

A STUDY ON CONSUMERS' ATTITUDE TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS IN ERODE CITY

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ABSTRACT

The public is becoming increasingly aware of the importance of healthy nutrition for general health and overall well-being. Processed foods which are high in saturated fats, sugar and sodium, and low in essential nutrients are not only responsible for overweight problems but have been also shown to be major contributors to a number of health problems including diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. To make things worse, there are also various artificial preservatives, flavour enhancers and a number of other chemicals with dubious effects on health. On the other hand, unprocessed foods are not as healthy as they seem to be either because most of them are conventionally grown which means with the use of pesticides, chemical fertilizers, antibiotics, growth hormones and who knows what else. Fortunately, there is a safer and healthier alternative – organic food. Critics claim that there is not enough evidence for organic food being either healthier or safer than the conventional one, however, the organic farming methods speak for themselves. The main idea of organic food production is avoidance of all non-organic farming methods which means that the use of pesticides, artificial fertilizers, antibiotics, growth hormones and similar things is strictly forbidden. Instead, organic food producers use all natural farming methods such as crop rotation, composting, companion planting, stimulating biodiversity, etc. As a result, organic products pose no risk of pesticide residues nor presence of other potentially harmful chemicals. Organic food products also are not allowed to contain any genetically modified ingredients nor artificial additives. Although conventionally grown food is claimed to be safe, absence of all non-natural ingredients makes organic food without a doubt healthier and safer choice because the long term effects of those “safe“ doses of pesticides, preservatives and other chemicals remain unknown. This paper deals with consumers' attitude towards organic food products in Erode city

Keywords: pesticides, companion planting

INTRODUCTION

Over the last twenty years, consumer concerns over health, food safety, and the environment have led to great expansion and demand in the organic industry. This increase in demand led to the creation of the Organic Foods Production Act of 1990 that mandated the

United States Department of Food and Agriculture (USDA) to create national organic standards. On October 21, 2002, the USDA created the National Organic Program (NOP) that set these national standards and must regulate the nation's organic products. More specifically, the standards set the labeling, processing, and certifications requirements. The organic standards were instituted to build confidence in organic foods. The term "organic" refers to the way agricultural products are grown and processed. Specific requirements must be met and maintained in order for products to be labeled as "organic." It is based on the minimal use of off-farm inputs and on management practices that restore, maintain and enhance "ecological harmony".

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

As human concern towards natural environment is recently increasing, consumers tend to seek for "the green aspect" of the products, as well as their effects on Earth. On the other hand, the healthy issue is becoming one of the prior concerns of consumers in purchasing products, especially when it comes to food. This factor is appeared as the main driving force for consumers to purchase organic food. Organic food products is increasingly popular throughout the world. In this context, the researcher has felt it necessary to study the consumers' attitude towards organic food products. The main aspects of research are,

- What type of organic food product is commonly purchased by the consumers?
- What is the attitude of consumers towards organic food products?
- Whether they face any problem while purchasing organic food products.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the objectives of the study:

- To analyze the reasons for purchase of organic food product.
- To analyze the consumers' opinion towards organic food product.
- To analyze the constrains in purchasing of organic food products and to suggest suitable measures thereof.

RESEARCH DESIGN

i. SOURCE OF DATA

The study is based on both primary data and secondary data. The primary data has been collected through a well structured questionnaire. Required secondary data has been collected from various sources like Magazines, Books, and Websites.

ii. SAMPLE SIZE

The number of items selected from the population constitutes the sample size. 100 respondents are used for the study of consumers' attitude on organic food products in Erode city.

iii. SAMPLE DESIGN

For the purpose of the research, convenient sampling technique is adopted in selecting the respondents in Erode city. The respondents are distributed with well structured questionnaire.

iv. STATISTICAL TOOLS

The following statistical tools are used in the study for the purpose of analysis.

- (1) Simple percentage analysis (2) Weighted average ranking analysis
(3) Chi-square test

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The major limitations of the study is that,

1. The study is restricted to Erode city with due constrains of time and cost.
2. The correctness of information depends upon the data given by the respondents according to their opinion, knowledge and feeling.
3. The sample size was limited to 100 respondents.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

TABLE NO: 1
PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS

| FACTOR | | PERCENTAGE |
|---------------------------------------|------------------------------|------------|
| Type of Organic Food Product Purchase | Vegetables & Fruits | 51 |
| | Jaggery | 6 |
| | Pulses & cereals | 25 |
| | Milk/Dairy product | 14 |
| | Others | 4 |
| Place of Purchase | Generic Supermarket/Retailer | 43 |
| | Organic/Health store | 33 |
| | Online | 5 |
| | Producer/farm | 19 |
| Duration of Usage | Less than 4 years | 47 |
| | 4 year - 8 years | 38 |
| | More than 8 years | 15 |
| Source of Information | Newspaper/Magazine | 16 |
| | Family/ Friends | 44 |
| | Television | 6 |
| | Internet | 10 |
| | Organic shops | 5 |
| | Self-decision | 19 |

| | | |
|---|------------------|----|
| Satisfaction Level | Highly satisfied | 22 |
| | Satisfied | 69 |
| | Dissatisfied | 9 |
| Familiarity of Organic Standards & Labels | Yes | 59 |
| | No | 41 |

Source: Survey Data

From this study, it is concluded that,

- Out of 100 respondents, as high as (51%) respondents are buying vegetables & fruits.
- Majority (43%) of the respondents purchase organic food products from Generic Supermarket/Retailer.
- Majority (47%) of the respondents are using organic food products for a period of Less than 4 years.
- Majority (44%) of the respondents are influenced by Family/friends.
- Majority (69%) of the respondents are Satisfied towards organic food products.
- Out of 100 respondents, as high as (59%) of the respondents have Seen Organic Standards and Labels on the package of the products.

TABLE NO: 2

| Reasons | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | 6 | 7 | 8 | Total | Rank |
|-------------------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|-------|------|
| Higher Nutrition Value | 64 | 161 | 150 | 115 | 20 | 24 | 10 | 3 | 547 | II |
| Healthy | 248 | 77 | 150 | 85 | 40 | 15 | - | 1 | 616 | I |
| Price | 48 | 63 | 24 | 35 | 36 | 36 | 56 | 25 | 323 | VII |
| Quality | 144 | 98 | 48 | 65 | 88 | 48 | 12 | 3 | 506 | IV |
| No Pesticides/Chemicals | 216 | 77 | 72 | 70 | 52 | 33 | 8 | 8 | 536 | III |
| Eco-friendly | 24 | 49 | 36 | 30 | 100 | 63 | 38 | 13 | 353 | VI |
| Natural | 48 | 140 | 108 | 95 | 44 | 36 | 16 | 6 | 493 | V |
| Proximity | 8 | 35 | 12 | 5 | 20 | 45 | 60 | 41 | 226 | VIII |

RANKING THE REASONS FOR BUYING ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS

Source: Survey Data

From the above table no.2, it is clear that majority of the respondents gave first rank for Healthy followed by second, third, fourth, fifth, sixth, seventh and eighth for Higher Nutrition value, No Pesticides/Chemicals, Quality, Natural, Eco-friendly, Price and Proximity.

Thus, Healthy is the main reason for buying organic food products.

LEVEL OF OPINION OF THE RESPONDENTS

In order to find out the level of opinion, the factors of organic food products such as good quality, more expensive, tastier, without adverse effects, environment friendly, good for health, food preparation-hard and time consuming are taken into consideration. Out of 100 respondents, 9% of the respondents have low level of opinion, 74% of the respondents have medium level of opinion and remaining 17% of the respondents have high level of opinion. To analyze the association between independent variable and level of opinion, the following null hypothesis has been framed.

Ho:

There is no significant association between various independent variables [gender, age, educational qualification, occupation, monthly family income, marital status, family size and area of residence] of the respondents and their level of opinion towards organic food products. This hypothesis has been tested using chi-square test.

TABLE NO. 3
ASSOCIATION BETWEEN DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES AND LEVEL OF OPINION

| Factor | Degrees of freedom | Calculated Value | Table Value at 5% level | Ho: Accepted/ Rejected |
|---------------------------|--------------------|------------------|-------------------------|------------------------|
| Gender | 2 | 2.432 | 5.991 | Accepted |
| Age | 6 | 3.953 | 12.592 | Accepted |
| Educational Qualification | 4 | 2.695 | 9.488 | Accepted |
| Occupation | 6 | 2.450 | 12.592 | Accepted |
| Monthly Family Income | 6 | 8.463 | 12.592 | Accepted |
| Marital Status | 2 | 2.368 | 5.991 | Accepted |
| Family Size | 4 | 14.417 | 9.488 | Rejected |
| Residential Area | 4 | 4.627 | 9.488 | Accepted |

Source: Survey Data

- The Chi-square test results have shown that the demographic factor like gender, age, educational qualification, occupation, monthly family income, marital status and residential area have not significantly influence the level of opinion of the respondents towards organic food products.
- The Chi-square test results have shown that the demographic factor family size have significantly influence the level of opinion of the respondents towards organic food products.

TABLE NO: 4
RANKING THE PROBLEMS REGARDING THE ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS
WEIGHTED AVERAGE RANKING ANALYSIS

| Weighted Score Point(W) | | 7 | 6 | 5 | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 | Total Score (ΣWX) | Weighted Average Score | Rank |
|--|----|-----|-----|-----|----|----|----|-----|-----------------------------|------------------------|------|
| Rank | | I | II | III | IV | V | VI | VII | | | |
| High price | X | 51 | 13 | 13 | 5 | 5 | 2 | 11 | 550 | 19.64 | I |
| | WX | 357 | 78 | 65 | 20 | 15 | 4 | 11 | | | |
| Difficult to identify real organic food products | X | 28 | 28 | 16 | 15 | 6 | 5 | 2 | 534 | 19.07 | II |
| | WX | 196 | 168 | 80 | 60 | 18 | 10 | 2 | | | |
| Durability | X | 6 | 7 | 9 | 18 | 26 | 12 | 22 | 325 | 11.61 | V |
| | WX | 42 | 42 | 45 | 72 | 78 | 24 | 22 | | | |
| Non-availability | X | 5 | 11 | 23 | 22 | 13 | 19 | 7 | 388 | 13.86 | III |
| | WX | 35 | 66 | 115 | 88 | 39 | 38 | 7 | | | |
| Packaging | X | - | 17 | 8 | 12 | 25 | 22 | 16 | 325 | 11.61 | V |
| | WX | - | 102 | 40 | 48 | 75 | 44 | 16 | | | |
| Cooking conditions | X | 6 | 5 | 12 | 14 | 12 | 28 | 23 | 303 | 10.82 | VII |
| | WX | 42 | 30 | 60 | 56 | 36 | 56 | 23 | | | |
| Cheating by shop owners | X | 5 | 19 | 18 | 14 | 13 | 12 | 19 | 377 | 13.46 | IV |
| | WX | 35 | 114 | 90 | 56 | 39 | 24 | 19 | | | |

Source: Survey Data

Table no.4 reveals that out of the various problems the high price is given first rank with Weighted Average score of 19.64 and the second rank is given to difficulty to identify real food products with Weighted Average score of 19.07, it is followed by non-availability whose Weighted Average score of 13.86 and secure third rank. The cheating by shop owners is given fourth rank with Weighted Average score of 13.46, and the fifth rank is given to both durability and packaging with Weighted Average score of 11.61, cooking condition is given seventh rank with Weighted Average score of 10.82 respectively.

Hence, high price is the main problem in purchasing organic food products.

SUGGESTIONS

- ❖ Healthy is the foremost reason for buying organic food product. Steps must be taken to educate farmers about organic and sustainable methods of farming.
- ❖ High price is the main problem in purchasing organic food products. Producers must take steps to sell their produce directly at convenient places to the consumers so as to reduce price and non-availability.
- ❖ Majority of the respondents are buying vegetables and fruits, producers and sellers must motivate the consumers to buy other organic food products also.
- ❖ The sample respondents have medium level of opinion towards organic food products. The producers must improve the quality and taste to increase the opinion level.

CONCLUSION

The overall awareness on organic food products among the public is increasing and their attitude towards purchase intention is positive. The results of the study further shows that the reasons advocated by the consumers for buying organic food products are varied and primarily the motivations behind their decision to purchase include concerns for environment, health, lifestyle and food product quality.

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