

Consumer Perceptions and Organic Food: Health Attitudes in the Post-COVID-19 Market

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Abstract

This study looks into the factors impacting consumer attitudes and behaviours regarding the use of organic food in light of the COVID-19 epidemic. After a thorough analysis of the body of research, the study focuses on attitudes, perceived health risks, and perceived efficacy as key drivers. The influence of perceived health risks on "health attitudes" has been studied in the past, but perceived effectiveness has not received as much attention as it should. By offering insights into consumers' interactions with organic food marketers and their advertising techniques, this study seeks to close this gap. Promoting sustainable consumption patterns and closing the attitude behaviour gap in the use of organic foods require an understanding of these variables. Policymakers and marketers can use the findings to leverage consumer health attitudes and views of the efficacy of organic food to drive more sustainable consumption behaviours.

Introduction

Consumers' consumption patterns have significantly shifted to become healthier and more ecologically friendly since the start of the COVID-19 epidemic (Kursan Milakovic, 2021; Nayal et al., 2021). This is clear from a Euromonitor (2021) analysis that claimed the value of organic food on the worldwide market had grown by 13% in 2020 compared to 2019. Significantly, the Indian market's consumption of organic food was estimated to be worth USD 1.36 billion in 2020, a remarkable 26.5% increase from 2014 (Statista, 2021a). In actuality, more people are consuming organic food worldwide. Food grown organically is practiced in more than 175 countries (Willer et al., 2020). India is ranked tenth among them for the production of organic food (Willer & Lernoud, 2019). However, despite such growth in production, the Indian market has been plagued with the issue of lower acceptance rate of organic food (Rana & Paul, 2020). For example, the per capita consumption of India is €0.1, which represents less than 1% of the world market share (Willer & Lernoud, 2018). Scholars in the past have both acknowledged and highlighted that the rise in demand for organic food on one hand

and low consumption rates on the other hand have led them to focus on explaining consumers' decision-making and buying behaviour (Mansoor & Paul, 2021). As a result, this causes the attitude behaviour gap (Tandon et al., 2020a). Hence, it prompts for more research to understand the consumption patterns of organic foods, thereby identifying the underlying causes of the gap. As a result, this study seeks to address the attitude behaviour gap. To understand how consumers make decisions about organic consumption, it is essential to identify the factors that drive those decisions. Hence, it would be valuable to study consumers' decision-making process in order to gain in-depth insights into economic and environmental sustainability, as well as bridging the attitude behaviour gap. Following an extensive review of extant literature on organic foods, this study focuses on consumer effectiveness, health-related risks, and attitudes. While perceived effectiveness has been used in previous studies to understand organic purchase behaviour, perceived health risk and health attitude have largely been ignored.

India's organic food market

The organic food market in India is a promising and developing industry with room for expansion. The market was estimated to be worth \$138 million in 2021, and estimates for the years 2019 to 2024 indicate a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 13%. Growing consumer interest in organic products and health and environmental sustainability are the main drivers of this explosive growth. The market offers a wide variety of organic foods and drinks to meet the needs of both local consumers and foreign buyers. Government backing, improved supply chain management, and the growing acceptance of organic agricultural methods among Indian farmers are important drivers of this expansion. The growing middle class in India, which has discretionary income and is adopting better lifestyles, is another factor supporting the organic market's growth potential. According to Statista (2021b), India houses the largest number of organic food producers in the world. In 2018, ASSOCHAM and EY reported India's market value of organic food to be

about USD 6 billion, expecting to cross USD 9 billion by 2025. Yadav (2016), along with Sadiq et al. (2020), suggested that while the world does acknowledge India as among the leading organic food producers, yet its domestic sale is abysmally low. This effectively highlights that India's internal market in itself is still at its initial stage in terms of domestic consumption. The scenario is ironical given the fact that by and large, Indian consumers do tend to have high levels of environmental concern, as opposed to their counterparts from other developed nations, such as the United States (Paul et al., 2016).

Worlds organic food market

The present global state of eco-awareness of consumers and market trends for organic foods unveil a steady increase in eco-consumerism concentrating on organic foods (Chekima & Chekima, 2019). In spite of this upward trend, the organic food market has to surpass several hurdles. Reports indicate that conventional food still dominates the global consumer food market (Chekima et al., 2019). While many Asian countries have been producing and exporting organic foods, their internal consumption has been remained low as compared to the global trend (Rahman & Noor, 2016). The market for organic food and drinks has grown significantly globally in recent years, which is indicative of a shift in consumer tastes toward more sustainable and healthful eating options. The market, which was estimated to be worth USD 231.52 billion in 2023, is projected to develop at a 13.9% compound annual growth rate (CAGR) between 2024 and 2030.

What is organic food?

The most prevalent definitions of foods produced organically place emphasis on the "organic philosophy," as well as the technology, principles, and/or production techniques employed (Bourn and Prescott, 2002). Fresh and processed foods produced using organic farming practices are referred to as organic food. These techniques place a strong emphasis on using natural materials and procedures, staying away from synthetic chemicals like fertilizers and pesticides as well as genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Soil health, biodiversity, and ecological balance are all enhanced by organic farming. To guarantee that organic food production satisfies these requirements, regulations are tight. Customers can be assured by the organic label that the food they purchase complies with strict environmental and animal welfare standards. Fruits, vegetables, cereals, dairy products, and meats are frequently found in organic food items. Even though they are usually more expensive than conventional foods,

consumers still want them because they believe them to be healthier and more environmentally friendly.

Health consciousness (HEC)

Consumer health consciousness has a big impact on their opinions. The primary reason why consumers choose organic food is its health benefits. Numerous studies demonstrate that consumers' propensity to purchase organic goods is strongly influenced by health-related considerations. Customers may view their purchases as investments in their health since one of the major factors influencing them may be the decline in their health. According to Bourn and Prescott, the nutritional qualities of organic foods give them a competitive advantage over conventional foods.

Consumer perception of organic food quality

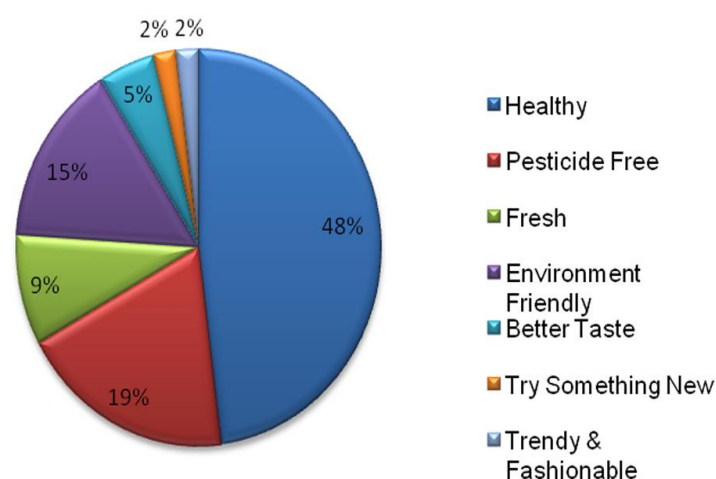
Traditional food quality attributes, such flavour and freshness, freshness being especially important for fruits and vegetables are prioritized by consumers. When certain requirements are satisfied, Thai customers favour organic produce. Defects, nutritional value, safety, chemical composition, mechanical and functional features, and sensory elements like taste, aroma, appearance, and texture are just a few of the characteristics that make up quality. The main deciding criterion is sensory evaluation, which is followed by nutritional value and safety from microbes and chemicals. Differentiating between different product kinds is crucial, as opposed to generalizing. Compared to conventionally cultivated potatoes and veggies, organically grown produce has lower nitrate levels and less pesticide residues. To avoid customer confusion, trustworthy information on health advantages and quality practices is essential. One-third of respondents to a survey conducted in six European nations said they would stay away from genetically modified (GM) food unless it provided better output and health benefits. 86% of people regularly consume functional foods, such as high fiber products and probiotic drinks, which encourage better eating practices.

Reasons for purchase of organic foods

When asked if they have ever purchased organic food items, 55.6% of respondents answered in the affirmative. Subsequently, these participants were questioned further concerning their purchases. When asked how often they buy organic food goods, 51.8% responded that they do so weekly, 26% that they do so at least once a month, and the remaining 21.6% that do so less frequently than once a month. Health consciousness was cited by respondents as the main

justification for buying organic food. Other factors that influence respondents' decision to purchase organic food include perceived freshness, reduced pesticide residues, ecologically friendly manufacturing, and no usage of pesticides. For 48% of respondents, health concern was the most important factor, followed by pesticide-free (19%) and environmentally friendly (15%) factors.

Fig. 1 Reasons for purchase of organic foods



Organic Food Market Overview

Organic food is produced without the use of chemical pesticides, fertilizers, hormones, or antibiotics, preserving biodiversity and fostering ecological balance. Food preservatives, artificial food additives, industrial solvents, or radiation are not used in the processing of organic food. Globally, organic agriculture is rapidly expanding in the majority of nations. Throughout the projected period, the market is anticipated to develop as more people become aware of the benefits of eating organic food.

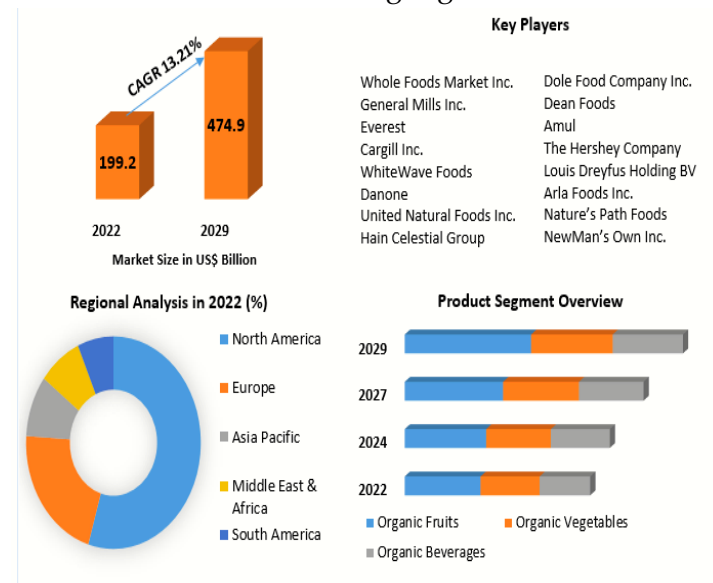


Fig. 2 Organic Food Market Overview

Source: - Maximize Market Research

Conclusion

In order to promote sustainable practices, it is critical to comprehend consumer attitudes and behaviour about the consumption of organic food, as this study emphasizes. Policymakers and marketers can benefit greatly from the research's identification of perceived efficacy, health-related hazards, and attitudes as critical elements influencing consumer decisions. By addressing these variables, more sustainable purchasing habits can be encouraged by closing the gap between consumer views and actual behaviours. The study adds to the body of knowledge by highlighting how consumer decisions are influenced by health attitudes, especially in light of the COVID-19 epidemic. In the end, these understandings can aid in the creation of more potent legislative and marketing plans to increase the uptake of organic food.

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