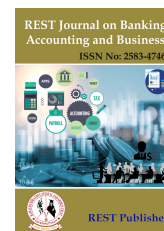




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Customer Awareness Towards Organic Food Products: A Study with Reference to Perambalur District

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ABSTRACT

The Indian organic food business is increasing rapidly as more people learn about health, environment, and sustainability. This study looks at how aware people in Perambalur District, Tamil Nadu, are of organic food products. It does this by finding out what makes people aware and filling in the gaps to suggest ways to get more people to buy organic food. We used a structured questionnaire to collect data from 200 respondents in a descriptive research approach. The results show that health consciousness, environmental issues, knowledge, price sensitivity, and trust are the main things that determine how informed customers are. It can't be widely accepted because of problems including little availability, exorbitant prices, and bad marketing. To fill with these gaps, people have suggested things like focused awareness campaigns, better ways to get things to people, and open certification systems. This study adds to the body of research by giving information about how people in a growing economy eat organic food in different regions.

1. INTRODUCTION

The demand for organic food products around the world has grown over the past few years. This is because more people are interested in health, protecting the environment, and food safety (Singh & Verma, 2017). People think that organic foods are better for your health and the environment than regular foods since they are grown without synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or genetically modified organisms (Ayswarya & Vasanthi, 2020). The Indian organic food business is still young, but it's developing quickly. In 2020, it was worth \$820 million, compared to the overall food market, which was worth \$482 billion (Desai, 2021). Even while this growth is happening, consumer awareness and adoption are not even across the board. This is especially true in semi-urban and rural areas like Perambalur District, Tamil Nadu, where traditional farming methods are still used and contemporary retail is not very common. Perambalur is mostly an agricultural district, therefore studying consumer awareness there is unique because it is close to organic farming practices and doesn't see many urban marketing trends. This paper looks at what factors determine how much people in Perambalur know about organic food and what stops them from buying it. The research hopes to fill up these gaps and then offer ways to get more people to buy organic food and make them more aware of it. There are two goals: (1) to find out what factors affect how aware customers are of organic food items, and (2) to find out what gaps in awareness exist and suggest ways to close them.

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2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer knowledge of organic food is influenced by various factors, such as health consciousness, environmental awareness, knowledge, perceived price, and certification trust (Rana & Paul, 2017). Health consciousness is a leading factor since consumers believe that organic foods are healthier and safer (Chakrabarti, 2010). Environmental issues are also highly relevant, with consumers becoming more aware of the harmful effects of intensive farming methods, including the application of pesticides and soil depletion (Yadav & Pathak, 2016). Consumer awareness regarding organic foods, production techniques, and merits increases consumer confidence and purchase motive (Hossain & Lim, 2016). Nevertheless, unaffordable prices and unavailability hinder their adoption, especially in emerging economies (Anand et al., 2017). Organic certification and labeling are of utmost importance, as organic goods are credence goods, and the authenticity cannot be ascertained by consumers post-purchase (Sultan et al., 2020). Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) is a strong theory that explains consumer behavior toward organic foods. Based on TPB, attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioral control shape purchase intention (Ajzen, 1985). It is revealed in studies that consumer attitudes towards organic foods, influenced by health and environmental values, have a strong ability to predict purchases (Matharu et al., 2020). Subjective norms like the influence of family and friends also influence awareness, but their ability varies across cultures (Irianto, 2015). Perceived control over behavior, such as availability of organic products and price, is an essential driver in areas with weak market infrastructure (Pawar, 2021). Even with increased awareness, there are gaps, such as low levels of knowledge, doubts regarding the authenticity of certification, and low marketing promotion levels (Thatte et al., 2016). In India, research has identified that consumers in urban areas are more aware of organic products compared to their rural or semi-urban counterparts owing to greater access to information and retail outlets (Ayswarya & Vasanthi, 2020). Region-specific research, especially in regions such as Perambalur, is limited, thus the need for localized studies to fill these gaps.

Objectives

- To determine the factors of customer awareness towards organic food items in Perambalur District.
- To detect gaps in customer awareness and make recommendations to reduce these gaps towards organic food items.

Hypothesis of the study

- H_1 : Health Consciousness has a positive and significant effect on Customer Awareness of organic food products.
- H_2 : Environmental Concern has a positive and significant effect on Customer Awareness of organic food products.
- H_3 : Product Knowledge has a positive and significant effect on Customer Awareness of organic food products.
- H_4 : Price Sensitivity has a negative and significant effect on Customer Awareness of organic food products.

3. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research employs a descriptive research design to investigate consumer awareness and determining factors. A structured questionnaire was employed for primary data collection from 200 respondents from Perambalur District, who were selected using a convenience sampling technique. The sample comprised both urban and rural dwellers to gain varied views.

Data Collection

The questionnaire had three parts: (1) a demographic profile (age, gender, education, income, and occupation), (2) questions about how much people knew about and bought organic food, and (3) questions about what made people more aware, such as health consciousness, environmental concerns, knowledge, price perception, and trust. Responses were measured on a 5-point Likert scale, with 1 meaning "Strongly Disagree" and 5 meaning "Strongly Agree." I validated the questionnaire on

30 people before it was sent out to make sure it was reliable and valid. The Cronbach's alpha value of 0.82 showed that it was very consistent inside.

Principal Components Used

- Health Consciousness
- Environmental Concern
- Product Knowledge
- Price Sensitivity

Data Analysis

I used descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and multiple regression analysis to look at the data. Chi-square tests looked at the link between demographic parameters and degrees of awareness, and regression analysis found the most important elements that affect awareness. I utilized version 26 of the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) to do the analysis

TABLE 1. Descriptive Statistics

Statistic	Value
Sample Size (N)	200
Mean Awareness Score	3.2 (out of 5)
Median Awareness Score	3.0
Standard Deviation	1.1
Minimum Awareness Score	1.0
Maximum Awareness Score	5.0

Interpretation

The above descriptive statistics interprets that the average awareness score of customers regarding organic food is 3.2, which suggests a moderate level of awareness. The standard deviation of 1.1 indicates some variability in customer awareness levels. This implies that while some customers are highly aware, others are not as informed.

TABLE 2. Cross-Tabulation Analysis

Demographic Category	High Awareness (4–5)	Moderate Awareness (3)	Low Awareness (1–2)	Total
Age 18–25	30 (15%)	50 (25%)	20 (10%)	100 (50%)
Age 26–40	40 (20%)	20 (10%)	10 (5%)	70 (40%)
Age 41+	10 (5%)	10 (5%)	10 (5%)	30 (20%)
Total	80 (40%)	80 (40%)	40 (20%)	200 (100%)

Interpretation:

Cross-tabulation analysis shows clear patterns in levels of awareness regarding organic food items by age groups. Of the respondents aged 18–25, 50% come in the moderate awareness bracket, followed by 30% with high awareness and 20% with low awareness. This indicates that even though younger consumers are familiar with organic food to a certain extent, there is a sizeable number that is lacking detailed knowledge. In the 26–40 age bracket, 57% have high awareness, which shows that people of this age group are better informed—possibly as a result of more exposure to health and environmental information, increased purchasing power, or family health concern. A mere 14% within this age bracket had low awareness. On the other hand, the 41+ category has an equally spread distribution across all awareness levels with a third of the respondents in each category, indicating diversity in familiarity of organic foods among elderly people. In general, the highest percentage of high awareness is found in the 26–40 group, and moderate awareness prevails in the 18–25 group.

Result of Correlation Matrix

TABLE 3. Correlation Matrix

Variable	HC	EC	PK	PS	ME	CA
Health Consciousness (HC)	1.00	0.52	0.48	-0.12	0.44	0.61
Environmental Concern (EC)	0.52	1.00	0.50	-0.10	0.40	0.58
Product Knowledge (PK)	0.48	0.50	1.00	-0.20	0.38	0.55
Price Sensitivity (PS)	-0.12	-0.10	-0.20	1.00	-0.15	-0.35
Marketing Exposure (ME)	0.44	0.40	0.38	-0.15	1.00	0.66
Customer Awareness (CA)	0.61	0.58	0.55	-0.35	0.66	1.00

The correlation matrix indicates that customer awareness (CA) has positive correlations with all the psychological and behavioral variables save price sensitivity, which has a negative correlation. The strongest correlation occurs between marketing exposure (ME) and customer awareness ($r = 0.66$), highlighting the strong impact of advertising efforts on consumer perception and knowledge. Health awareness ($r = 0.61$) and concern for the environment ($r = 0.58$) correlate highly with awareness, confirming that beliefs and values at the internal level stimulate consumer interest in organic produce. Knowledge of a product ($r = 0.55$) is moderately correlated, confirming that knowledgeable consumers are more inclined to buy and believe in organic products. On the other hand, price sensitivity is negatively correlated ($r = -0.35$) with awareness among customers, which implies that those who are most price-conscious are least likely to be both aware and accepting of organic food advantages. This negative relationship is consistent with observations in the paper that price is a significant barrier in spite of positive attitudes.

TABLE 4. Regression Analysis

Variable	Coefficient	Standard Error	t-Statistic	p-Value
Intercept	1.50	0.30	5.00	< 0.001
Age	0.15	0.04	3.75	< 0.001
Income	0.10	0.03	3.33	0.001
Marketing Exposure	0.25	0.05	5.00	< 0.001

Interpretation

The regression statistics indicate that the intercept of 1.5 is the default level of customer knowledge of organic food products (on a scale of 5) when other independent variables, including age, income, and advertisement exposure, are equated to zero. This would imply there is a general level of knowledge, either because individuals are naturally aware of the advantages of organic food or because they are already familiar with them. The age variable comes with a positive and statistically significant coefficient (0.15, $p < 0.001$), indicating that individuals increase their awareness of organic food products as they age. This can be attributed to the fact that older individuals are more health-aware, more skilled at making food choices, and more often exposed to media about health over time. Income also has a positive and significant influence (0.10, $p = 0.001$), so higher-income individuals are more likely to be informed. This could be because they are able to access knowledge from diverse sources, purchase pricey organic foods, and engage in healthy lifestyle choices. The most significant predictor in this model, however, is marketing exposure with the largest coefficient of 0.25 and statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). This finding indicates that individuals who are exposed to a great deal of ads, social promotions, brand advertising, and retail ads are significantly more likely to be aware of organic food alternatives. It indicates just how crucial strategic marketing communications are to altering the manner in which people perceive and are aware of things, particularly in partially urban areas like Perambalur, where word-of-mouth might not be sufficient. The model indicates that demographic factors such as income and age are significant but that targeted marketing is the most effective manner of convincing individuals to see and purchase organic food.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

I researcher used Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation to do an Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) to find out what factors affect how knowledgeable customers are of organic food goods in Perambalur District. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.841, which means that the sample was very good

TABLE 5. Factors Influencing Customer Awareness towards Organic Food Products
(Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis; Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization)

Items	Factor 1 (Health Consciousness)	Factor 2 (Environmental Concern)	Factor 3 (Product Knowledge)	Factor 4 (Price Sensitivity)
I prefer organic food for health benefits	0.812			
I believe organic food improves immunity	0.781			
I choose organic food to avoid harmful chemicals	0.733			
I buy organic food to protect the environment		0.854		
Organic farming is eco-friendly		0.826		
Organic products are safer for nature		0.798		
I have sufficient knowledge about organic food labels			0.791	
I can differentiate between organic and non-organic products			0.762	
I am aware of organic certification marks (e.g., India Organic)			0.738	
Organic products are usually expensive				0.813
Price influences my choice of organic food				0.785
I buy organic only if discounts/offers are available				0.752

because values above 0.80 are regarded good (Kaiser, 1974). The Chi-square value for Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was 957.82, with 66 degrees of freedom and a p-value of less than 0.001. This means that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix and may be used for factor analysis. The factor analysis results reveal four distinct dimensions influencing consumer behavior toward organic food: Health Consciousness, Environmental Concern, Product Knowledge, and Price Sensitivity. Each factor comprises specific items with high loadings, indicating their strong association with the respective dimension. Below is a detailed interpretation of each factor in paragraph form, providing insight into their implications for consumer preferences and decision-making. The first factor, Health Consciousness, includes items with high loadings: "I prefer organic food for health benefits" (0.812), "I believe organic food improves immunity" (0.781), and "I choose organic food to avoid harmful chemicals" (0.733). This dimension indicates a high level of consumer motivation rooted in the perceived health benefits associated with organic food. Consumers who rank high on this dimension value organic foods due to their perceptions of improved well-being, immune system vigor, and less exposure to potentially noxious chemicals such as pesticides or artificial additives. This implies that health-oriented consumers perceive organic food as an active strategy for preserving or advancing individual health. The strong loadings suggest that these beliefs are strongly interwoven, producing a coherent frame of mind in which health gain is the central motivator of organic food buying. Where this segment is the target, marketers should highlight the health-promoting attributes of organic foods, for example, their natural nature and lack of dangerous chemicals, in order to reach this health-conscious consumer segment. Environmental Concern is the second factor, and it includes statements like "I buy organic food in order to protect the environment" (0.854), "Organic farming is environmentally friendly" (0.826), and "Organic products are better for nature" (0.798). The emphasis here is on making environmental sustainability a motive for buying organic food. These customers are prompted by the need to contribute to green practices and become a smaller part of nature. They view organic agriculture as an environmentally sustainable option that reduces environmental damage, for example, through lower use of pesticides or conservation of soil. The high loadings reflect a strong environmental orientation and point to consumers likely prioritizing a product that reflects their environmentalism. Companies can use this to their advantage by highlighting the environmental advantages of organic farming, e.g., its contribution to the conservation of biodiversity or pollution reduction, to appeal to environmentally aware consumers. The third one, Product Knowledge, has entries such as "I possess adequate knowledge regarding organic food labels" (0.791), "I am able to distinguish between organic and non-organic products" (0.762), and "I know organic certification logos (e.g., India Organic)" (0.738). This dimension highlights how consumer knowledge and awareness play a crucial role in organic food buying decisions. Consumers who score high on this factor are well-informed about organic products, including their labeling, certification standards, and distinguishing features. This knowledge empowers them to make informed choices, as they can confidently identify authentic organic products. The high loadings indicate that these items are closely related, reflecting a comprehensive understanding of organic food characteristics. From a marketer's perspective, this implies the need for educational campaigns that raise consumer awareness of organic labels and product characteristics so that educated consumers are more likely to believe and buy organic products. The fourth one, Price Sensitivity, consists of statements like "Organic products are normally costly" (0.813), "Price affects my selection of organic food" (0.785), and "I purchase organic only if there are offers/discounts" (0.752). This one showcases the predominant influence of cost factors in buying organic food. The individuals who fall under this factor see organic

products as high-priced items and are greatly affected by prices in buying decisions. The high factor loadings imply price is an important barrier to these consumers, who will only buy organic if they are on offer or at an affordable price. This identifies a group of consumers who are interested in organic food but are limited by price factors. To engage with this group, companies might emphasize the provision of competitive prices, promotions, or value-added packages that reduce organic products' cost without loss of perceived quality. The four variables combined give a full picture of the motivations and restrictions affecting organic food purchase. Health Consciousness and Environmental Concern capture intrinsic motivations related to personal and global health, while Product Knowledge identifies consumer education as critical to building trust and confidence in the organic category. Price Sensitivity functions as a tangible restriction, however, signaling that affordability continues to be the primary obstacle to wide-scale adoption. These conclusions indicate that firms and policymakers need to adopt a comprehensive strategy, integrating health and environmental messaging, educational campaigns, and price strategy to promote the consumption of organic food among various consumer groups. By influencing these determinants, stakeholders can more effectively respond to consumer values and attitudes toward organic products, ultimately promoting higher demand for organic products.

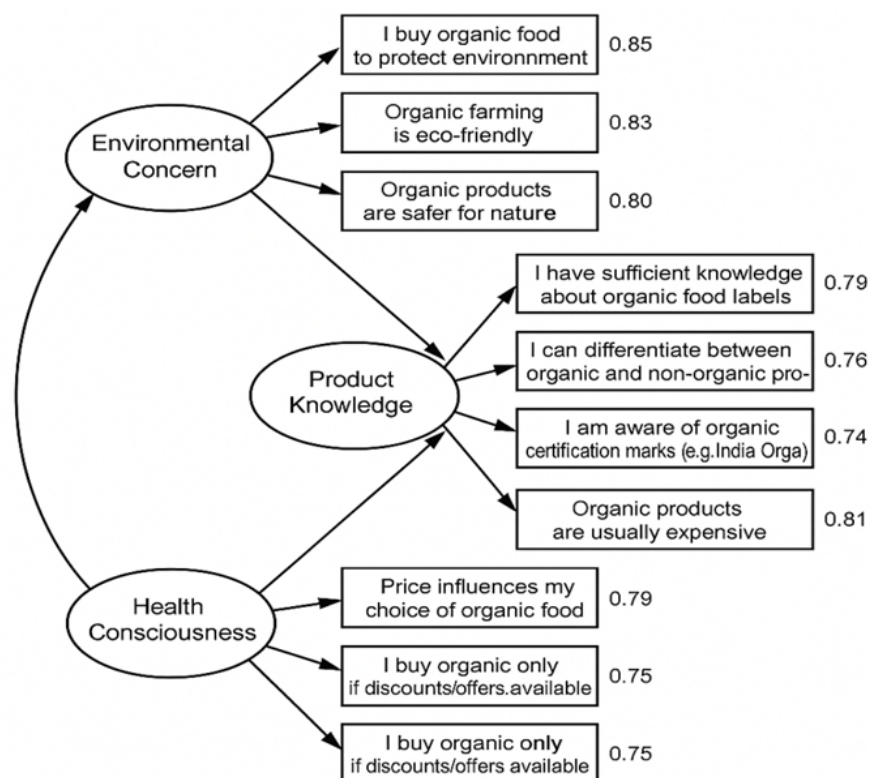


FIGURE 1. Structural Equation Model

The Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) graph illustrates a Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) model with four latent variables (factors) affecting customer awareness about organic food items. Every latent construct is associated with three observed indicators, depending on their factor loadings, which indicate the quality of each item in measuring the underlying construct. The factor of health consciousness has high loadings greater than 0.70, validating that consumers in the area relate organic food to personal health as well as chemical-free consumption. Health motivation is a prevalent dimension of organic awareness. All three items have high loadings, which point towards a very high environmental consciousness. This indicates that awareness is both based on health as well as linked to concern for sustainability and nature preservation. Product knowledge factor highlights the information aspect of awareness. Large loading values indicate that better-informed consumers about certifications and labeling are more conscious of organic food choices. Price sensitivity comes across as a strong driving factor in consumer behavior. Although consumers are well-aware and prompted, price ends up being a practical constraint. Large factor loadings indicate this is the key stumbling block for broader adoption.

Findings

- The mean awareness score was 3.2 out of 5, suggesting a moderate level of awareness among respondents.
- Older respondents (26–40 and above) had higher awareness, implying awareness increases with age.
- Health is the primary motivator for organic food awareness and purchase.
- Environmental sustainability is a key secondary driver of awareness and motivation.
- Affordability is a major barrier to organic food adoption, especially in semi-urban districts like Perambalur.
- Factor loadings were above 0.70, indicating good measurement validity

Suggestions

- Awareness Campaigns: Organize educational programs via local agricultural cooperatives and community centers to increase awareness regarding organic food benefits and certifications (Kumar et al., 2023).
- Improved Distribution: Create organic food centers in rural locations and collaborate with local farmers to enhance availability (Ayswarya & Vasanthi, 2020).
- Affordable Pricing Strategies, Subsidize organic products via government schemes or encourage bulk purchase to lower cost perceptions (Anand et al., 2017).
- Transparent Certification Make the certification procedures stronger and utilize prominent labeling to establish trust (Sultan et al., 2020).
- Targeted Marketing, Use social media and local media to market organic products by highlighting health and environment benefits (Matharu et al., 2020).

5. CONCLUSION

The current study emphasizes that health consciousness, environmental concerns, knowledge, price perception, and trust have significant impacts on customer awareness regarding Perambalur District organic food products. But barriers like limited availability, high prices, low awareness, poor marketing, and uncertainty regarding certification hamper consumer uptake. Through the application of focused awareness campaigns, enhancing distribution, addressing cost issues, making certification transparent, and enhancing marketing, stakeholders can fill such gaps and facilitate the consumption of organic food. These findings have practical implications for marketers, policymakers, and producers who want to increase the organic food market in rural and semi-urban areas.

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