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Research paper



Perceptions and Purchase Patterns of Organic Food Products: A Study on Trust, Connection To Roots and Sustainability

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Abstract

Background: In response to the global shift towards health-conscious and environmentally sustainable food choices, this study delves into consumers' perceptions and purchase patterns of organic food products, with a specific focus on the trust and connection to roots, along with sustainability. The study begins by tracing the evolution of consumers' interest in organic food, highlighting the importance of trust and beliefs in certifications and supply chain partners, and the connection to roots, traditions, culture, taste, and preferences, and the broader theme of environmental sustainability.
Method: The research methodology involves a survey of 556 respondents selected through stratified random sampling in the Delhi-National Capital Region. The collected primary data was analysed using statistical techniques like cross-tabs and Chi-square.
Findings: The findings provide an understanding of the critical factors that shape consumers' perceptions of organic food products. Consumer trust in organic food affects their purchasing decisions, with higher levels of trust associated with higher frequency of purchasing organic food. Meanwhile, connection to roots does not significantly influence their purchase decision for organic food products. For organic food stakeholders, this information is useful for strategically directing their efforts, with a focus on increasing and maintaining trust to promote organic food consumption effectively and to create sustainable practices within this industry.

Keywords: *Organic Food; Consumer Purchase Pattern; Perceptions; Trust; Connection with Roots.*

1. Introduction

In recent years, consumer preferences in the global food market have shifted towards health, sustainability, and ethical consumption. The increased interest in the interest of organic food products is also a trend that consumers have become interested in. Consumers are looking for food sources that reflect their beliefs towards practices that are either environmentally sound, animal-friendly, or personally healthy (Kanchana, K., & Kannan, V., 2023). Consequently, gaining a deeper understanding of the cohesive nature of consumer beliefs and perceptions towards organic foods is an increasingly important topic of research, and this study aims to explore the various factors that may influence consumer behaviors in organic food markets, more specifically, how Trust and "disconnection from roots" may affect consumers' perception and purchasing decisions..

1.1. Evolution of consumer interest in sustainable organic food

The changing view of consumers towards sustainable organic food signifies a transformation in the way people view and choose the food they eat (Elrayah et al, 2023). For the past couple of decades, consumer awareness has shifted, and we have observed a growing awareness of the possible effect of food consumption on personal health and the environment. This shift has occurred amidst a rise in the demand for organic products (Kanchana & Kannan, 2023). Consumers today are now cognizant and selective of the possible health impacts of conventional farming practices, such as synthetic pesticides, GMOs, and synthetic additives used in food. The recent trend of rising health problems and lifestyle diseases has led individuals to evaluate food quality and what it comprises. Further, environmental factors like soil loss, water pollution, and loss of biodiversity have added to the sense of responsibility. (Jinet et al., 2023).

1.2. Trust as a key determinant

Trust is a fundamental factor in the development of consumers' perceptions, especially when it comes to sustainable organic food choices, as consumers are increasingly asking for transparency and authenticity from food producers. Trust is especially difficult to generate in the

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sustainable organic food arena because claims such as organic and natural are often dependent on people's subjective interpretations and exploitative marketing claims. Understanding the role of trust in consumers' decision-making processes regarding sustainable organic food will be an important consideration for both food producers and food policy makers who want to encourage an organic food market that is both thoughtful/trustworthy and sustainable. Thorsøe, M. H. (2015).

1.3. Role of connection to roots

This notion of "connection to roots" relates to the real source of sustainable organic products, including the authentic agricultural production methods employed, the true taste and flavour of food, and intercultural identity and heritage. Consumers are becoming increasingly conscious of wanting to know about the journey of their food from field to table. Investigating how "connection to roots" affects consumer perceptions, attitudes, and purchasing decisions provides insights into some of the variables contributing to the success of sustainable organic food brands while others fail in the marketplace.

1.4. Perceived benefits of organic products and sustainability

Organic food products are frequently regarded as a healthier alternative to conventionally produced food products. Organic food products are produced without the use of synthetic pesticides and fertilizers, and animals that are raised for food are not treated with antibiotics or growth hormones. The absence of genetically modified organisms is also a factor that contributes to the health benefits of organic food (Lazaroiu et al., 2019). The commitment to natural health and sustainable practices in agriculture has been consistent with cultural shifts towards holistic wellness with environmental stewardship. The progression in consumer interest for sustainable organic food products has been (inconsistently) progressing with increased interest in sustainable environmental practices (Duttagupta, A. 2023). Conventional agricultural practices are sometimes discussed negatively regarding environmental externalities such as soil erosion, contamination of water sources, and depletion of natural resources. On the other hand, organic agriculture practices are discussed positively regarding soil health, biodiversity (fewer additives), and less environmental impact, which resonates with consumers interested in environmentally sustainable practices.

As consumers become increasingly discerning, there is a heightened interest in transparency and authenticity in the food supply chain, and as such, organic certification, processes that confirm that a grower or food provider has complied with organic standards for a period, give some degree of confidence to consumers that the product is genuine. While trust in the certification, its process, logos, labelling, and other visual cues about food product authenticity are important, the demand extends to trust in food producers and sellers. Knowing how this change and evolution have occurred is valuable to producers, retailers, and policymakers because it will help anticipate, understand, and respond to consumer needs and expectations. For example, producers can modify their production methods to meet changing consumer values, and policymakers can make regulations based on this understanding to increase trust in certifications. Retailers can develop their products and services to better satisfy consumer demand, ensuring that they remain relevant in a rapidly changing value-driven market. This study aims to investigate the role of trust and connection to roots in the acceptance of organic food products, with sustainability as the primary goal.

The rising popularity of organic food is generally based on trust in certifications, which has profound effects on environmental sustainability and human health. Trust in organic certification (e.g., USDA Organic) allows consumers to be confident that products were produced without the use of synthetic pesticides/herbicides, and so lessens the level of pesticide residues found in soil and waterways, ultimately reducing environmental harm associated with pesticide use. Furthermore, organic production practices (which prioritize sustainable land use), lead to more environmentally beneficial land practices that reduce long-term ecological imbalance caused by synthetic chemicals (Duttagupta, A., 2023). When focusing on human health, in addition to creating a more sustainable food system, trust in organic certification ensures consumers that their food is safe from hazardous chemicals and/or genetically modified organisms. Lazaroiu et al. (2019) assert that organic food consumption has been associated with health outcomes linked to potentially less exposure to pesticide-related risks of illness and improved nutritional value. The action of supporting trust in organic certification could lead to widespread adoption, creating greater environmental and health benefits, respectively, towards sustainable ecological goals promoted at the international level.

2. Objectives of The Study

1) Objective 1: To examine the association between trust and the adoption (purchase patterns) of organic foods.
2) Objective 2: To examine the association between connection to roots and adoption (purchase patterns) of organic foods.

2.1. Theoretical framework

This research investigates consumer attitudes towards organic food products, organized through trust, connection to roots, and their influences on consumer purchasing behaviors for sustainability. Trust is an important motivator of organic food consumption, as consumers rely on credible certificates and transparency in the food supply chain about safety and quality (Zagata and Lostak, 2012). The TPB proposes that attitudes, which are shaped by trust, lead to intentions to purchase (Oreg and Katz-Gerro, 2006), while the connection to roots, based on food practices and cultural identity, can also form positive attitudes towards organic food (Hansen et al., 2018; Hughner et al., 2007). By merging these two theoretical perspectives through the TPB and cultural identity perspectives, the framework provides insight into how the combination of trust and roots impacts consumer beliefs, which in turn influence consumers' sustainable purchase behaviors.

3. Research Methodology

The study utilized a quantitative design and used a survey with Likert-type ratings of thoughtfully constructed questions to explore consumer views on organic food. The authors used stratified random sampling to ensure diversity and to ensure representativeness, and to promote diversity. The survey sought a sample size of 600 respondents with a goal to reflect a wide collection of points of view with a generally even distribution of the sample across strata. A total of 556 questionnaires were received in full and were ultimately used for analysis. The questions covered aspects such as demographics, purchase patterns, importance of certification, trust in certifications, producers, retailers, visual appearance, taste & flavour, culture & heritage, etc. Ethical considerations, including participant anonymity and

informed consent, were strictly adhered to throughout the research process. Hence, based on the above, the following hypotheses have been tested:

1) H1: There is a significant association between trust and purchase patterns for organic food.
2) H2: There is a significant association between connection to roots and purchase patterns for organic food.

3.1. Data analysis

This study aims to investigate the associations between consumers' trust in organic food, their connection to roots, and their purchase patterns of organic food. Two hypotheses were tested using a cross-tabulation of responses and Chi-Square tests. The analysis was conducted using survey data collected on a 5-point Likert scale, where respondents rated their agreement with various statements related to trust in organic food and their connection to cultural roots. Respondents' purchase behaviour was then categorized based on their levels of trust and connection to roots, and the associations between these variables were examined.

3.2. Association between trust and purchase patterns for organic food

H1: There is a significant association between trust and purchase patterns for organic food.
To explore the relationship between trust and purchase patterns, seven statements were presented to respondents, each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Disagree'' (1) to "Strongly Agree" (5) [refer to Table 1]. The mean score for each respondent was calculated, and respondents were then divided into two groups: those with a mean score greater than 2.5 were categorized as demonstrating 'trust' in organic food, while those with a mean score less than or equal to 2.5 were categorized as demonstrating 'no trust.'

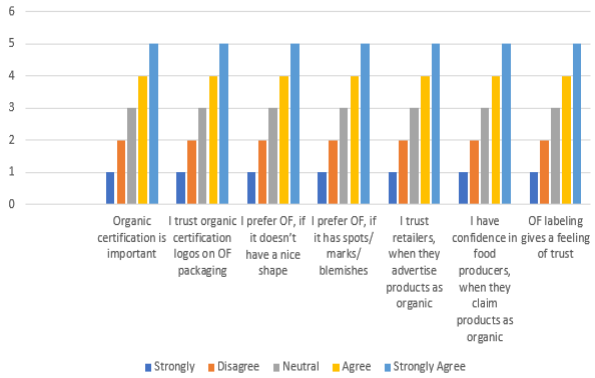


Fig. 1: Survey Result on Purchase Pattern.

Table 1: Survey Result on Purchase Pattern

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
Organic certification is important	1	2	3	4	5
I trust organic certification logos on OF packaging	1	2	3	4	5
I prefer OF if it doesn't have a nice shape	1	2	3	4	5
I prefer OF if it has spots/ marks/ blemishes	1	2	3	4	5
I trust retailers when they advertise products as organic	1	2	3	4	5
I have confidence in food producers when they claim their products as organic	1	2	3	4	5
OF labeling gives a feeling of trust	1	2	3	4	5

The table presents seven key statements aimed at measuring trust in organic food, ranging from the importance of organic certification to confidence in labelling and retailer claims. This initial step was crucial for categorizing respondents into two distinct groups: those who demonstrate trust (scores greater than 2.5) and those who do not (scores less than or equal to 2.5). The rationale behind this categorization was to create a clear dichotomy that could be analysed further to understand how trust influences purchase patterns.
Further, Table 2 shows a cross-tabulation between the categorized levels of trust and the purchase pattern of the respondents.
It clearly indicates that respondents who trust organic food, its certifications, visual appearance, and vendors purchase organic food products more often. While respondents who do not trust organic purchases more of conventional food.

Table 2: Categories of Trust * Purchase Behaviour Crosstabulation

Purchase Behaviour							
Count	I always purchase conventional food		I purchase more of conventional & little OF	I am indifferent to both	I prefer OF, but I purchase some conventional food as well	I always purchase OF	Total
Categories of Trust	No Trust	12	40	6	11	1	70
	Trust	61	222	20	154	29	486
Total		73	262	26	165	30	556

Further, to statistically validate the association between trust and purchase behaviour, Chi-Square tests have been performed.

Table 3: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	12.883[a]	4	0.012
Likelihood Ratio	14.068	4	0.007
Linear-by-Linear Association	9.106	1	0.003
N of Valid Cases	556		

2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.27.

The Chi-Square test results (p = 0.012) suggest that there is a statistically significant association between trust in organic food and purchase behaviour. In other words, the level of trust consumers has in organic food influences their purchasing decisions, with higher trust levels correlating with more frequent purchases of organic food.
The p-value 0.012 [refer to Table 3] is significant at 5% level of significance, and hence there is a significant association between trust and purchase patterns for organic food, and hence the hypothesis is accepted.

3.3. Analysis of the association between connection to roots and purchase patterns for organic food

H2: There is a significant association between connection to roots and purchase patterns for organic food.
To investigate whether there is a significant association between connection to roots and purchase patterns for organic food, four statements were designed on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, and strongly agree [refer to Table 4]. For each respondent, a mean was calculated. Consumers were segregated into two groups – respondents greater than 2.5 on a 5-point scale were categorized as perceiving that organic food has 'connection with roots', while scores less than or equal to 2.5 were categorized as perceiving 'no connection with roots'. Cross-tabulation and chi-square statistics were performed between the two groups and purchase patterns.

Table 4: Connection to Roots and Purchase Pattern

Statements	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly Agree
OF has authentic taste & flavor	1	2	3	4	5
OF consumption connects with our traditions and roots	1	2	3	4	5
OF helps to promote our culture & heritage	1	2	3	4	5
I buy OF because it tastes better than conventional food	1	2	3	4	5

Further, a cross-tabulation has been performed comparing respondents' perceptions of organic food's connection to roots with their actual purchasing behaviour. The results have been tabulated below:

Table 5: Categories of Connecting with Roots *Purchase Behaviour Crosstabulation

Count		Purchase Behaviour I always purchase conventional food	I purchase more of conventional & a little OF	I am indifferent to both	I prefer OF, but I purchase some conventional food as well	Total
Categories of Connecting with Roots	No connection with roots	9	32	4	12	60
	Connection with roots	64	230	22	153	496
Total	73		262	26	165	556

Table 5 clearly indicates that respondents who perceive that organic food products connect with roots are also purchasing more conventional food and quantity of organic food. Further, a Chi-Square test was conducted to statistically assess whether there is a significant association between the perception of a connection to roots and purchase behaviour.
A limitation of the Chi-Square test for H2 is that 20% of the cells in the cross-tabulation (Table 5) have expected counts less than 5, which may compromise the reliability of the test results. This low expected count could introduce bias in the statistical analysis, potentially affecting the validity of the non-significant association observed (p = 0.487). To address this, future studies could employ a robustness check, such as Fisher's Exact Test, which is better suited for contingency tables with low expected counts. Acknowledging this limitation highlights the need for cautious interpretation of the findings related to the "connection to roots" hypothesis and suggests avenues for methodological refinement in future research.

Table 6: Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	3.441[a]	4	0.487
Likelihood Ratio	3.601	4	0.463
Linear-by-Linear Association	1.999	1	0.157
N of Valid Cases	556		

2 cells (20.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.81.
The Chi-Square test results (p = 0.487) suggest that there is no statistically significant association between the level of connection to roots and purchasing behaviour. In other words, whether a person feels connected to their cultural or traditional roots does not significantly impact their choice to purchase conventional or organic food. This contrasts with other factors (like trust, as seen in previous tables) that do influence purchasing behaviour.
The p-value 0.487 [refer to Table 6] is not significant at 5% level of significance, and hence there is no significant association between connection with roots and purchase patterns for organic food; hence hypothesis is rejected
The non-significant finding for the "connection to roots" hypothesis (p = 0.487) warrants further exploration. Several factors may contribute to this outcome. The Delhi-NCR region is characterized by a diverse population with varying cultural backgrounds, which may lead to differing interpretations of what constitutes a "connection to roots." For some participants, the idea may invoke memories of traditional farming, while for others it may be more closely associated with their cultural identity or food preferences, which may lessen the motivation to buy. Additionally, Hansen et al. (2018) show that organic food consumption is more powerfully influenced by cultural identity in situations where traditional food practices were tangibly tied to a locality (e.g., rural or less urbanized areas). The urbanized and cosmopolitan nature of Delhi-NCR may dilute the perceived association between organic food and culture more than other locations because consumers may seek convenience or health more than cultivation practices. Future studies may capture some of these contextual or cultural variations for understanding "connection to roots" in organic food consumption.

4. Conclusion

The results from this research clearly demonstrate the value of trust in the development of consumers' purchasing an organic food product. This study provides relevance for marketers, policymakers, and other stakeholders. Trust is paramount for a sustainable organic food product sector. For marketers, the focus should be on being transparent about their production & sourcing, highlighting certifications, and building trust to produce brand loyalty. For the policymakers, the focus should be on developing strict regulation systems for the trusted certifications, so consumers can trust the organic certifications and their logos and labels. For retailers, the focus should be on enhancing and increasing access to organic food products through appropriate supply chains, explaining the entire organic farming process to consumers, offering farm visits, and proving that the organic products are as they say (authentic). For Non-government organizations (NGOs), it should prioritize monitoring the organic farming practices in the farms and fields, while on the same note, advocating for organic farming practices and products, which will be useful in producing trust among the general public. By focusing on these implications, stakeholders can help create consumer engagement, increase the market size, and encourage a healthier, sustainable future.

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