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Consumers' awareness and opinion regarding organic food products in south Gujarat

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ABSTRACT

Increasing awareness has caused shifts in consumers' tastes and preferences which have led to the domestic as well as global rise in demand for organic products. The country's budding organic food market is transforming into world's fastest growing organic food market backed by a shift in consumer behavior and spending patterns. Organic food industry has been blossoming in India. The present study attempted to gain knowledge about consumer awareness and opinion about organic food products in south Gujarat. While studying level of knowledge and awareness regarding organic food products it was noted that majority of the respondents associated organic products being without chemical fertilizers and healthy and safe however majority were unaware about the availability of organic produce and had not tried it. Majority of them gave importance to certification as a way to be assured that the product was organic and were willing to pay a price premium. The study suggested lack of knowledge and information as important variables playing important roles in consumption of the organic produce.

Keywords: Organic; awareness; food; produce; consumers; awareness; opinion

INTRODUCTION

Food consumption patterns are changing as a result of health and environmental issues. Interest in organically produced food is increasing throughout the world. India today is on the threshold of an organic revolution and Indian organic food industry though at a nascent stage has experienced steadfast growth in past few years. Ever since the environmentalists raised their concern regarding harmful effect of increasing use of chemicals in farming the consumers are getting conscious and selective about edible products. This increasing awareness has caused shifts in consumers' tastes and preferences which have led to the domestic as well as global rise in demand for organic products. Consumers' interest in organic food products has grown enormously during the past ten years in many industrialized countries. Despite the growth trend of organic food products industry and continued government support, there is little research on the demand of organic food products in India. Thus a clear understanding of consumer attitudes and the motivations underlying actions in responding to organically grown products in India is important. This study attempted to gain knowledge about consumers' awareness and opinion regarding organic food products.

According to several studies the image of organic products is generally positive due to their perceived health value, product safety and natural purity (Beharrell and MacFie 1991, Luth et al 2004).

In most studies gender and income are among the most significant determinants affecting the willingness-to-pay for organically grown produce. These studies found that willingness-to-pay for food risk reduction increased with income (Elnagheeb and Jordan 1990, Underhill and Figueroa 1996). Govindasamy and Italia (1999) reported that higher earning individuals were the most likely to pay a premium for a certified organic produce. Weaver et al (1992) reported that 56 per cent of consumers indicated a willingness-to-pay of at least a 10 per cent premium to obtain organic tomatoes. Huang (1993) reported a gender significance which showed that females were more likely than males to pay a premium for organic produce. Misra et al (1991) reported a negative correlation between education and willingness-to-pay for organic produce. Earlier works (Zellner and Degner 1989) also showed that higher educated consumers exhibited a lower willingness-to-pay for safer food. Thompson (1998) suggested that demand is positively related to household size and has mixed relationship to age (young and older middle-aged adults tend to buy the most organic produce).

Education has an interesting effect in that it is positively related to demand unless post-graduate education is pursued in which case the opposite holds (Ward et al 2004). Thompson and Kidwell (1998) suggested that income may not be related to organic purchases while many studies generally suggest a positive relationship between income and organic consumption.

The main objectives of this study were to assess consumers' awareness and opinion regarding organic food products in south Gujarat.

METHODOLOGY

Three cities of ssouth Gujarat namely Navsari, Surat and Bharuch were selected for the study. Primary data were collected by conducting personal interview of consumers belonging to upper and upper middle income categories through a structured questionnaire and secondary data were collected through various sources like magazines, internet, journals etc. Applying convenience sampling methodology 300 respondents were selected with 100 consumers from each city.

Both quantitative and qualitative approaches were used for the data analysis. Statistical tools like mean, frequency and percentage were used. For finding out the factors affecting the importance of food items for the consumers Likert-type scale from 1 to 5 was used (1 being not very important and 5 very important).

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

Data in Table 1 show that maximum respondents fell in the age group of 26-40 years (44%); 41.33 per cent were employees of private organizations; 40.67 per cent were graduates; 44.67 per cent had monthly income in the range of Rs 20000-40000 and 76 per cent of the respondents had nuclear families.

Most of the respondents (29.30%) bought food items from Mandis which are considered to be wholesale traditional markets for grocery and fresh produce followed by grocery stores (23.95%) (Table 2).

Table 3 indicates that consumers gave much importance to freshness as for 78.3 per cent respondents it was very important factor followed by quality and taste (50.00%). Visibility in the shop and packaging were least important factors affecting the consumption.

Table 4 indicates that most of the respondents got information about the organic food from word of mouth (37.33%) and majority (38.00%) was of the concept that it was produced without chemical fertilizers. For the consumers organic food was healthy (34.00%) followed by safe (32.00%).

Majority (56.75%) of the people surveyed didn't know about any organic brand selling organic produce. Only 14.59 per cent of the respondents knew the name of Organic India (Table 5).

Data given in Table 6 show that 58.66 per cent respondents did not know about the availability of organic products and two-third of them (67.66%) had never tried organic products.

Most of the respondents (62.00%) did not use organically grown products only due to the reason that they were unaware about the source of them followed by 26.00 per cent who did not have knowledge of them (Table 7).

In the opinion of the respondents organic foods were of higher quality and better taste (Rank I) followed by the opinion that these were healthy (Rank II) and more natural (Rank III) (Table 8).

Table 1. Socio-economic profile of the respondents

Parameter	Respondents	
	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Male	162	54
Female	138	46
Age of respondents (years)		
18-25	58	19.33
26-40	132	44
41-50	84	28
>50	26	8.67
Marital status		
Married	212	70.67
Unmarried	88	29.33
Type of family		
Nuclear	228	76
Joint	72	24
Educational qualification		
Secondary	28	9.33
Higher Secondary	46	15.33
Graduate	122	40.67
Post-graduate	68	22.67
Professional	36	12
Occupation		
Business	66	22
Government service	110	36.67
Private job	124	41.33
Monthly income (Rs)		
<10000	52	17.33
10000-20000	76	25.33
20000-40000	134	44.67
>40000	38	12.67

Table 2. Source of buying food items

Source	# family members	
	Frequency*	Percentage
Mandi	126	29.30
Specialized shop	37	8.60
Modern supermarket	88	20.46
Mobile vendor	76	17.67
Grocery store	103	23.95
Total	430	100

*Multiple responses

Table 3. Factors affecting the consumption of food items

Factor	Importance					Mean	Rank
	Not important 1	Slightly important 2	Moderately important 3	Important 4	Very important 5		
Price	30 (10)	50 (16.6)	55 (18.3)	80 (26.6)	85 (28.3)	3.46	IV
Quality and taste	0 (0)	5 (1.6)	60 (20)	85 (28.3)	150 (50)	4.26	II
Freshness	0 (0)	0 (0)	15 (5)	50 (16.6)	235 (78.3)	4.73	I
Useful features	0 (0)	15 (5)	70 (23.3)	85 (28.3)	130 (43.3)	4.10	III
Presentation in the shop	85 (28.3)	60 (20)	21 (7)	62 (20.6)	72 (24)	2.92	V
Visibility in shop	119 (39.6)	27 (9)	24 (8)	62 (20.6)	68 (22.6)	2.77	VI
Packaging	123 (41)	25 (8.3)	23 (7.6)	61 (20.3)	68 (22.6)	2.75	VII

Table 4. Source of information of food for the respondents and their concept and perception about organic food

Parameter	Respondents	
	Frequency	Percentage
Source of information about food		
Advertisement	89	29.67
Word of mouth	112	37.33
Visibility in shop	90	30
Other sources	9	03.00
Concept about organic produce		
Natural foods	33	11.00
Produced without chemical fertilizers	114	38.00
Ecologically clean foods	21	07.00
Healthier foods	48	16.00
Produced using organic methods	39	13.00
Don't know	45	15.00
Perception about advantages of organic produce		
It's tasty	30	10.00
It's healthy	102	34.00
It's safe	96	32.00
It's nutritional	33	11.00
Better smell	6	2.00
Don't know	33	11.00

Table 5. Awareness about organic food brands

Brand	Respondents	
	Frequency*	Percentage
24 Letter Mantra	7	1.89
Down to Earth	36	9.72
Orgavita	33	8.91
Fab India	21	5.67
Green Fiesta	9	2.43
Organic India	54	14.59
Not known	210	56.75
Total responses	370	100

*Multiple responses

Table 6. Awareness of the respondents about availability of organic products and whether they had ever tried them

Parameter	Respondents	
	Frequency	Percentage
Awareness		
Yes	124	41.33
No	176	58.66
Whether tried the organic products		
Yes	97	32.33
No	203	67.66

Table 7. Reasons for not using organically grown products by the respondents

Reason	Respondents	
	Frequency	Percentage
Unaware of the source to buy	186	62.00
Possibility of being cheated	33	11.00
Lack of knowledge	78	26.00
High price	3	1.00
Total	300	100

Table 8. Respondents' opinion about organic products

Statement	Strongly disagree 1	Disagree 2	Undecided 3	Agree 4	Strongly agree 5	Mean	Rank
Organic foods are healthy	0 (0)	0 (0)	18 (6)	110 (36.6)	172 (57.3)	4.51	II
Organic foods are more natural	4 (1.3)	5 (1.6)	22 (7.3)	103 (34.3)	166 (55.3)	4.49	III
Organic foods are of higher quality and better taste	0 (0)	0 (0)	15 (5)	111 (37)	174 (58)	4.53	I
Organic foods are more environment friendly	0 (0)	14 (4.6)	23 (7.6)	98 (32.6)	165 (55)	4.38	V
Organic foods are of better smell/flavor	30 (10)	34 (11.3)	32 (10.6)	82 (27.3)	122 (40.6)	3.77	VIII
Organic foods produce less toxic and dangerous waste	21 (7)	18 (6)	32 (10.6)	92 (30.6)	137 (45.6)	4.02	VI
Organic foods are of higher level of guarantee and control	41 (13.6)	46 (15.3)	25 (8.3)	78 (26)	110 (36.6)	3.56	IX
Organic foods are more expensive	24 (8)	21 (7)	21 (7)	98 (32.6)	136 (45.3)	4.00	VII
Organic foods don't last long	53 (17.6)	61 (20.3)	24 (8)	68 (22.6)	94 (31.3)	3.29	X
Organic foods don't look as good	69 (23)	71 (23.6)	21 (7)	54 (18)	85 (28.3)	3.05	XI
Organic foods are fraud	83 (27.6)	65 (21.6)	51 (17)	45 (15)	56 (18.6)	2.75	XII
Organic foods are like fashion	108 (36)	110 (36.6)	29 (9.6)	26 (8.6)	27 (9)	2.18	XIII
Organic foods are worse than conventional ones	131 (43.6)	121 (40.3)	27 (9)	10 (3.3)	11 (3.6)	1.83	XIV
Organic food products are difficult to find	0 (0)	7 (2.3)	10 (3.3)	121 (40.3)	162 (54)	4.46	IV

For 35.33 per cent respondents taste was the assurance factor through which they could find out that the produce was organic whereas 34.33 per cent relied on certificate on the product. They (48.33%) preferred that specialized shops should be there to procure organic food and 41.00 per cent were of the view that special TV programmes be held for getting information about organic food (Table 9).

Majority (72.00%) of the respondents surveyed were willing to be regularly informed about how to get organic produce (Table 10).

Table 11 shows that only 13 per cent of the respondents were not willing to pay any premium for the organically grown produce. Majority (41.00%) of the people surveyed mentioned about their willingness

Table 9. Assurance factors that produce was organic, preferred method to acquire organic food and preferred media to get information about organic produce

Parameter	Respondents	
	Frequency	Percentage
Assurance factors that the produce is organic		
Difference in taste	106	35.33
Difference in appearance	22	7.33
Difference in price	14	4.66
Trust	15	5.00
Certified	103	34.33
Special packaging	20	6.66
Duly labelled	9	3.00
Other	11	3.66
Preferred method to acquire organic food		
Delivered at home/office	3	1.00
Specialized shops	145	48.33
Supermarkets	73	24.33
Conventional markets	70	23.33
Other	9	3.00
Preferred media to get information about organic produce		
Special TV programmes	123	41.00
TV advertisement	69	23.00
E-mail	39	13.00
Radio	9	3.00
Newspapers	45	15.00
Word of mouth	15	5.00

Table 10. Willingness of respondents to get informed about how to acquire organic produce

Response	Respondents	
	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	216	72
No	84	28

Table 11. Willingness-to-pay a price premium of the respondents for organically grown produce

Response (%)	Respondents	
	Frequency	Percentage
No	39	13.00
Yes (<10)	33	11.00
Yes (10-20)	123	41.00
Yes (20-30)	48	16.00
Yes (30-50)	51	17.00
Yes (50-75)	3	1.00
Yes (75-100)	3	1.00

to pay a price premium between 10 and 20 per cent.

CONCLUSION

In the present study on consumers' awareness and opinion regarding organic food products conducted in south Gujarat it was found that consumers gave much importance to freshness followed by quality and taste. Most of the respondents got information about the organic food from word of mouth and were of the concept that it was produced without chemical fertilizers. For them organic food was healthy and safe. Majority of them didn't know about any organic food brand being sold in the market. Most of them did not know about the availability of organic products and two-third of them had never tried organic products only due to the reason that they were unaware about the source of them. For respondents organic foods were of higher quality and better taste. Taste was the assurance factor through which they could find out that the produce was organic. They preferred that specialized shops should be there to procure organic food and special TV programmes be held for getting information about organic food. Majority of the people mentioned about their willingness-to-pay a price premium between 10 and 20 per cent for the organic produce.

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