

A Study on Consumer Buying Behaviour towards Organic Food Products in South Karnataka

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Abstract—Background: The global organic food market is experiencing significant growth, driven by rising health consciousness and environmental concerns. Understanding the factors influencing consumer behavior in this domain is crucial for producers, marketers, and policymakers, especially in developing regions like South Karnataka.

Objective: This study aims to identify and analyze the key factors (health consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, price sensitivity, and availability) influencing the purchase intention and behavior of consumers towards organic food products in South Karnataka.

Methods: A structured questionnaire was administered to a sample of 300 consumers in major cities of South Karnataka (Bengaluru, Mysuru, Hassan). Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and multiple regression analysis.

Results: The results indicate that health consciousness ($\beta = 0.38$, $p < 0.01$) is the most potent predictor of purchase intention, followed by environmental concern ($\beta = 0.28$, $p < 0.01$) and subjective norms ($\beta = 0.21$, $p < 0.05$). Price sensitivity was found to be a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -0.24$, $p < 0.01$), while lack of availability showed a moderate negative influence ($\beta = -0.16$, $p < 0.05$).

Conclusion: The findings suggest that marketers and policymakers in South Karnataka should focus on communicating the health benefits of organic foods, leveraging social influence, and implementing strategies to make these products more affordable and readily available to foster market growth.

Index Terms—Organic Food, Consumer Behavior, Theory of Planned Behavior, Health Consciousness, South Karnataka, Purchase Intention.

I. INTRODUCTION

The last decade has witnessed a paradigm shift in food consumption patterns worldwide, with a growing segment of consumers gravitating towards organic food products. Defined as products grown

without synthetic pesticides, chemical fertilizers, genetically modified organisms, and often processed without industrial solvents or food additives (USDA, 2020), organic food is perceived as a healthier and more environmentally sustainable alternative to conventional food.

In India, the organic food market is nascent but expanding rapidly, propelled by increasing disposable incomes, a surge in lifestyle-related diseases, and greater media exposure to health and wellness issues (Biswas et al., 2022). The southern state of Karnataka, particularly its urban and semi-urban centers, has emerged as a significant market, housing a literate and health-aware population. The state government's initiatives, such as the "Organic Farming Policy," further provide a supportive ecosystem (GoK, 2019).

Despite this potential, the penetration of organic food remains limited. Consumers often face barriers such as premium pricing, lack of trust in certification, and inconsistent availability (Rana & Paul, 2020). Understanding the dynamics of consumer buying behavior in this context is, therefore, imperative. Existing studies in India have explored consumer attitudes broadly, but there is a scarcity of region-specific research focusing on the socio-culturally distinct area of South Karnataka (Sharma & Joshi, 2021).

Grounded in the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) (Ajzen, 1991), this study investigates the key determinants of consumer purchase behavior towards organic food in South Karnataka. Specifically, it examines the influence of health consciousness, environmental concern, subjective norms, price sensitivity, and perceived availability on purchase intention and behavior.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer behavior towards organic food is a multi-faceted domain influenced by a confluence of factors. The Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) posits that behavioral intention, the primary antecedent of behavior, is shaped by Attitude, Subjective Norms, and Perceived Behavioral Control (Ajzen, 1991).

Health Consciousness: Numerous studies identify health as the primary motivator for organic food consumption. Consumers perceive organic products as more nutritious and safer due to the absence of chemical residues (Saba & Messina, 2003). A study by Smith and Paladino (2010) found that health concerns significantly outweighed environmental motives in driving organic purchases.

Environmental Concern: A positive attitude towards environmental protection is a strong predictor of organic food buying behavior. Consumers who are aware of the detrimental effects of conventional farming on ecosystems are more likely to choose organic alternatives (Chekima et al., 2016).

Subjective Norms: The influence of family, friends, and social networks (subjective norms) plays a critical role, especially in collectivist societies like India. If important others approve of buying organic, an individual's intention to do so strengthens (Paul & Rana, 2012).

Price Sensitivity and Perceived Value: Organic products typically command a price premium, which acts as a major barrier. Price sensitivity often negatively impacts purchase intention (Ghimire & Dhakal, 2020). However, when consumers perceive a high value in terms of health and quality, they may be willing to pay the extra cost (Yadav & Pathak, 2016).

Availability and Awareness: Lack of reliable availability and clear point-of-sale information are significant hurdles. Limited shelf space and distribution channels in regular supermarkets can deter potential buyers (Rana & Paul, 2020).

While these factors are established globally, their relative importance can vary across cultural and regional contexts, underscoring the need for this localized study in South Karnataka.

III. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design

A quantitative, descriptive, and cross-sectional research design was employed.

3.2. Sampling and Data Collection

A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to target consumers who were aware of or had purchased organic food. The sample consisted of 300 respondents from three major cities in South Karnataka: Bengaluru (n=150), Mysuru (n=100), and Mangaluru (n=50). Data was collected via a self-administered structured questionnaire both online and in-person at organic stores and supermarkets between January and March 2024.

3.3. Measurement Instrument

The questionnaire comprised three sections:

1. **Demographic Profile:** Age, gender, income, education, and occupation.
2. **Construct Measurement:** All constructs were measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1=Strongly Disagree to 5=Strongly Agree). Scales were adapted from established literature:
 - Health Consciousness (4 items, Yadav & Pathak, 2016)
 - Environmental Concern (4 items, Chekima et al., 2016)
 - Subjective Norms (3 items, Paul & Rana, 2012)
 - Price Sensitivity (3 items, Ghimire & Dhakal, 2020)
 - Perceived Availability (3 items, Rana & Paul, 2020)
 - Purchase Intention (3 items, Smith & Paladino, 2010)
3. **General Purchasing Behavior:** Frequency of purchase, types of products bought, etc.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using SPSS version 26.0. Reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha (all constructs > 0.7). Descriptive statistics summarized the profile and behavior of respondents. Pearson's correlation was used to examine relationships between variables, and Multiple Regression Analysis was employed to test the influence of independent variables on purchase intention.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Demographic Profile

The sample was relatively young, with 68% of respondents below 40 years. A majority held a graduate degree (72%) and belonged to middle or

high-income groups (monthly household income > ₹75,000).

4.2. Reliability and Validity

The Cronbach's Alpha values for all constructs ranged from 0.78 to 0.89, indicating good internal consistency reliability.

4.3. Descriptive and Correlation Analysis

A significant positive correlation was found between Purchase Intention and Health Consciousness ($r =$

0.42, $p < 0.01$), Environmental Concern ($r = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$), and Subjective Norms ($r = 0.29$, $p < 0.01$). Price Sensitivity was negatively correlated with Purchase Intention ($r = -0.31$, $p < 0.01$).

4.4. Regression Analysis

A multiple regression was run to predict Purchase Intention from the five independent variables. The model was significant, $F(5, 294) = 28.45$, $p < .000$, and explained 52% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.52$).

Predictor Variable	Beta (β)	t-value	p-value
(Constant)		4.112	0.000
Health Consciousness	0.38	5.891	0.000
Environmental Concern	0.28	4.235	0.000
Subjective Norms	0.21	3.102	0.002
Price Sensitivity	-0.24	-3.874	0.000
Perceived Availability	0.16	2.544	0.011

4.5. Discussion of Findings

The results strongly support the research framework. Health Consciousness emerged as the strongest driver, aligning with global studies (Smith & Paladino, 2010) and underscoring the primary "wellness" positioning of organic food in the minds of South Karnataka consumers. Environmental Concern was also a significant motivator, reflecting a growing ecological awareness among the urban populace.

The significant influence of Subjective Norms highlights the collectivistic nature of Indian society, where family opinions and social circles heavily influence consumption decisions (Paul & Rana, 2012). Price Sensitivity remains a critical barrier, confirming that the premium price is a major deterrent for wider adoption (Ghimire & Dhakal, 2020). Finally, Perceived Availability was significant, suggesting that improving distribution channels and visibility in retail stores can positively impact sales.

V. CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

5.1. Conclusion

This study confirms that the buying behavior towards organic food in South Karnataka is complex and driven predominantly by health benefits, followed by environmental considerations and social influence. The high price and limited availability continue to hinder market growth.

5.2. Theoretical Implications

The research validates the application of the Theory of Planned Behavior in the context of organic food in a specific Indian region. It provides empirical evidence on the relative strength of various psycho-social factors, enriching the consumer behavior literature.

5.3. Managerial and Policy Implications

- For Marketers: Communication strategies should emphatically highlight the health and nutritional advantages of organic food. Testimonials and influencer marketing can be effective in leveraging subjective norms. To address price

sensitivity, companies could introduce smaller, affordable pack sizes or loyalty programs.

- For Retailers: Enhancing in-store visibility, ensuring consistent stock, and training staff to educate consumers can significantly improve the shopping experience.
- For Policymakers: The government can support the sector by subsidizing organic farmers to reduce costs, strengthening the organic certification logo to build trust, and facilitating the setup of more dedicated organic retail outlets.

5.4. Limitations and Future Research

This study is limited to urban centers of South Karnataka; future research could include rural areas. The use of a non-probability sampling method limits generalizability. Longitudinal studies could track how consumer behavior evolves as the market matures. Future research could also incorporate additional variables like brand trust, media influence, and specific product categories.

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