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DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMER PREFERENCE AND SATISFACTION TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS: INVESTIGATING THE MEDIATING EFFECT OF HEALTH CONSCIOUSNESS

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Abstract
This study investigates the factors influencing consumer behavior within the rapidly expanding organic food market in Chennai. Specifically, it examines the determinants of consumer preference and satisfaction, while analyzing the mediating role of health consciousness in the decision-making process. As urban lifestyle diseases rise, consumers are increasingly pivoting toward chemical-free alternatives. Data was collected via a structured survey of 682 organic food consumers across diverse demographics in Chennai. The findings reveal that while product quality, perceived nutritional value, and environmental concern significantly drive preferences, health consciousness acts as a powerful mediator that strengthens the relationship between these determinants and overall consumer satisfaction. Despite high interest, price sensitivity and trust in organic certification remain primary hurdles. The study concludes that for organic brands to thrive, they must move beyond general "green" marketing and focus on transparent, health-centric value propositions. These insights offer a roadmap for marketers and policymakers to enhance organic adoption in metropolitan India.

Keywords: Consumer's preference, Organic food products, consumer satisfaction, Mediating Effect and health consciousness.

Introduction

Growing environmental awareness, changing consumer lifestyles, and increased health consciousness have all contributed to a significant shift in the world's food consumption patterns in recent years. Among these developments, there has been a noticeable rise in demand for organic food items due to worries about pesticide residues, food safety, and the long-term implications of conventional farming on human health and ecological balance. Organic food, which is made without synthetic chemicals, artificial preservatives, or genetically modified organisms, is becoming more and more popular among consumers searching for natural, healthier, and environmentally responsible solutions.The increasing availability of organic products in supermarkets, specialist stores, and online platforms has caused consumer tastes to change from being price-driven to being quality-oriented and health-driven. In addition to its nutritional benefits, consumers are increasingly associating eating organic food with better health, ecological lifestyle, and social responsibility. At the same time, sustaining long-term loyalty and recurring business depends on customers being satisfied with organic food products. Customer satisfaction is influenced by a number of factors, including product quality, safety, availability, affordability, the validity of organic labels, and the whole shopping experience. Understanding the elements that affect customer happiness can be very helpful to legislators, retailers, and marketers who want to boost consumer trust in organic products.

Organic Food Products

Organic food items have garnered a lot of attention in recent years due to people's increased awareness of their health, the environment, and ethical consumerism. As consumers become more conscious of the quality and safety of the food they eat, many families are choosing organic items. Organic food is produced without the use of synthetic fertilisers, chemical pesticides, growth hormones, artificial additives, or genetically modified organisms (GMOs). Instead, they rely on natural farming methods that give priority to biodiversity, soil health, ecological balance, and sustainable agricultural practices.Organic food products are a part of a growing global movement toward sustainability, welfare, and environmental responsibility. Customers' preference for safer, healthier products is reflected in their rising popularity. Understanding the dynamics of organic food consumption is crucial for policymakers, marketers, farmers, and researchers since it exposes shifting consumer behaviour patterns and the direction of the food industry. The total amount shipped in 2019–20 was 6.389 lakh MT. Exports of organic food were valued at approximately INR 4,686 crore, or 689 million USD. Organic products are shipped to the United States, the European Union, Canada, Switzerland, Australia, Japan, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, New Zealand, Vietnam, and other nations. In terms of export value realisation, processed foods like soy meal (45.87%), oilseeds (13.25%), plantation crop products (like tea and coffee, 9.61%), cereals and millets (8.19%), spices and condiments (5.20%), dry fruits (4.98%), sugar (3.91), medicinal plants (3.84%), and other products are leading.

Review of literature

Age and health consciousness have a favourable impact on consumers' purchasing decisions, and older consumers like organic products because they believe they contain more vitamins and minerals than conventional ones. In **2019, Afonso et al.** Health is viewed by organic consumers as the enjoyment they get from eating a high-quality, tasty food product. **(Ditlevsen, K. et. al. 2019)**.

Basha and Lal (2019) investigated the attitudes and behavioural intents of Indian consumers with regard to buying organic food, providing insightful information about the factors influencing organic food consumption in a developing market. Their research demonstrates how perceptions of product quality, health, and the environment all influence Indian consumers' sentiments toward organic foods. The authors discovered that customers' perceptions of organic foods as safer, more nutrient-dense, and chemical-free are largely influenced by health consciousness. Their propensity to buy organic products is strengthened by this notion, which is consistent with the global trend that health continues to be the primary driver of organic food consumption.

Singh and Verma (2021) investigated what influences Indian consumers' loyalty and level of satisfaction with organic food items. According to their research, customer attitudes have a big influence on satisfaction, which in turn fuels loyalty. Crucially, they verified that the association between customer attitudes and satisfaction is strengthened by health consciousness acting as a mediating factor. According to the study, consumers who are more health-conscious not only have favourable opinions of organic products but also express greater contentment, which increases their propensity to make additional purchases. These results highlight how important behavioural and psychological elements are in influencing marketing tactics and patterns of organic food consumption.

Yadav et al. (2024) examine how 300 respondents in the Delhi NCR region's attitudes about organic food are influenced by awareness, beliefs, and market dynamics. The study concludes that while perceptions of accessibility and value are greatly influenced by market dynamics (such as availability, price, and faith in certification), consumer attitudes are heavily influenced by perceived health and environmental benefits. Location had an impact on supply and market convenience views, but it had no direct effect on attitudes toward organic food itself. The study emphasises how important supply-side elements and awareness are in encouraging sustainable consumption habits.

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According to Baş et al.'s (2024) investigation on consumer motives in Turkey, decisions to buy organic food are heavily influenced by functional values (such as product qualities and health), emotional values, social values, and conditional factors. The authors point out that value-based incentives take precedence over socioeconomic factors, which are occasionally significant. This highlights a change in consumer behaviour that reflects shifting worldwide consumer priorities toward sustainability and health, where intrinsic judgements of benefit, ethics, and wellbeing exceed simple demographic indicators.

Guumber (2025) investigates how consumers' perceptions and buying habits of organic food items are influenced by trust, cultural origins, and sustainability. A survey of 556 people in the Delhi NCR area reveals that while a feeling of "connection to roots" (tradition, culture, naturalness) is not a significant determinant, consumer trust in organic certification and supply-chain transparency significantly increases the frequency of organic food purchases. The authors come to the conclusion that establishing and preserving trust is essential for encouraging the use of organic food, overshadowing underlying cultural motivations. The results highlight trust as a key lever for stakeholders looking to increase demand for organic food.

Statement of the Problem

Despite the increasing availability of organic food products in Chennai, a significant disconnect remains between **consumer health awareness** and **consistent purchasing behavior**. While the surge in lifestyle-related diseases has heightened health consciousness, this mental awareness does not always translate into long-term consumer preference and sustained satisfaction. It is unclear to what extent **Health Consciousness** acts as a driver versus a barrier. For some, it creates a preference for organic food; for others, it leads to a preference for "home-grown" or "farm-direct" non-certified produce, bypassing the formal organic market. Without understanding these determinants, organic producers and retailers in Chennai cannot effectively bridge the gap between a consumer's *desire* for health and their *satisfaction* with the products currently available on the shelf. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating how health consciousness mediates the relationship between product attributes and consumer outcomes.

Research Questions

- Does high health consciousness automatically lead to a preference for organic brands in Chennai?
- How much does the "Trust Factor" (certification and labeling) impact final consumer satisfaction?
- Is the current organic market in Chennai meeting the nutritional expectations of health-conscious buyers?

Objectives of the Study

- To identify the key determinants of consumer preference and satisfaction for organic food products.
- To examine the mediating effect of Health Consciousness on the relationship between product attributes and consumer preference.
- To analyze the demographic variations (age, income, and education level) in consumer attitudes toward organic food products.

Research Methodology

The nature of this study is analytical and descriptive. The survey method is used in the investigation. The purpose of the study is to experimentally determine the nature of the relationship between consumers' personal and demographic characteristics and their purchasing patterns, usage, preferences, and satisfaction with organic food products. A questionnaire is used in the study to collect data. The core data was gathered from 682 customers using a Google Forms questionnaire. Information has been gathered about consumer preferences for organic food products, consumer satisfaction with organic food products, and consumer purchasing patterns and usage of organic food products. They underwent statistical analysis, including percentage, one-way ANOVA, chi square test andcorrelation analysis. After interpretations, recommendations have been made to raise consumer satisfaction with organic food products going forward and to improve the quality of organic food products.

Hypothesis of the Study

- There is no association between demographic profiles of the respondents and Consumers Purchasing Pattern and Usage of Organic Food Products.
- There is no correlation among Perceived Quality, Safety Concern, Environmental Concern, Price Sensitivity, Availability & Accessibility, Awareness & Knowledge and Health Consciousness of organic food products.

Limitations of the Study

The study was limited to Chennai city of Tamil Nadu. There could only be 682 respondents in total.

Results and Discussions

Table – 1 Years of purchasing and using organic food products –wise Frequency Distribution of the Respondents

Years of purchasing and using organic food products	Frequency	Percentage
Less than 2 Years	330	48.4
2 – 3 Years	93	13.6
3 – 4 Years	22	3.2
4 – 5 Years	92	13.5
More than 5 Years	145	21.3
Total	682	100.0

The above table shows, 48.4 % of the sample respondents have purchasing and using of Organic Food Products less than 2 years, 13.6 % of the sample respondents' have purchasing and using of Organic Food Products from 2 - 3 years, 3.2 % of the sample respondents' have purchasing and using of Organic Food Products from 3 - 4 years, 13.5 % of the sample respondents' have purchasing and using of Organic Food Products from 4 - 5 years and 21.3 % of the sample respondents' have purchasing and using of Organic Food Products more than 5 years. Hence, we conclude that maximum 48.4 % of the sample respondents have purchasing and using of Organic Food Products less than 2 years which shows the people to know about Organic Food Products in the recent years.

Table – 2 Place of purchase of organic food products –wise Frequency Distribution of the Respondents

Place of purchase of organic food products	Frequency	Percentage
Grocery shops	282	41.3
Departmental stores	191	28.0
Direct from Farms	44	6.5
Organic food stores	64	9.4
Online stores	101	14.8
Total	682	100.0

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The above table shows, 41.3 % of the sample respondents are purchase of organic food products from grocery shops, 28 % of the sample respondents are purchase of organic food products from departmental stores, 6.5 % of the sample respondents are purchase of organic food products directly from farms, 9.4 % of the sample respondents are purchase of organic food products from organic food stores and 14.8 % of the sample respondents are purchase of organic food products from online stores. Hence, we conclude that maximum 41.3 % of the consumers are purchase of organic food products from grocery shops. It shows the organic food products are also available grocery shops.

H_0: There is no significant difference between educational qualification of the respondents and Consumer Preference towards Organic Food Products.

Table – 3 Educational qualification of the respondents with respect to Consumer Preference towards Organic Food Products - One-way ANOVA

Consumer Preference towards Organic Food Products	Educational Qualification	Mean	SD	F Value	p Value	H_0
Perceived Quality	Up to HSC	4.1667	.00000	10.646	0.000	Rejected
	UG Degree	4.2176	.39037			
	PG Degree	4.3923	.57458			
	Professional Degree	4.5290	.56471			
Safety Concern	Up to HSC	4.7500	.00000	15.238	0.000	Rejected
	UG Degree	4.1093	.54079			
	PG Degree	4.3027	.66676			
	Professional Degree	4.5054	.52305			
Environmental Concern	Up to HSC	4.2500	.00000	9.577	0.000	Rejected
	UG Degree	4.1647	.43649			
	PG Degree	4.2268	.57142			
	Professional Degree	4.5761	.42121			
Price Sensitivity	Up to HSC	4.1667	.00000	3.225	0.022	Rejected
	UG Degree	3.8189	.47550			
	PG Degree	3.8756	.78713			
	Professional Degree	4.0000	.25337			
Availability & Accessibility	Up to HSC	4.1667	.00000	22.909	0.000	Rejected
	UG Degree	3.7445	.58447			
	PG Degree	4.0363	.56407			
	Professional Degree	3.5000	.38006			
Awareness & Knowledge	Up to HSC	3.8333	.00000	25.358	0.000	Rejected
	UG Degree	3.8867	.56602			
	PG Degree	4.2446	.54759			
	Professional Degree	3.8116	.53357			
Health Consciousness	Up to HSC	4.1429	.00000	4.286	0.005	Rejected
	UG Degree	4.0855	.53247			
	PG Degree	4.2398	.82669			
	Professional Degree	4.3944	.88688			

The above table indicates the results:

Perceived Quality: The ANOVA result (F = 10.646, p = 0.000) indicates a significant difference. Respondents with Professional Degrees reported the highest perceived quality (Mean = 4.53), followed by PG Degree holders (Mean = 4.39). H_0 is rejected. Perception of product quality differs across educational levels.

Safety Concern: The ANOVA results (F = 15.238, p = 0.000) show a **significant difference**. Those **Up to HSC** and **Professional Degree** holders show comparatively higher safety concern (Means = 4.75 and 4.50). H_0 is rejected. Educational qualification significantly affects safety concern.

Environmental Concern: A significant difference is observed (F = 9.577, p = 0.000). Respondents with Professional Degrees express the highest environmental concern (Mean = 4.58). H_0 is rejected. Environmental attitudes vary across educational levels.

Price Sensitivity: The difference is statistically significant (F = 3.225, p = 0.022). Respondents with Up to HSC and Professional Degrees show slightly higher price sensitivity (Means = 4.17 and 4.00). H_0 is rejected. Educational qualification influences price sensitivity.

Availability & Accessibility: The ANOVA (F = 22.909, p = 0.000) indicates significant variation. The highest mean is among PG Degree holders (Mean = 4.04), while the lowest is for respondents with Professional Degrees (Mean = 3.50). H_0 is rejected. Perception of availability differs across groups.

Awareness & Knowledge: The ANOVA (F = 25.358, p = 0.000) confirms a highly significant difference. PG Degree respondents exhibit the highest awareness and knowledge (Mean = 4.24). H_0 is rejected. Awareness and knowledge are strongly influenced by educational background.

Health Consciousness: A significant difference is observed (F = 4.286, p = 0.005). Respondents with Professional Degrees reported the highest health consciousness (Mean = 4.39). H_0 is rejected. Health consciousness significantly varies across educational levels.

Across all seven dimensions of consumer preference, the p-values are less than 0.05, indicating that educational qualification significantly influences consumer preference. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected because the ANOVA results show statistically significant differences based on educational qualification. Professional Degree holders consistently show higher means in perceived quality, environmental concern, and health consciousness. PG Degree holders show strong awareness and accessibility perception. Respondents Up to HSC show high safety concern and price sensitivity. Thus, educational qualification is an important determinant of consumer preference for organic food products.

Ho: There is no correlation among Perceived Quality (PQ), Safety Concern (SC), Environmental Concern (EC), Price Sensitivity (PS), Availability& Accessibility (AA), Awareness & Knowledge (AK) and Health Consciousness (HC) of consumer preference towards organic food products.

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Table - 4 Correlation among Perceived Quality (PQ), Safety Concern (SC), Environmental Concern (EC), Price Sensitivity (PS), Availability& Accessibility (AA), Awareness & Knowledge (AK) and Health Consciousness (HC) of consumer preference towards organic food products.

		PQ	SC	EC	PS	AA	AK	HC
PQ	Pearson Correlation	1	.542**	.477**	.416**	.150**	.361**	.538**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**
	N	682	682	682	682	682	682	682
SC	Pearson Correlation	.542**	1	.734**	.418**	.429**	.523**	.575**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**		**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**
	N	682	682	682	682	682	682	682
EC	Pearson Correlation	.477**	.734**	1	.273**	.257**	.525**	.404**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	**.000**		**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**
	N	682	682	682	682	682	682	682
PS	Pearson Correlation	.416**	.418**	.273**	1	.510**	.312**	.622**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**		**.000**	**.000**	**.000**
	N	682	682	682	682	682	682	682
AA	Pearson Correlation	.150**	.429**	.257**	.510**	1	.486**	.489**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**		**.000**	**.000**
	N	682	682	682	682	682	682	682
AK	Pearson Correlation	.361**	.523**	.525**	.312**	.486**	1	.576**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**		**.000**
	N	682	682	682	682	682	682	682
HC	Pearson Correlation	.538**	.575**	.404**	.622**	.489**	.576**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	**.000**	
	N	682	682	682	682	682	682	682

Table 4 shows that all correlation coefficients are **positive and statistically significant at the 1% level ($p < 0.01$)**. Therefore, the null hypothesis is **rejected**, confirming that **significant correlations exist among all the studied variables**.

1. **Strong Interrelationships Among Core Factors**
   - The strongest correlations are observed between:
     - Safety Concern (SC) and Environmental Concern (EC) (r = 0.734)
     - Price Sensitivity (PS) and Health Consciousness (HC) (r = 0.622)
     - Awareness & Knowledge (AK) and Health Consciousness (HC) (r = 0.576)
     - Safety Concern (SC) and Health Consciousness (HC) (r = 0.575)

   These results indicate that consumers who are highly concerned about safety or the environment tend to be more health conscious and price sensitive when choosing organic foods.
2. **Moderate Correlations Among Perception-Related Variables**
   - Perceived Quality (PQ) **shows moderate positive correlations with:**
     - Safety Concern (SC) **(r = 0.542)**
     - Health Consciousness (HC) **(r = 0.538)**
     - Environmental Concern (EC) **(r = 0.477)**

   This suggests that consumers who value quality also consider health and environmental aspects as important drivers of organic food preference.
3. **Positive Link Between Availability and Perception Factors**
   - Availability & Accessibility (AA) is positively correlated with:
     - Price Sensitivity **(r = 0.510)**
     - Awareness & Knowledge **(r = 0.486)**
     - Health Consciousness **(r = 0.489)**

   This implies that improved availability may enhance consumers' awareness and indirectly shape their health-driven preferences.
4. **Awareness & Knowledge (AK) Shows Wide Influence**
   - AK is strongly correlated with:
     - Environmental Concern (EC) **(r = 0.525)**
     - Safety Concern (SC) **(r = 0.523)**
     - Health Consciousness (HC) **(r = 0.576)**

   Higher awareness leads to stronger concern for safety and environmental sustainability, directly supporting the adoption of organic products.

The correlation matrix confirms that **consumer preference for organic food is multidimensional**, influenced by interrelated psychological, perceptual, and knowledge-based factors. Health consciousness acts as a central connecting variable, showing significant correlations with all other factors.

Conclusion

This study offers a thorough examination of the variables affecting customer behaviour, satisfaction, and buying habits in the organic food industry. The results show that consumers are primarily young (under 25), male, live in cities, and have a high level of education (UG degree holders). The growing knowledge among students and the middle-class segment (income between Rs. 25,000 and Rs. 50,000) is a key finding from the demographic data, indicating that organic food is becoming a more popular lifestyle choice across a wider range of socioeconomic strata rather than an exclusive luxury. In the organic food industry, there is currently a high degree of awareness but selective consumption. The transition from "occasional" to "staple" consumption requires three strategic pillars: open safety communication, affordability, and availability in local grocery stores. Marketers and lawmakers should use social media, the primary source of awareness, to better educate the younger generation while addressing the price-value gap for middle-class households. By strengthening the supply chain to improve accessibility and maintaining the "health-first" narrative, the organic business may move from a restricted urban trend to a sustainable mainstream market.

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