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## AN EMPIRICAL STUDY ON CONSUMER RESISTANCE TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD

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### ABSTRACT

*This conceptual paper explores consumer resistance towards buying organic food, identifying key factors influencing this phenomenon. Despite the growth of the organic market, many consumers exhibit reluctance to purchase these products. This paper proposes a framework that categorizes the barriers to organic food adoption into three main dimensions: economic, psychological, and social. By synthesizing existing literature, this framework aims to enhance understanding of consumer resistance and provide insights for marketers and policymakers.*



**KEYWORDS:** *explores consumer , organic food adoption , consumer resistance.*

### INTRODUCTION:

The organic food market has witnessed significant growth over recent years, driven by heightened awareness of health and environmental issues. However, many consumers still resist purchasing organic products, which can hinder market expansion. Understanding the underlying reasons for this resistance is crucial for developing strategies to promote organic consumption. This paper aims to conceptualize consumer resistance to organic food through a structured framework that identifies and categorizes the barriers faced by consumers.

Organic products are grown under a system of agriculture without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides with an environmentally and socially responsible approach. The term "organic" refers to the way agricultural products are grown and processed. Organic farming is an ecological management production system that promotes and enhances biodiversity, biological cycles and soil biological activity. It is based on the minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance "ecological harmony".

In traditional India, the entire agriculture was practiced using organic techniques, where the fertilizers, pesticides, etc were obtained from plant and animal products. Organic farming was the backbone of the Indian economy. Now a days organic food has become very popular, but navigating through the maze of organic food labels, benefits, and claims can be confusing. Is organic food really better for your mental and physical health?? What do all the labels mean? This guide can help you make better choices about shopping organic, including what to focus on and how to make eating organic more affordable. All these concerns have created confusion and have resulted in consumer resistance towards organic food.

The organic food market in India is a niche market, with the market expected to see wider penetration in the coming years. Owing to the growing incidences of food adulteration, the demand for

organic food is anticipated to rise in the coming years. The organic markets in India are largely spread across the food & beverages, health & wellness etc. The highest growth is observed in the “Organic food” segment. The organic food market in India is displaying an upswing closely following rising territory under organic farming, developing tendency of consumers in urban regions towards chemical-free food sources and natural items, and increasing disposable income levels.

The organic food market in India is greatly disorganized. Even though the quantity of organic food cultivators and zone under organic food cultivation is expanding, the farm size is small. The Organic food market in India developed at a sound pace during 2010-14, because of rising health concerns, evolving lifestyle, mounting disposable spending, and developing accessibility of organic food products in malls, supermarkets, retail outlets, and online business gateways. The shelf space of organic food products is expanding across significant retail outlets, for example, Spencer's, Nilgiri's, and Nature's Basket, and so forth.

The organic food market in India is anticipated to display exponential growth, owing to rising government support as endowments, accessibility of simple financing plans from financial institutions, government subsidies, etc. Himalayan states, for example, Himachal Pradesh and Uttarakhand are concentrating on the development of organic products, fruits, and vegetables.

Organic food is more labour intensive since the farmers do not use pesticides, chemical fertilizers, or drugs. Organic certification is expensive and organic feed for animals can cost twice as much. Organic farms tend to be smaller than conventional farms which mean fixed costs and overhead must be distributed across smaller produce volumes without government subsidies.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer resistance refers the fact of people disliking or being unwilling to buy a particular product or services. Consumer resistance is a complex phenomenon characterized by reluctance or refusal to adopt new products or behaviours. It can manifest through negative attitudes, avoidance behaviours, and scepticism.

Consumer resistance is rooted in various theoretical frameworks, including the Theory of Planned Behavior and the Resistance Theory. The Theory of Planned Behavior posits that behavioral intentions are shaped by attitudes, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control (Ajzen, 1991). Resistance Theory, on the other hand, suggests that resistance can be an active and strategic response to perceived threats (Bohm et al., 2017). This theoretical backdrop highlights the multifaceted nature of consumer resistance.

Organic food, which used to be supply-driven, has now become demand-driven. Moreover, organic food has been re-launched as a “new product” under the green, eco, sustainable, or ethical products category (Thøgersen, 2010). In addition to this, organic food is also referred to as green innovation or ethical innovation in the academic literature (Thøgersen & Zhou, 2012). Scholars argue that organic food provides ecological as well as social benefits along with added individual benefits (Cerjak et al., 2010).

The domestic consumption of organic food is still low indicating the presence of certain resistance faced by consumers. The resistance to organic food can be categorized into several dimensions:

- **Economic Factors:** such as Price Sensitivity is a major deterrent. Organic food often costs 20-100% more than conventional alternatives, leading to perceptions of it being a luxury rather than a necessity (Grunert et al., 2014). The Value perception of consumers is another factor for their resistance. Consumers may question whether the health and environmental benefits justify the higher costs, especially if they have limited knowledge about organic farming practices.
- **Psychological Factors:** Many consumers harbour doubts about the authenticity and efficacy of organic products. Misleading labelling and reports of organic fraud can exacerbate these concerns (Rundh, 2016). Consumers may experience conflict when trying to reconcile the desire for healthy eating with the convenience and familiarity of conventional foods.

- **Socio-cultural Influences:** Eating habits are influenced by cultural background and community norms, which can either promote or hinder the acceptance of organic food (Zepeda & Deal, 2009). Social circles and peer opinions significantly impact purchasing behavior, with individuals often aligning their choices with those of friends and family.
- **Other factors for resistance:** Perceptions that organic foods are less flavoured or of inferior quality can deter purchases. Tasting events and product demonstrations may help alter these perceptions. The availability of organic products in local stores can significantly affect consumer choices. In many areas, access to organic options is limited, impacting consumer willingness to buy. Ineffective marketing strategies may fail to resonate with target audiences. Clear, relatable messaging that addresses consumer concerns can enhance acceptance.

Understanding consumer resistance toward organic food is essential for effective marketing strategies. Marketers can address price concerns by highlighting the long-term health benefits and potential savings associated with organic diets. Education campaigns that provide clear, evidence-based information about organic products can help alleviate skepticism. Furthermore, engaging consumers in taste tests and offering convenience through online purchasing options may reduce resistance. Building community-based initiatives that promote organic foods can also leverage social influences to encourage acceptance.

Consumer resistance toward organic food is influenced by a myriad of factors, including price sensitivity, skepticism, taste preferences, convenience, and cultural influences. Marketers must navigate these complexities to effectively promote organic products. Therefore, the said research is an earnest attempt to explore the evolving attitudes toward organic food, particularly in the context of increasing environmental awareness and health consciousness among consumers.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The review of literature details about the consumer resistance and the factors contributing towards the resistance in context of organic food. In this background, to further explore the research topic selected for the study is "An Empirical Study on Consumer Resistance towards Organic Food". The objectives of the study were to study consumer awareness and preference towards organic food. Other objectives of the study were to study consumer perception and consumer resistance towards organic food.

The data that was gathered for the study was Primary data through survey with the help of questionnaire from the respondents. The sampling method was Convenience sampling for the sample size of 200 respondents. The data was then analyzed using SPSS software and the findings were obtained.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

From the research conducted it was observed that 71% of the respondents were aware about organic food products that signifies the importance of health to the respondents.

It was observed that the respondents stated following reasons for their preference towards organic food as follows in their preferential order as Eco-friendly option, 2<sup>nd</sup> as Health Benefits, 3<sup>rd</sup> as Pesticides/Chemical free, 4<sup>th</sup> as No Adulteration and 5<sup>th</sup> as Costly. Therefore, we can say that the major reason for the preference of the organic food product is Eco-Friendly and Health Benefits.

7% of the respondents prefer to buy organic food products directly from producer. 28.2% of the respondents prefer to buy organic food products from supermarkets and 31% of the respondents prefer to buy organic food products from specialized organic food shops.

The respondents ranked the following motivation to buy organic food, given 1<sup>st</sup> rank as Friends, 2<sup>nd</sup> as Price, 3<sup>rd</sup> as Benefits, 4<sup>th</sup> as Packaging and 5<sup>th</sup> as Taste. Therefore, we can say that the major reason that motivates to buy the organic food are friends and price of the organic food.

Majority of respondents are strongly agreed that organic products are high priced than non-organic products. Majority of respondents agree that quality of organic products is better than non-organic product. Also Majority of respondents Strongly agree that organic food has more health benefit

than non-organic food. 59.2% of the respondents thinks that organic food products are value-based pricing.

Finally, when asked about the reasons respondents ranked the following reasons for not purchasing organic products, given 1<sup>st</sup> rank was mentioned for Packaging, 2<sup>nd</sup> as taste is not good, 3<sup>rd</sup> as low availability, 4<sup>th</sup> as lack of knowledge and 5<sup>th</sup> as high price.

### IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS

To reduce consumer resistance, stakeholders should address the issue of Price sensitivity by implementing pricing strategies, such as discounts or loyalty programs, to make organic products more financially accessible. Another method to reduce the resistance is to build trust by enhancing transparency in labelling and marketing to mitigate scepticism. This could involve third-party certifications and clearer communication of organic standards.

There is a need to educate Consumers by increasing awareness through targeted educational campaigns that inform consumers about the health and environmental benefits of organic food. Collaboration with healthcare providers and community organizations can help disseminate this information effectively.

### CONCLUSION

This paper investigates the factors contributing to consumer resistance towards organic food. Despite the growing popularity of organic products, some consumers remain hesitant to embrace them. Consumer resistance towards organic food is driven by multiple factors, primarily related to price, health scepticism, and trust in labelling. Addressing these barriers through targeted strategies can enhance consumer acceptance and promote a more sustainable food system. The findings offer insights for marketers and policymakers aiming to enhance the appeal of organic food.

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