

A Behavioral Study on Consumer Choices in the Organic Food Industry

Megha L M¹ and Dr. Sanjeev Kumar Tiwari²

Research Scholar, Department of Commerce¹

Associate Professor, Department of Commerce²

NIILM University, Kaithal, Haryana, India

Abstract: *Organic food is always popular. Organic food's advantages are widely established, and with so many people dying from inadequate diet, awareness will grow. Organic food sales are increasing 9% yearly (Wood, 2019). The worldwide organic food and drink market will grow from \$115,984 million in 2015 to \$327,600 million in 2022, according Dwivedi (2016). Western Mumbai consumers' organic food opinions are studied. Our sample population's demographics, knowledge, challenges, and motives for organic food were explored. The 318 research participants completed a standardized questionnaire. Although organic food is popular, understanding and belief are limited. Organic food is recommended for safety and nourishment. Established organic food customers are unaffected by cost, even if some recognize the advantages but are afraid to pay more. This is why pricing deters non-organic food buyers most. Thus, organic food marketers should split the market into existing and future segments and build strategies to meet their demands*

Keywords: Organic food industry, Consumer perception, Consumer trust

I. INTRODUCTION

Organic fruits and vegetables will increase at a CAGR of 9% between 2019 and 2024, making them the largest and fastest-growing segment of the organic food industry.

Due to increased demand for organic food and limited availability, organic farming has risen worldwide since 2011. Global production areas rose from 37.2 million hectares in 2011 to 57.8 million in 2016. Due to the above considerations, organic fruit and vegetable consumption is rising faster than synthetic food demand.

The surge in food-borne diseases has also made shoppers more wary. Organic product demand exceeds supply, according to the Organic Consumers Association. This research sought to explain the rising demand. Organic food consumer views were assessed using a standardized questionnaire from 318 participants.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Literature review done on the basis of objectives is as follows:

To study the motivating factors that lead to purchase of organic food.

Food safety, affordability, environmental friendliness, nutrition, and taste impact consumers' organic food intake (Chiciudean, et al., 2019).

If high-quality items are assured, people will pay more. Consumer health awareness is a major element in organic food purchases. Most also thought organic goods' advantages were overblown and weren't willing to pay more for them. One of the least important variables is excessive pricing and lack of information about these goods' advantages. Organic product ignorance owing to insufficient media exposure has dissatisfied respondents since they don't obtain enough information. Thus, absence of advertising hinders their buying selections (Krishna & Balasubramanian, 2018).

Some nations use organic food as part of their culture and history, and customers buy particular types to preserve their heritage. Organic food is becoming associated with ancestors' authenticity as consumers revert to old farming traditions. Self-esteem strongly influences organic food attitudes. Media attention has increased customers' desire to improve their quality of life, creating "green" consumers.

Thus, elite society values organic food since it represents their high spending power and lavish lifestyle (Rana & Paul, 2017).

Organic goods are bought because: Low pesticide use ensures safer food; Since it lacks preservatives, organic food is often fresher; Organic farming reduces contaminants, conserves water, reduces soil disintegration, increases soil maturity, and uses less energy; Organic animals have no antimicrobial, growth hormones, or long-term adverse effects and are healthy (Renuga & Ramaya, 2018).

To study the barriers that exist in purchasing organic food for non-organic buyers.

In Chandigarh, Jatinder Kumar studied organic food consumer behavior. He discovered inconsistent organic product availability in store. Soil-grown foods are sold weekly in stores. Products are poorly packaged. Farmers don't like cultivating organic items, thus supply is limited. Because they lack insecticides, these items are perishable and difficult to store. Organic produce is more costly than ordinary produce, hence buyers choose the cheaper option (Kumar, 2017). The high price, poor performance, poor quality, lack of availability, is not up to par, lack of trust, and inability to distinguish organic products from normal products cause consumers to stop buying them (Krishna & Balasubramanian, 2018).

To study the awareness levels of consumers w. r. t. organic food products.

Most clients didn't know the differences between organic and normal meals. Organic food popularity is expanding in developing countries, although high cost and lack of price regulation decrease its influence on price-sensitive customers. It also shows organic farming may not address rural and agricultural food security needs (Iqbal, 2015).

Organic food's vitamin and micronutrient richness attracts buyers. In affluent nations like the US and Germany, "eco-friendly products," or "green products," have made organic food feasible (Rana & Paul, 2017).

Developed and emerging countries consume more organic food. So, customers are increasingly health-conscious (Uvaneswaran, 2017).

Despite its tremendous growth, organic food awareness is minimal. Consumers demand more scientific evidence organic food is healthier. Advertisement, availability, and diversity are needed to sell organic products. Most customers didn't know the main differences between organic and conventional meals (Pércsi & Fogarassy, 2019).

Informing consumers increases their likelihood of buying organic products. Without knowing where to acquire organic food or government certificates and labeling, people shun it (Krishna & Balasubramanian, 2018).

Half to 60% of Czechs buy organic food. Organic products were known by 83% of Croatians and 87% of Serbs. Customer awareness of health and environmental issues has increased organic product sales during the previous decade. Organic products are legally marked. Most respondents prefer to purchase fruits weekly, and supermarkets are the most popular site to acquire organic products worldwide. The survey offers new insights into organic food customers' attitudes and behavior. Seasonal availability, variety, and price of organic foods varies. According to research, 46.3% of Croatians purchase organic food in city markets and 9.9% at supermarkets. Many factors affect marketing and prevent finding appropriate organic product outlets (Vukasović, 2015).

III. RESEARCH PROBLEM

The research challenge explains why the study is being conducted and what the researcher hopes to learn from it. The perspective of consumers in Western Mumbai about organic food goods is our research issue. This research's topic area is "Program," which examines consumer perceptions and attitudes about organic food items, and its study population is "Western Mumbai residents."

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE

Statements outlining the kind of data the researcher hopes to gather on the research topic are known as research goals. The following subjects were chosen from the literature review and examined in this report:

- To study the motivating factors that lead to purchase of organic food.

- To study the barriers that exist in purchasing organic food for non-organic buyers.
- To study the awareness levels of consumers with respect to organic food.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

Based on descriptive, exploratory, and causal study aims, research designs are established. Unstructured exploratory research uses secondary resource analysis, case study method, expert opinion method, observation in-depth interviews, and focus groups to examine an ambiguous, new, and unknown scenario. Causal research requires studies to establish links between two variables. This work uses descriptive research to describe a scenario, issue, or phenomenon.

To present a thorough profile of the population under investigation, evaluate the simultaneous occurrence of specific events, and define consumer attitudes toward organic food, descriptive research was conducted. Different methods include cross-sectional and longitudinal investigations. A single cross-sectional research collected data from a population sample at one time. This was done to determine people's current attitude toward organic food since previous research showed differing attitudes.

Sampling Design

The data was taken from western Mumbai residents. Probability and non-probability sampling exist. Probability sampling gives every population member an equal probability of being picked. Non-probability sampling gives each population member a different chance of getting picked. Both have various kinds. The convenience sampling approach was used for this investigation. This sub-type of sampling collects data from respondents at the researcher's convenience. Non-Probability Sampling chose 318 respondents for this investigation.

Data Collection Method

Data collection entails carefully monitoring, documenting, and arranging data from diverse sources. The study employed primary and secondary data.

Primary data gathering used quantitative data that gives demographic and preference insights, is well-organized and planned, costs less, and can be examined statistically. Since survey method gives comprehensive problem sample information, descriptive study design uses it to collect quantitative data. Formalized, non-formalized, and hidden surveys collect data. The research collects data by survey using a standardized and unconcealed questionnaire with planned questions and answer categories and explains its purpose.

This established composition helps manage a large number of people, generates reliable outcomes, and simplifies work; thus, it was chosen. Personal surveys, telephone surveys, mail-in questionnaires, emails, and websites may collect feedback. Website strategy was used since it's cheap, easy to manage data, and doesn't need questionnaire preparation. A questionnaire including text, MCQs, linear scales, rating scales, etc. was created in Google Forms. Google Forms makes it simple to construct and invite respondents to fill out questionnaires without sign-in. After analysis, it provides a descriptive and inferential statistics spreadsheet of responses.

Data Analysis

Data analysis uses descriptive statistics to describe the population or data, and inferential statistics to assist the researcher draw conclusions. Descriptive statistics were employed in the study to simplify data interpretation and summary. Central tendency measures like mean, median, and mode reveal data strength. The population under research was represented by a single number, such the average score for specific criteria, by applying mean to interval and ratio scaled questions.

In ordinal, interval, and ratio scale inquiries with extreme values and open class intervals, median was used to find the middle value. Mode was used to find the greatest frequency to determine the most essential element for certain scenarios, the most desired medium or factor, etc. in nominal, ordinal, interval, and ratio scaled questions. The report employed central tendency measures to determine data consistency and how much real values deviate from the center

value. To analyze interval and ratio scale dispersion, standard deviation was utilized to determine how distant values are from the average of the elements evaluated.

V. FINDINGS

Motivating Factors that Lead to Purchase of Organic Food

AVERAGE SCORES OF MOTIVATING FACTORS TO PURCHASE ORGANIC FOOD

Motivators	Average Score	Standard Deviation
It is nutritious	4.9	1.71
It is safe	4.8	1.76
It is tasty	4.1	1.64
It is trendy	3.9	1.70
It is traditional	3.8	1.78
It is elite	3.7	1.69
It is easily available	3.6	1.65
It is affordable	3.3	1.56

In Abraham Maslow's Human Theory of Motivation, the need hierarchy divides human motivation into five stages: psychological, safety, love and belonging, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Organic food customers have met psychological, safety, and love needs. The preceding data shows that affordability has the lowest average score because these people want a better life. Value, not goods, is what these shoppers want. The preceding data shows that organic food customers are self-motivated and choose logical options over convenient ones.

Nutrition Consciousness

It is clear that the most popular incentive is nutrition. As health consciousness has grown, many individuals who can afford to pay a little more to make sure their bodies are getting the right nutrients are willing to do so and find it to be their main source of motivation. Organic food is desired since nutrition becomes essential due to health concern.

Quality and Safety

The fact that they are unaware of what they are eating makes conscious customers feel very frightened. Conventional food items that are mostly genetically engineered, cultivated with the use of synthetic fertilizers, or sprayed with pesticides are the sources of these dangers. Consuming organic food items gives customers a sense of security since they are aware of the negative externalities described above. Furthermore, every conscientious consumer has been compelled to switch to organic food due to the rise in food-related illnesses such the corona virus, avian influenza, etc.

Taste

Compared to conventional food goods, organic food products have a distinct and appealing natural flavor since they are made without any artificial ingredients. Additionally, because they are paying more for the same food, customers naturally expect it to taste better, and vendors are taking advantage of this to create a market that is always growing.

Trend of sustainable consumption

Sustainable consumerism is now becoming more popular. People and businesses are realizing more and more that spending now without saving for the future will lead to an existential crisis. Furthermore, a favorable attitude toward the environment and a sense of moral duty have been developed by societal standards and environmental concerns.

Traditional

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Elite nature

As previously said, those who have attained the self-esteem level of Maslow's motivation hierarchy are thought to consume organic food items.

Availability

Our lives have been made simpler by technological advancements and the emergence of internet platforms. All necessary items are readily accessible and may be delivered to your home within a few business days. Because of this, customers are able to take the convenience of availability for granted, which is why it received the second-lowest average score.

Affordability

Table 6.1.2 shows that the top two income groups and the latter two have comparable beliefs. Even people with less money to purchase organic food feel the urge to do so as strongly as those with more. Because others make consumption decisions for them, the upper classes are not personally engaged.

This research reveals that all classes are more motivated to eat organic food.

ORGANIC FOOD PREFERENCE BASED ON INCOME LEVELS

Income levels	No. of respondents	Yes	No	% of Yes	% of No
Less than 12 Lakhs	187	160	27	86	14
12 Lakhs to 36 lakhs	75	64	11	85	15
36 lakhs to 60 lakhs	26	19	7	73	27
More than 60 lakhs	30	21	9	70	30
Total	318	264	54		

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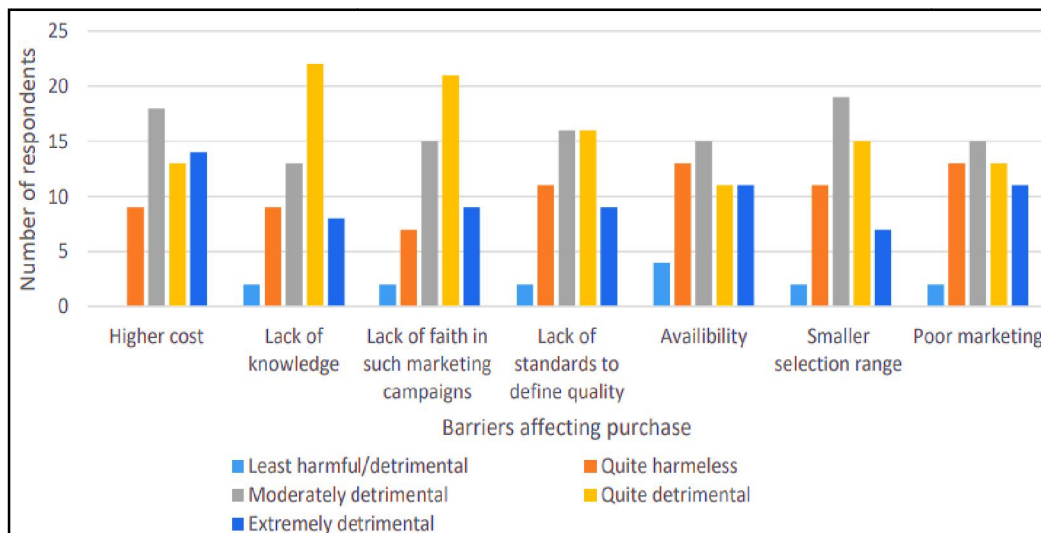
VI. BARRIERS THAT EXIST IN PURCHASING ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS

AVERAGE SCORE OF BARRIERS IN PURCHASING ORGANIC FOOD

Factors	Average Score	Standard Deviation	Mode
Higher cost	3.5925	1.0554	3
Lack of knowledge	3.4629	1.0588	4
Lack of faith in marketing campaigns	3.5185	1.1015	4
Lack of standards to define quality	3.3518	1.1015	3
Availability	3.2222	1.2387	3
Smaller selection range	3.2592	1.0494	3
Poor marketing	3.3333	1.1655	3

Higher cost

Cost is clearly the largest obstacle. Consumers are spending less on food due to market slowdown and liquidity issues. They would rather save that money and purchase more traditional things. Families with children choose cheaper items to save food costs. Amazon India sells organic raw polished rice for Rs 95 per kilogram and ordinary rice for Rs 60 per kg. India is the second-largest rice consumer, therefore middle-class households choose traditional items for everyday grains. This prevents access.



KINDS OF DETRIMENTAL BARRIERS RELATING TO ORGANIC PRODUCT PURCHASES

Lack of knowledge

Organic items are unfamiliar to most customers, who think they're natural. Our survey found that 71% of customers cannot distinguish between organic and natural items since most retail establishments display them together.

Lack of knowledge is linked to age, income, education, and employment.

Illiterate people don't know about organic goods' advantages and won't pay extra.

Lack of faith in marketing campaigns

Customers often see advertisements that claim to be 100% organic as just a marketing tactic. Advertisements often provide inaccurate information and are deceptive. According to 21 out of 54 respondents, they do not buy or eat organic products because they do not trust marketing tactics.

Lack of standards to define quality

You anticipate receiving higher-quality goods when you pay more for them. Customers who are concerned about their health want to know exactly what they are eating and how many calories they are ingesting. Organic goods have a low level of pesticides; this does not imply that they contain no pesticides at all. In addition, the rise in food-related illnesses like the corona virus and bird flu has compelled all health-conscious consumers to switch to organic food.

Availability

Consuming organic goods on a daily basis is problematic for customers due to their limited and dispersed availability across different regions. Convenience is always the top priority for consumers. Customers who live close to a retail location that sells organic goods, for instance, are more likely to purchase them than those who must drive far to do so.

Smaller selection range

Compared to organic items, conventional products come in a greater variety. Since consumer preferences and needs are always evolving, organic goods are often incompatible with these types. According to 102 out of 254 respondents, having a large variety is crucial when purchasing organic goods.

Poor marketing

There aren't many ads for organic products. Customers are unaware of organic goods since companies that produce them sometimes lack marketing initiatives to promote them. Low customer reach is the result of a lack of marketing efforts.

AWARENESS LEVELS OF CONSUMERS WITH RESPECT TO ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS

Consumer decision-making starts with issue awareness and finishes with post-purchase appraisal. From the initiator recognizing the need to buy a product to the user evaluating it thereafter, several elements impact this process by shaping perceptions and attitudes. Options are pre-evaluated using integration, heuristics, and referral decision rules.

Heuristics are simple principles individuals use to assess or pick between choices based on price, promotion, and popularity. Organic food product purchases are made more heuristically and have a perceived set of characteristics that produce a favorable attitude, therefore proper advertising is needed to raise awareness. Inability to distinguish flavor, appearance, and experience generates dissonance in organic food attitudes after examination.

Reliability and credibility of information available

Most respondents doubt the authenticity of organic food information, which influences their buying choice. After evaluating the options in the 5-stage purchasing choices model, skepticism about the information consumers get greatly impacts their selection.

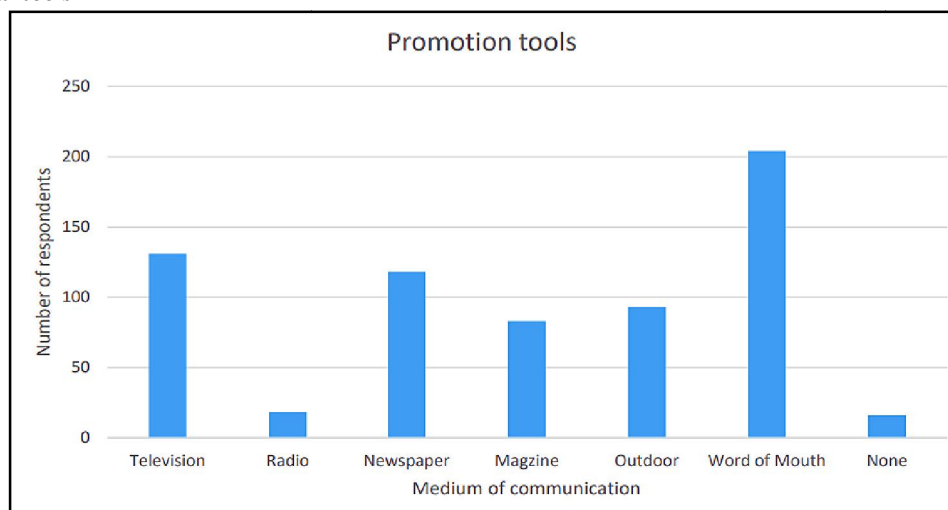
After identifying a need and searching for information, consumers tend to negatively appraise a portion of the decision set if they mistrust the information. Vegetables, fruits, and fowl are bought regularly without much thinking, and incorrect information regarding organic forms prevents them from being invoked as brands.

Awareness about quality standards

Heuristic characteristics like organic labeling help customers choose organic goods (Aigner, Wilken, & Geisendorf, 2019). 60% of organic food consumers know quality requirements. However, 40% of them are uninformed of organic food quality requirements, so they misread the labeling and purchase organic food for other reasons.

53% of non-organic food buyers are ignorant of these higher-quality criteria (Janssen & Hamm, 2012). This view creates good attitudes about organic food in terms of trust, taste, quality, etc. According to Wang and Tsai (2014), consumers are prepared to pay more for branded organic items. Organic labels boost consumer attractiveness, hence Bezawada and Pauwels (2013) recommend high awareness.

Promotional tools



LEVEL OF EXPOSURE OF ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS TO CONSUMERS BY EXTENSIVE MEDIA COVERAGE

clearly shows that the community being investigated knows about organic food. It shows that extensive media coverage has focused on health-related topics and used consumer behavior to display ads that highlight environmental and children's well-being by portraying preservatives as harmful, creating a need to raise children responsibly, and creating a need to "feel good" about oneself by buying high-end, high-quality products.

Due to widespread media coverage, customers are more health-conscious and driven to live well. The saying "You are what you eat" makes organic food popular (Rana & Paul, 2017). Organic product knowledge is best gained by word-of-mouth. Thus, positive post-purchase reviews are essential to increasing demand for these products.

Increasing consumer awareness

HELPFUL FACTORS OF INCREASING CONSUMER AWARENESS ABOUT ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS

Factors	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mode
Scientific evidence on packaging	3.46	1.15	3
Sustainable investment by brands	3.22	1.09	3
Informative advertising	3.65	0.96	4
Consumer education movements	3.56	1.07	4

Consumer education and informative advertising may help buyers understand organic food and distinguish it from conventional goods as most respondents considered them helpful. Organic food is nutritious and high-quality, so these individuals shop carefully. Since customers can't identify organic from conventional, organic food has a low market share.

A standard deviation of one shows that respondents think consumer education programs, sustainable brand investments, scientific packaging, and educational advertising will considerably enhance their awareness. Eco-friendly materials help purchasers spend more on utilitarian items, while scientific and ecological packaging affects hedonistic purchases. However, these parameters' approximately neutral utility shows that individuals lack trust and access to complete, high-quality organic food information to measure their knowledge while purchasing.

Inability to differentiate

After reviewing their purchases, organic food buyers have had trouble distinguishing them from conventional ones. Consumers confuse conventional foods for organic because "natural," "farm fresh," and "not genetically modified" are synonymous with organic food. Manufacturers must differentiate and mark their products to offset conventional food businesses' deceptive claims of being "organic" and "natural". Similar looks make it hard to differentiate, thus more informational advertising and distinctive, sustainable packaging are required to promote differentiation awareness (6.3.4). Most non-organic eaters can't tell conventional from organic. Ignorance of the differences leads to a negative attitude about organic food, and many are reluctant to pay extra for it to enjoy its superior quality, taste, and pleasure.

Impact of purchase locations

Food goods are often bought by customers from open markets, corporate shops, and locally owned businesses. Supermarket chains only sell a specific range of organic products, and they primarily focus on price in their marketing rather than the quality, ethical considerations, and health consciousness criteria that consumers have for organic food products.

As a result, they draw in more non-organic customers. Retail establishments have yet to seize the chance to offer organic food items with uniqueness and distinction, as evidenced by the fact that the majority of respondents who typically buy food items from neighborhood department stores are unable to distinguish between conventional and organic products. As a result, the customer picks a conventional product since they are unaware of the availability and characteristics of organic food goods in the shop.

VII. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Technology and artificial fabrication have raised awareness of conscientious consumerism. Food-borne infections have also grown. Genetically altered, artificially fertilized, and synthetically made food is becoming riskier. Organic food is in demand because it helps preserve food production resources for long-term food sustainability.

This poll found that organic food buyers had several motives. The most noticeable is that organic food purchasers feel forced to eat healthy food. We also discovered that organic food is becoming a luxury, thus the upper middle classes should be the target market.

Lack of awareness about conventional and organic products strongly affects purchase intentions. Since organic food heuristics are vital in evaluating alternatives, the perception of organic food must be changed to attain the right attitude. TV advertisements and word-of-mouth marketing may increase demand and awareness for organic food, which will increase supply. Consumers' and enterprises' label interpretations differ when quality standards are low. The organic product industry is growing quickly, but various barriers prevent it from reaching saturation. This research sought to identify and examine these obstacles to understand why customers don't purchase organic goods. We identified seven barriers: increased cost, illiteracy, lack of confidence in marketing efforts, lack of quality standards, availability, restricted choices, and bad marketing.

Nearly 97% of middle-aged women and 95% of high-income families with children choose organic food over non-organic. These results illuminate how successfully a shop must target and identify its consumer base for long-term operational efficiency.

Recommendations

Two categories should make up the target market for organic food makers or marketers, and strategies should be developed for each of them separately:

Financially abled conscious consumers: -

individuals whose annual income exceeds 36 lakh rupees. This target demographic is categorized as financially abled conscientious customers because of their demand for self-esteem.

Moderately financially abled conscious consumers: -

Those with incomes under 36 lakhs should be the second target group that these merchants should focus on. It is necessary to provide products that are affordable for them. This target market is categorized as customers that are somewhat financially able and conscientious.

To improve public awareness of the unique qualities that set organic food apart from conventional goods and foster a positive attitude among consumers, stricter definitions for the terms "natural" and "safe" are needed.

Outside of retail establishments, certificates attesting to the superior quality standards of organic food items may boost the retailer's reputation and authenticity.

TV commercials and word-of-mouth marketing are powerful instruments for raising demand for and awareness of organic food, which will ultimately expand its supply.

One of the finest mediums for product promotion is television. Customers will be encouraged to switch to organic goods via increased media exposure and the provision of quality information backed by concrete statistics.

There will be higher sales if more merchants are ready to carry organic goods since they will be more readily available and more convenient for consumers.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Sampling

A census survey was not carried out as part of the study because of specific limitations. Because a sample survey was conducted, the study results are only applicable to a certain community, namely Western Mumbai. We refer to it as Sampling Error. Due to our screening process, there can be an unforeseen bias.

Convenience Sampling

The study sample was selected from a nearby segment of the population. It might result in sample inaccuracy and be very vulnerable to selection bias. These factors might make the research less credible. The population may not be accurately represented by the sample.

Cross Sectional Study

A cross-sectional investigation was carried out. It is not possible to assess behavior over time using this kind of investigation. It may not be valid later; it is only valid for the period in which it was done.

Objective Limitation

In order to raise the degree of concentration of the research study, it may be possible to cut down the goals since they are now too wide. Because of our limited resources and inexperience performing research, we have set restricted goals for the study.

Location

The study was carried out in Western Mumbai, and only Western Mumbai participants were included in the sample. The research may not apply to other places. There can be a probability of inaccuracy because of the limited resources available and the restricted access to the study's site. It can also have an impact on the study's sample units.

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