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## CONSUMER ATTITUDE AND BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD PRODUCTS

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### ABSTRACT

*The study is an attempt to understand the consumer behavior and attitude concerning organic foods in Tiruchirappalli. The purpose of this research paper is to present an overall view of Tiruchirappalli organic food market and to delineate consumer's behavior and attitude towards organic food. The study sought to understand the main external and internal social factors that influence purchase behavior, consumer decision making process, and to explore organic consumer profile.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Organic food, consumer behavior, attitude, social factors, purchase behavior, consumer decision making process*

### 1. INTRODUCTION

This research paper aims to gain knowledge about consumer attitude and behaviour towards organic food products in the Trichy district of Tamil Nadu. The author explores to investigate factors that might influence the people's intention to purchase organic products and also analyses the demographic characteristics of respondents by looking at their buying pattern towards organic food. Due to technological advances and increasing consumer dissatisfaction with conventional food, the organic agriculture has steadily expanded worldwide over the past few years. Now days, organic food production has gained wide attention as concerns and awareness about the negative impacts from intensive farming affecting the environment, public health, community and economy has increased considerably.

Trichy Public authorities have continuously promoted organic agriculture as an environmentally friendly production method, and consumer behaviour

towards organic products has attracted growing research attention. In most parts of the Trichy, organic food has become an attractive and fast developing sector of the overall food market. Organic agriculture is one of the solutions to reduce the negative consequences of industrialized agriculture. Based on holistic production management systems, organic agriculture is a multifunctional and highly sustainable method; it delivers numerous public benefits and ethical values including preservation of natural resources, welfare of humans and animals, internalizing environmental costs, etc.

Today's educated society has raised a great interest to healthy lifestyle with high nutrition values, food safety, environmental and animal welfare. The increasing consumer demand for higher quality produce and food safety makes organic food one of the most promising alternatives. Due to many recent food scandals, people are suspicious towards conventional products which include the use of

GMOs, pesticides, additives, or fertilizers. As a result, consumers are willing to pay premium price for organic food to employ the benefits of natural production and to mitigate the ill-effects of aggressive farming.

Like mainstream agriculture, organic agriculture is faced with the challenges of globalization and sustainable development. Although the organic market has expanded in recent years, it occupies small market share in food consumption. Some researchers indicated that consumers' lack of knowledge concerning organic food is one of the barriers to increasing the market share.

**2. CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR ANALYSIS**

Consumer behavior is defined as the study of consumers and the processes by which they use to select, consume, and dispose of products and services, in satisfaction of their needs and wants (Kuester, Sabine 2012). Consumer behavior combines elements from several sciences including psychology, biology, chemistry and economics.

Product decisions shape life for the consumers; they are engaged in activities of selecting

and buying food almost every day. Actual purchasing decision involves a complicated decision-making process and cycle. Different decisions depend on internal and external factors such as psychological, personal, social and cultural factors.

The stimulus-response model is the starting point to understand the relationship between marketing stimuli and consumer response (C.L. Tyagi, Arun Kumar 2004). According to this model, stimuli come in the form of both the elements of the marketing mix and the external environment (Table2.1). Marketing stimuli consist of the Four Ps: product, price, place, and promotion. Besides, there are other stimuli that act as the major forces and events in the buyer's environment: economic, technological, political, and cultural.

All these inputs enter the buyer's "black box", and interact with the buyers' characteristics and decision processes; they produce a series of certain buyer responses: product choice, brand choice, dealer choice, purchase timing and purchase amount (Kotler et al., 2008). Marketing management must take into account what is inside of the buyer's "black box" and how stimuli are changed into responses.

Environmental factors		Buyer's black box		Buyer's response
Marketing Stimuli	Environmental Stimuli	Buyer Characteristics	Decision Process	
Product	Economic	Attitudes	Problem recognition	Product choice
	Technological	Motivation	Information search	Brand choice
Price	Political	Perceptions	Alternative evaluation	Dealer choice
Place	Cultural	Personality	Purchase decision	Purchase timing
Promotion	Demographic	Lifestyle	Post-purchase behaviour	Purchase amount
	Natural	Knowledge		

**Table2.1: Model of Buyer Behaviour (Source: Wikipedia: Consumer Behaviour)**

**3. MAJOR FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR**

Consumers vary tremendously in age, income, education, tastes, and many other characteristics; therefore, they make product

purchase not in the same ways. There are various internal and external factors influencing the purchases of consumer (Dunn and Corvallis, 2007). These factors are also called determinants of consumer behaviour (Figure3.1)

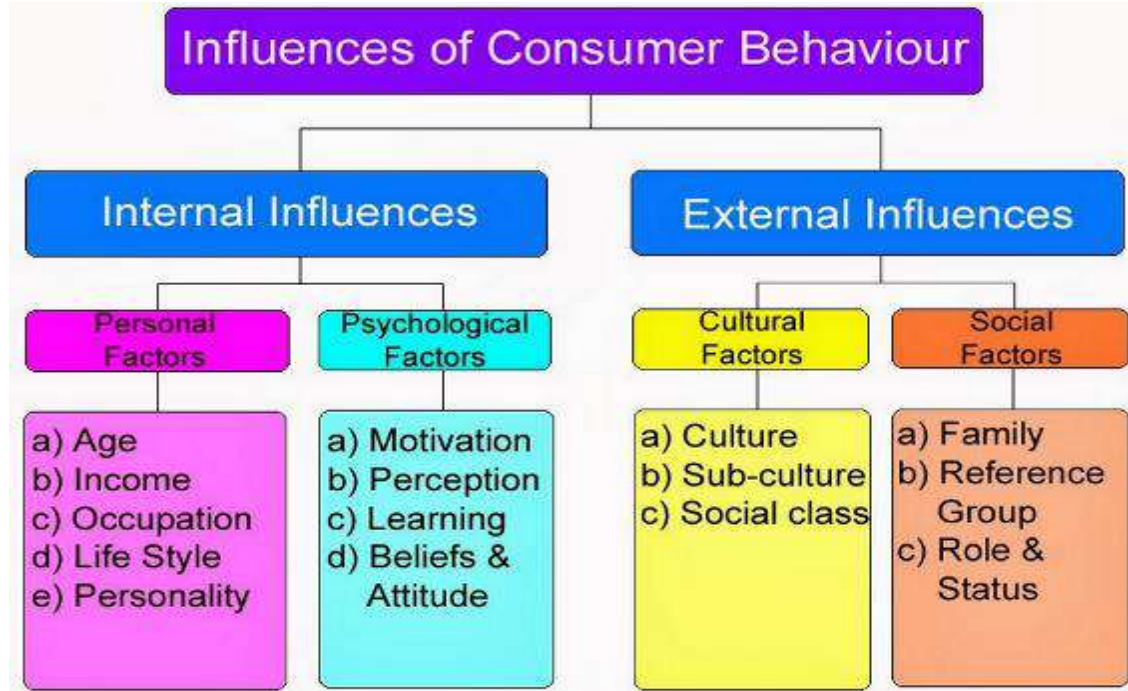


Figure3.1: Model of Factors Influencing Consumer Behaviour (Source: eNotesMBA.com)

### 3.1 Internal Factors

#### (i) Personal Factors

##### Age and life-cycle

Human age and life-cycle have a significant impact on consumer buying behaviour. The individual grows and enters various stages throughout their lives such as single, married, married with children, or widowed; therefore, their needs change. Each stage of life will affect what the consumer needs and wants, their taste, preference, etc. It is obvious that people purchase different products and services at their different phases of cycle (Kotler et al. 2008). People who are among the highest spenders on organic food are on average more affluent and younger (Patel and Foster, 2005). Demographically, a lot of people are young parents that are buying organic food. According to the Organic Trade Association report (2009), common results on the socio-economic profile of organic food consumers show that organic purchasing grows as consumers reach their 30s and lies between the age 35 and 55 years.

Thus, understanding the family life cycle is beneficial for marketers because it helps in defining target customers. Therefore, it is important to identify the main stages in an individual's life and develop appropriate products for each stage.

##### Gender

Males and females do not want the same products and don't have the same ways of liking (Mitchell and Walsh 2004). The consumer behaviour

varies across gender at various situations because of the differences between men and women about expectation, want, need, life-style, etc. (Akturan, 2009). Moreover, with the different upbringing and social position as well as various other biological and psychological factors, men and women work differently with different types of stimuli and different criterion of evaluations at every stage of decision making. Lea and Wesley (2005) stated that women generally have more positive attitude towards organic food than men. Because women are normally the main cook in the household, they tend to be a more frequent buyer and seem to be more interested in organics than men (Wandel and Bugge, 1997).

##### Education

An individual's level of education and associated earnings significantly influence spending patterns. There is a close correlation between the education level of consumers and the amount of organic foods they purchase. People that have a higher education are more likely to express their positive attitudes towards healthy and environmental save product, and they also require more information about the production process and method (Padel and Foster, 2005). According to most of surveys, organic food consumers are among those with high education level compared to non-organic consumers. People buy organic food generally either have more education or have wider view on the world. Thus it appears that the biggest determiner affecting

consumer motivation towards organic foods product has been and still seems to be level of education.

### **Economic Situation**

The buying tendency of an individual is directly related to their income or the economic situation which is an important driving force for purchasing power and shapes the consumption pattern. Lockie et al., (2002) reported that increase in income levels leads to an increase in the likelihood of purchasing organic food. Therefore, buying pattern of people differs with different levels of income.

In general, people with higher income are more likely to have a positive attitude and to purchase more organic food (Magnusson et al., 2001), whereas lower income households have to face budget constraints and are at many times not able to afford higher price of organic food.

### **Occupation**

The occupation or profession of an individual plays a significant role in affecting their buying decision. A person's designation and his nature of the work have a direct influence on his life style and purchasing considerations. A low level worker wouldn't purchase business suits or college students would prefer casual outfits rather than formal dress. In the same manner, people with lesser income, the blue-collared professionals or the laborers, wouldn't go for the expensive organics products. Hence, there is a strong correlation between the occupation and the consumers' attitude towards organic foods.

### **Lifestyle**

Life style refers to a person's pattern of living in the society including activities, interests, values, opinions, and will influence on his behaviour and purchasing decisions. A person makes a choice in consumption environment in order to define or actualize his life style, identify it through the products or brand chosen. It has been observed that people who maintain healthy lifestyle choose organic

foods over conventional farm products. Even people who have similar culture, social class or occupation may have quite different lifestyles but people with healthy lifestyle prefer to opt for organic foods.

### **Personality**

One individual is different from another not only in the physical aspects, but also in personality wise. Personality is the set of traits and specific characteristics of an individual which is the result of social and environmental influences on his attitudes, values in life, etc. Such traits include assertiveness, ambitiousness, introversion, patience, aggression, among others (Lawrence A. Pervin, 1996).

There are inner psychological characteristics that determine and reflect a person's response tendencies to the environment stimuli (Harold H. Kassarian, 1981). Researchers have linked personality traits to diverse outcomes such as buying tendencies, political orientation, natural language use, preference in pets, living space, and many other important life events. It is a useful concept because it enables marketers to categorize consumers into different groups on the basis of one or several traits.

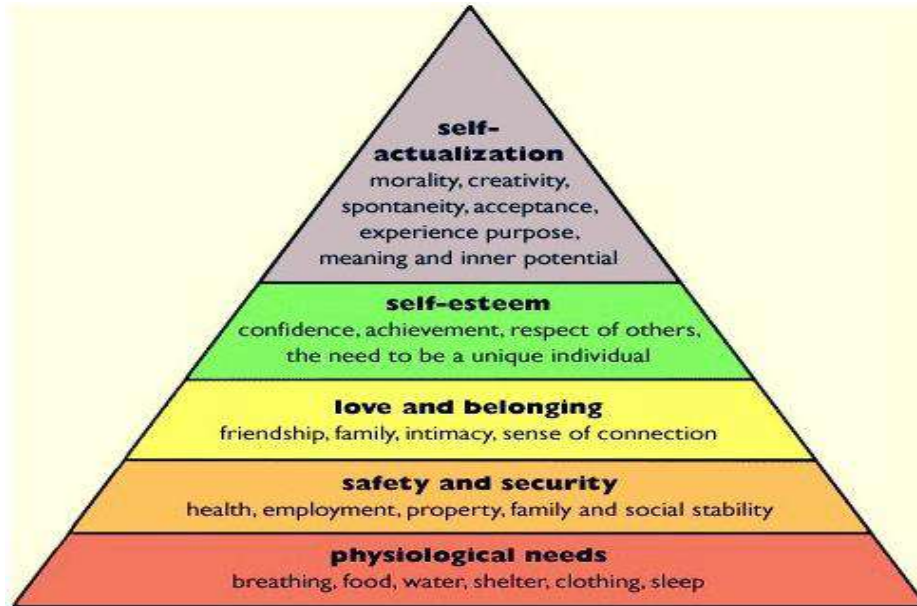
## **(ii) Psychological Factors**

### **Motivation**

People are driven by particular needs at particular times. Human needs are arranged in a hierarchy from most pressing to least pressing.

In the mid-1900s, Abraham Maslow, an American psychologist, developed the hierarchy of needs which explores the factors behind human achievement and explains people different motivational level in undertaking a buying decision (Figure 3.2).

Maslow theorized that people have to fulfill their basic needs before they can begin fulfilling higher-level needs. Different needs arise at different points in time in a person's life.



**Figure3.1.1: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (Source: Wikipedia)**

The level of motivation also affects the buying behaviour of customers. In every decision-making process several motives play a role, not only one. In fact, most studies confirmed that organic consumers are more motivated by egocentric values such as health, safety, quality, flavour, etc. more than concerns for the environment and animal welfare, or rural development (Zanoli and Naspetti, 2002). According to Whole Foods Market® nationwide survey (2004), respondents believed that organic foods are better for the environment (58%), better for health (54%), and 57% believed that buying and using organic products is better for supporting small and local farmers.

**Perception**

Perception is how a person selects, processes, and interprets input data from the environment and makes sense of it in his brain (Brown 2006). It relates directly to an individual's interpretation of a product. Depending on his experiences, beliefs and personal characteristics, an individual will have a different perception from another.

Along with direct experience of sensory data, perception is also influenced by learning, attitudes, and past experiences, etc. Consumers buy organic foods for different reasons, including perceptions that organic foods are healthier and concerns about effects of conventional farming practices on the environment, human health, and animal welfare (Zander and Hamm, 2010).

**Beliefs and Attitudes**

Attitudes are shaped by an individual's values and beliefs, which are learned. Belief is a subjective perception that a person holds about

certain things; whilst an attitude, is defined as a learned predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner towards a person, place, or event. Through the experience a person obtains, his learning and his external influences (family, friends, etc.), he will develop beliefs and attitudes that will affect his shopping and buying habits.

Although consumers have developed beliefs that organic foods are healthier, more nutritious, and taste better, these beliefs are only consumer perception and have not been scientifically proven.

**Learning**

Learning refers to changes in individual behaviour resulting from information and experience. Through learning, people obtain beliefs and attitudes, which consequently affect the buying behaviour. The more information an individual is exposed to, the more he learns from it and behaves accordingly. People with limited experience about a product generally attempt to find more information than those who have used the product before. Therefore, to create changes in consumer behaviour toward a certain product, it is essential to give them the adequate information. In addition, if a person has positive experiences with the product purchase, it will generate a pleasant learning, and he will have much more desire to buy it again next time.

**3.2 External Factors**

**(i) Cultural Factors**

**Culture**

Culture refers to shared beliefs, customs, behaviors, and attitudes that characterize a society. Culture is the part of every society and its values differ greatly from country to country. Basically, values, perceptions, preferences as well as common

behaviour of an individual were what he learned from his family, friends, cultural environment and society.

For example, a culture where personal health is given priority tends to buy organic foods as they contain more nutrients than conventional agriculture products. Therefore, culture is the most fundamental determinant of a person's want and behaviour towards organic food use.

### Subculture

Subcultures are groups of people within a culture who share the same value systems based on common life experiences and situations, or similar lifestyles. Each culture contains various smaller subcultures which provide specific identity to its members such as religion, nationalities, age groups, geographical regions, gender, status, etc. Although this subgroup will share most of the beliefs of the main culture, they share among themselves another set of beliefs, which may be in conflict with those held by the main group.

Many subcultures make up important market segments and marketers have to design multicultural marketing approaches tailored to the tastes and preferences of the consumers belonging to different subcultures.

### Social Class

Consumer behaviour is determined by the social class to which they belong. According to some researchers, behaviour and buying habits would also be a way of identification to its social class. Social class is not only determined by a single factor such as income but it is measured by a combination of various other factors as well such as education, occupation, power, property, ownership, life styles, consumption, etc. A well-informed society is keen on environment protection and refrains itself from indulging any activity which hampers the environment sustainability.

Organic agriculture provided several environmental benefits including lower pesticide pollution, enhanced biodiversity and ecological services, improved soil health and strong links between organic farming and nature conservation activities (Lohr, 2005). In fact, what truly increases the value of organic food is its greater respect for the environment.

## CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study one can give an overview of today's Tiruchirappalli organic food market and consumer's behaviour and attitudes towards organic consumption. The main explanations from organic non-buyers were lack of interest, no perceived benefits, and higher price which are relatively consistent with the theory. The basic concept of the research was to classify the organic consumers in relation to demographic factors including age, gender, education, employment status, income, and living situation.

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