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Consumers Buying Behaviour towards Organic Food Products in Kerala

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Abstract:

The choice of organic food products in the consumption basket of Indian consumers have increased over the years due to their increased attention towards nutrient content and quality of food. After the outbreak of covid-19, the health consciousness of average consumer has increased and the consumers are changing their life styles by adopting healthy food habits. The present paper is an attempt to study the buying behaviour of consumers towards organic food products in Kerala. Convenient sampling method was used for selecting samples from the population and sample respondents includes both organic and non-organic buyers. The collected data was analysed with the help of statistical tools like chi-square, weighted mean and ranks. The result of the study indicates that more concentration is needed on affordability and accessibility than awareness on organic food products.

Keywords: buying behaviour, food habits, health, natural, organic food.

Introduction:

Organic cultivation is a system of agriculture where farm produces are grown and processed without using chemical fertilisers, pesticides, growth regulators and chemical preservations. Agricultural pollution is increasing in India mainly due to the increased volume of agricultural output. Increased production without efficient marketing and post-harvest mechanism will result in food wastage and food losses. Food wastages are the major contributors of Green House Gas (GHG) emission which will affect environmental and ecological balance. Organic production is a solution to

reduce the harmful effect of conventional agricultural practices on the soil and will keep agricultural production at a sustainable level.

Organic food products helps to reduce public health risk and it also minimises the exposure of chemical and toxic content from the food, water, land and from the air. Organic products have high nutrient value and are rich in vitamin C, iron, magnesium and phosphorus. Health consciousness, environmental protection and safety has contributed the growth of organic food products (Kareklas al., 2014). Increased awareness, increased income, urbanisation, life style changes and increased working population have reinforced the development of organic food industry.

Psychological factors and product attribute also influence consumers' buying decision towards organic food products. People perceive organic products as fresh, environmental friendly, healthy, safe and of good quality. Organic product is costlier than conventional and consumers' rationality for paying premium price is justified by the product attributes. But at the same time high price , lack of availability and lack of trust towards organic certification prevent consumers from buying organic products. Even though consumers are aware about the health benefit, some of them consider organic products are not affordable for them. Therefore the study of factors determining consumers' preference or non-preference towards organic food products are to be studied.

Review of Literature:

Organic products are produced and preserved in natural way and without using any chemicals or pesticides (Wandel and Bugge, 1997; Squires et al., Pino et al., 2012).With the increase of public awareness and consumption of organic food, the organic food industry continues to grow worldwide. Therefore it is necessary to understand the consumer behaviour and factors contributing their preference (Bravo et al., 2013).

Cognitive change occurs on account of information availability can increase consumers' preference for organic fruits and vegetables in their food habits. Increased access to information regarding health benefits and environment benefit of organic food products will have impact on the perception of food buyers (Radulescu et al., 2021).

A study conducted among the food buyers in the city of Mysore reveals that premium price creates lesser demand for organic food products. Limited availability and limited variety also leads an organic buyer to buy non-organic products (Chandrasekhar, 2014).Demographics also influence the preference of food consumers. Food consumers with higher education and consumers with high paying capacity have shown more patronage towards organic food products (Shivani et al., 2020).

Objectives:

1. To study the level of awareness of respondents towards organic food products.
2. To understand the perception of respondents towards the characteristics of organic food

products.

3. To study the factors influencing the purchase decision of respondents towards organic food products.
4. To analyse the Level of perception, attitude, belief and intention towards organic food products.

Methodology:

The study was conducted among the respondents of Kottayam district and sample size taken for the study was 240, which includes 120 organic buyers and 120 non-organic buyers. Primary data was collected through questionnaire and convenient sampling technique was adopted. The collected data was analysed with the help of statistical tools like percentages, chi-square, weighted mean and ranking.

Discussion and Result:

Awareness level of respondents towards organic food products:

Table 1 reveals that majority of organic buyers have low awareness towards organic products where there are 13.3 percent buyers have medium awareness. There are no buyers in the organic category have high awareness towards organic products. While in the case of non-organic buyers, 55 percent have medium awareness and 30 percent have low awareness and 15 percent have high awareness towards organic food products.

Table 1 :Awareness level of respondents towards organic food products

Level of awareness	Organic buyers		Non -organic buyers	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
High	0	0	18	15
Medium	16	13.3	66	55
Low	104	86.7	36	30
Total	120	100	120	100

Source: Primary data

It is clear from the above table that lack of awareness is not the factor which limits respondents from buying organic food products. Even though non-organic buyers have awareness towards health benefits of organic foods, there are certain factors which prevent them from buying organic food products.

Perception of respondents towards the characteristics of organic food products:

Existing studies indicates that consumers have different perception towards organic food products. Some consider it as natural and fresh, some consider it as chemical free and some as environment friendly. Table 2 shows the perception of respondents towards the characteristics of organic food products.

Table 2: Characteristics of organic products perceived by respondents

Characteristics	Organic buyers		Non -organic buyers	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
No use of synthetic chemicals	64	53.3	15	12.5
Fresh and natural	56	46.7	105	87.5
Total	120	100	120	100

Source: Primary data

Majority of the organic consumers believes that there is no use of synthetic material on organic food products where as non-organic consumers perceives organic food products as fresh and natural.

Awareness level and demographic characteristics of respondents:

Demographic characteristics of respondents will have influence on purchase decision. Demographic variables taken for the study was gender, age, education, occupation and annual income. Cobo and González (2001) found the most likely organic consumers were between 25 and 54 years old. Thompson (1998) found that there exist a positive correlations between education and income on organic purchases. Women have more preference for purchasing organic food products than men (Felix et al., 2007). Table 3 shows the association between awareness level and demographic variables of respondents.

Ho: There is no association between awareness level and demographic characteristics of respondents towards organic food products.

H1: There is an association between awareness level and demographic characteristics of respondents towards organic food products

Table 3: Association between awareness level and demographic characteristics of respondents

Variable 1	Variable 2	Chi-square value	Degree of freedom	P value *
Awareness	Gender	62.02	1	0.000
Awareness	Age	103.03	3	0.000
Awareness	Education	153.65	5	0.000
Awareness	Occupation	2.01	4	0.000
Awareness	Annual income	228.27	3	0.000

Source: Primary data *significance level is 1%

Table 3 reveals that p value was 0.000 for all the variables under the study, which is less than the level of significance. Therefore all the null hypothesis were rejected and it was interpreted that there is an association between demographic characteristics of respondents and level of awareness towards organic food products.

Factor influencing purchasing behaviour of respondent:

There are several factors influence the buying behaviour of food consumers. Most of the consumers prefer to buy organic food products because of the health value it offers. Freshness, quality, aroma, organic certification, availability and price are the other factors influence their buying decision. Table 4 shows the factors affecting the purchase and non-purchase decision of organic food products.

Table 4: Factors influencing purchase or non-purchase behaviour of respondents

Factors	Organic food consumers		Non-organic food consumers	
	Weighted mean	Rank	Weighted mean	Rank
Quality	4.01	3	3.91	5
Taste and Aroma	3.98	4	3.78	8
Freshness	4.10	2	3.96	4
Price	3.58	6	4.72	1
Health and Nutritional Value	4.73	1	3.89	6
Availability	2.98	7	4.23	2
Trust	3.84	5	4.41	3
Variety	2.89	8	3.80	7

Source: Primary data

Among the organic buyers, health consciousness was the critical factor behind their buying decision, followed by freshness, quality, taste and aroma, trust, price, availability and variety. But among the non-organic buyers, high price, non-availability and lack of trust towards were the most influential factors which hinder them from purchasing the organic food products. Weighted mean for each factor were calculated and ranks were assigned accordingly.

Perception, attitude, belief and intention towards organic food Products:

Perception, attitude, belief and intention are different for different consumers. Table 5 shows the perception, attitude, belief and intention of respondents towards organic food.

Table 5: Level of perception, attitude, belief and intention towards organic food products

Level	Organic food consumers		Non-organic food consumers	
	Number	Percentage	Number	Percentage
	Level of perception			
Low	1	0.83	64	53.33
Medium	90	75.0	40	33.33

High	29	24.17	16	13.34
Level of attitude				
Low	2	1.67	65	54.17
Medium	76	63.33	55	45.83
High	42	35.0	0	0
Level of belief				
Low	0	0	98	81.67
Medium	0	0	22	18.33
High	120	100	0	0
Level of intention				
Low	1	0.83	0	0
Medium	5	4.17	104	86.67
High	114	95	16	13.33

Source: Primary data

Organic buyers show positive approach towards all these psychological factors than non-organic.

Conclusion:

Health consciousness of food consumers have increased after the outbreak of covid-19 and they are willing to change their life style and food habits from unhealthy to healthy. The pandemic made them more concerned about environment and they become more receptive to organic products but to on a budget. The results of the study shows that all the respondents are aware about the characteristics of organic food product and also about the nutrition and health value of consuming organic food products. Affordability, availability and accessibility were the main reason for non-purchase of organic food products among the respondents. It is the need of the hour to promote organic cultivation among the farmer producers and make them available to masses by establishing initiatives like community farming and Farmer's markets.

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