumption	Frequency	%
Once a week	153	69
Once a month	69	31
Once sixth month	24	11

The Table 1 describes male constitution as 65% and females as 45%, the distribution of sample with reference to age wherein maximum respondents were below 30, according to education, maximum respondents are graduates and 28% of the respondents are post graduates. Fourthly, average spending is more than 1000 per month. Lastly, Maximum numbers of respondents consume organic food products on a weekly basis followed by a minimum number of respondents consuming organic food products once a month. The least amount of consumption falls in the category of once a sixth month consumption pattern.

GENERAL FINDINGS

Following are the findings related to this study on consumer perception towards organic food products in Udaipur.

- Consumers of organic food products evaluate product quality with the price they pay.
- Demographic variables namely gender has a positive impact on consumer perception towards organic food products while difference in educational qualifications do not have a significant impact.
- There is significant impact of psychographic factors on overall satisfaction of consumers towards organic food products.
- Consumers consider organic food products as safe for consumption.
- The respondents have also felt that organic food products are healthy to consume.
- Consumers generally prefer to consume grain based organic food products followed closely by organic grains and organic fruits.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

It is important to study factors that have an influence on consumer perception towards organic food products. This study helps consumers and producers/marketers of organic food products to understand the importance of various factors on overall satisfaction towards organic food products.

An understanding of consumer perception leads to the creation of better marketing strategies. Here the marketers can focus on appropriate pricing and promotional methods particularly to increase the visibility of organic products to make a positive impact on their perception so as to increase potential sales in the domestic market. Consumers are both quality conscious and price sensitive. Marketers and producers should collectively work towards bringing quality produce in the market to gain market acceptance. At the same time, both marketers and producers should work in consensus with the pricing factor which is perceived to be one of the most important factors influencing consumer perception as well as their overall satisfaction towards organic food products. This will help marketers to formulate a strong communication plan in order to influence consumer perception towards organic food products.

FOUR MAIN FACTORS MAY HAVE CONTRIBUTED TO THE GROWTH OF THE ORGANIC MARKETS IN INDIA

- An increasing level of consumer knowledge about organic, in parallel with increasing dissatisfaction with conventional food and environmental concerns;
- Higher levels of consumer trust in the organic food products and in the certification labels of the products;
- Increasing demand of organic products, especially due to health consciousness.
- The involvement of big food retailers in Organic is another factor that can explain an increasing proportion of organic foods in the total amount of food consumption in India.

CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study show that there is a significant relationship between various psychographic factors on the overall satisfaction of consumers towards organic food products. This implies that both producers and marketers need to concentrate on specific factors so as to improve the market potential for organic food products and thereby contributing to the general well being of the society and the larger good to environment.

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