EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook (SEEO) ISSN: 2348-4101
Volume: 11 | Issue: 7 | July 2024 | SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.284 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0314 | Peer-Reviewed Journal

A DETAILED STUDY ON THE EMERGENCE OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERNS ON CONSUMER ATTITUDES TOWARDS ORGANIC FOOD IN MAHARASHTRA

Sujata Sen Bhowmick
Research Scholar in Management, Banasthali Vidyapith, Rajasthan
Lecturer, Kapol Vidyanidhi College of Hotel Management, Kandivali (West), Mumbai

ABSTRACT
The paper studies the attitudes of consumers of Maharashtra toward organic food, in particular related to their concerns about the environment and sustainable development and the impact on their purchasing behavior. It studies the relationship of demographic parameters such as age, gender, and education level to several variables, including organic food buying frequency, reasons for the purchase of organic food, and knowledge of the meaning of environment-related certificates. The number of participants in the study was 190 people from three tahsils of Thane district, Maharashtra. The results show that the opinions and behavior of customers are very diverse, but, for most, the attitude to sustainable development plays an important role in terms of buying organic food.
KEYWORD: ***Organic food; Environmental sustainability; Consumer attitudes; Maharashtra; Purchasing behavior; Awareness campaigns***

INTRODUCTION

Sustainability as a discourse has experienced increased growth in the last few decades, driven primarily by general concerns about environmental degradation, climate change, and resource depletion. Organic food production and consumption have been getting more and more attention from all over the globe (Ahmad et al., 2023). Consumption of food has acquired significance in sustainability discussions, even as it continues to play a subordinate role, compared with other issues. One of the most noticeable changes in Maharashtra is, a large state with widespread types of agriculture grown and much urban development throughout the province, that there's rising awareness among its people of consuming an organic nature of foodstuffs (Vijay, 2021). Moreover, the trend could be encouraged by growing concern for the environment. This follows from a better understanding of global warming and what our consumption means (Tandon et al., 2020).

The fact is that people's views about the effectiveness and advantages of eating organic foods, aside from considerations of environmental effects, still have fairly great impacts on consumers' food choices and demand. At the same time, Maharashtra, with such diverse ethnic and cultural groups along with wide-ranging processes occurring throughout its society gives an opportunity to test and uncover which opinions about consuming organic food there actually still exist and how they can be put into practice for some environmental benefit or other. For this reason, the study aims to understand what most people in Maharashtra think about how inexpensively growing food organically can help to reduce pollution in the environment. As a result, the study is focused on determining the key factors that might have an effect on people’s perceptions and choices associated with food.

As organic food consumption is gaining broader attention globally (Sahota, 2010) and the need for designing new policy interventions also grows, one of the most critical tasks is to design viable strategies for increasing its demand. They are becoming particularly relevant in Maharashtra, a state that is at the crossroads of agricultural modernization and sustainable development with regard to organic food. In this paper, the initiatives, practices, and technologies that can be used for improving the consumption of organic food based on the empirical results of the study as well as some best practices are to be introduced. Additionally, the socio-demographic factor that was defined in the study as one that influences customer attitudes to consumption of organic foods and the policymaking consequences based on it are also to be discussed further. Through a comprehensive study of all these aspects, the current research is supposed to become a basis for further developments of the policy aimed at enhancing organic food consumption and achieving the goals of sustainability.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumers are becoming more aware of the adverse effects of contaminants on food, pushing them to buy organic foods (Basha et al., 2015). In their study, Cheung et al. (2015) analyzed how health awareness, understanding of organic food, and conservation consciousness together shape the view of consumers about organic foods in Hong Kong. Consumer opinion towards organic foods is the result of their environmental concern and their knowledge of organic food. The study did, however, conclude that health consciousness had no significant effect on young consumers' view of organic food products.

Baydas et al. (2021) explored which factors affected attitudes towards organic products among college students in assistance with healthy behavior. A survey conducted in the province of Istanbul identified and classified those factors that affect attitudes to organic products into five dimensions: knowledge, price, inconvenience, negative sentiment, and standard. Hsu & Chen (2014) studied the effects of regulatory fit on consumer perception and purchase intention concerning organic food in Taiwan. It was found that regulatory fit had a positive effect on both people's views and inclination to buy organic food. Çabuk et al. (2014) studied the effects of health consciousness, environmental awareness, and safety concerns for organic foods on individuals' motives to purchase organic foods and attitudes toward such products in Adana, Turkey. If more health-conscious, environmentally affected, and anxious about food safety than average people, you're more likely to have an opinion as well as buy intention on organic products.

Lee & Yun (2015) explored that which impact consumers expect the organic food characteristic should have. In the process of doing so, they also sought to identify whether these anticipated utilitarian and hedonic attitudes translate into intentions to buy organic foods. Nutritional quality and environmental protection, as well as price had substantial quantifiable impacts on both utilitarian attitudes toward buying organic food and hedonic attitudes towards purchasing organics. Gifford & Bernard (2006) conducted a study in the United States, in which they examined how the presentation of information about organic foods, either positively or negatively influenced consumers' inclination to buy organic food. When both the tone of the information and the perceived degree of danger from traditional agriculture were altered, eight out of ten respondents changed their intentions to purchase organic food. An analysis of survey results was more strongly influenced by the attributes of the knowledge and information than it was by demographic variables. Communication tactics are hence shown to play an significant role in encouraging people to use organic food products.

These studies jointly enhance our comprehension of the factors that influence consumer attitudes and intentions about the consumption of organic food. Researchers and marketers can build specific strategies to encourage the consumption of organic food and support the global growth of the organic food sector by identifying the elements that influence consumer behavior and attitudes.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The scope of this research is to investigate the intersection between consumer attitudes towards organic food and environmental sustainability within the context of Maharashtra, India. The study aims to delve into the following key aspects:

- Consumer awareness and understanding of the environmental implications associated with organic food production and consumption.
- Perceptions surrounding organic food consumption and its perceived environmental impact among consumers in Maharashtra.
- Factors influencing consumer behavior towards organic food consumption, including socio-demographic variables such as age, gender, and education level.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- To what extent do consumers in Maharashtra possess knowledge and awareness regarding the environmental advantages associated with organic food consumption compared to conventional alternatives?
- What are the prevailing attitudes and beliefs among consumers in Maharashtra regarding organic food, specifically concerning its perceived environmental sustainability in terms of pesticide use, soil conservation, and biodiversity preservation?
- How do socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, and education level influence consumer perceptions and behaviors towards organic food consumption, and to what extent do these factors vary across different aspects?
- What role do certifications or labels indicating environmentally friendly or organic products play in shaping consumer trust and attitudes towards organic food in Maharashtra?

EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook (SEEO) ISSN: 2348-4101
Volume: 11 | Issue: 7 | July 2024 | SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.284 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0314 | Peer-Reviewed Journal

- How can targeted initiatives, strategies, and policy interventions be formulated and implemented to promote the consumption of organic foods and foster environmental sustainability within Maharashtra?
- What are the potential barriers and challenges hindering the widespread adoption of organic foods among consumers in Maharashtra, and how can these obstacles be addressed effectively?
- How can insights from this study contribute to the development of marketing campaigns, supply chain interventions, and educational initiatives aimed at promoting environmental sustainability and conscious consumption of organic foods in Maharashtra?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- To investigate the overall perspective of consumers regarding the consumption of organic food and its impact on the environment in the selected tehsils of Thane district in Maharashtra.
- To identify the factors that promote the use of organic food in order to provide practical solutions for increasing market demand and improving accessibility in the selected tehsils of Thane district in Maharashtra.

RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

Hypothesis 1: Consumer purchasing frequency of organic food products is positively correlated with their level of environmental awareness.

Hypothesis 2: The trust and awareness of certifications or labels indicating environmentally friendly or organic products significantly influence consumer attitudes toward organic food.

Hypothesis 3: Socio-demographic factors such as age, gender, and education level influence consumer perceptions and behaviors toward organic food consumption, but the impact may vary across different aspects

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study will utilize a cross-sectional research approach to examine the influence of environmental concerns on consumer attitudes toward organic food in Maharashtra. The study will concentrate on 190 households situated in the Thane, Bhiwandi, and Kalyan tehsil of Thane district. The fieldwork is planned for February 2024 and will involve the use of a questionnaire survey as the main mode of data collection.

A convenience sample strategy will be used to pick participants since it is reasonable and feasible. Proficient research assistants will personally conduct the questionnaire survey to guarantee a substantial response rate and address any possible inquiries from participants.

Ethical issues will be of utmost importance throughout the research procedure. Before including participants in the study, we will get informed consent from each individual, ensuring that their participation is voluntary. Participants will receive a guarantee of confidentiality and anonymity, ensuring that their replies will only be used for research reasons. The study will comply with ethical rules and principles to protect the rights and well-being of participants.

Figure 1: The diagrammatic representation of the research methodology

EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook (SEEO) ISSN: 2348-4101
Volume: 11 | Issue: 7 | July 2024 | SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.284 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0314 | Peer-Reviewed Journal

RESULTS

Descriptives

In terms of Tehsil distribution, the data reveals a relatively balanced representation across the three regions of Thane, Bhiwandi, and Kalyan. Thane accounts for the highest percentage of respondents at 35.8%, followed closely by Kalyan with 34.7% and Bhiwandi with 29.5%.

Table1: Tehsil Distribution

Tehsil-Wise Distribution

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Thane	68	35.8
	Bhiwandi	56	29.5
	Kalyan	66	34.7
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

Regarding age distribution, the data showcases a spread across different age groups, with no single cohort dominating the sample. However, it's notable that the age group of 18-25 years comprises the largest proportion at 23.7%, followed by those aged 56 and above at 22.1%.

Table 2. Age Distribution

		Age Frequency	Percent
Valid	18-25	45	23.7
	26-35	31	16.3
	36-45	39	20.5
	46-55	33	17.4
	56 and above	42	22.1
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

Gender distribution in the sample is almost evenly split, with males representing 49.5% and females representing 50.5% of the total respondents.

Table 3. Gender Distribution

Gender

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Male	94	49.5
	Female	96	50.5
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

Education level distribution among respondents shows a balanced representation across different educational backgrounds. While no single category dominates, Bachelor's degree holders comprise the largest proportion at 27.4%, followed closely by respondents with Higher Secondary education at 25.8%.

Table 4. Education wise distribution

Education

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Matriculation or below	48	25.3
	Higher Secondary	49	25.8
	Bachelor's Degree	52	27.4
	Master's Degree or higher	41	21.6
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

Objective 1: To investigate the overall perspective of consumers regarding the consumption of organic food and its impact on the environment

Regarding the belief of whether organic food is more environmentally beneficial than conventionally produced food, there is a significant division of opinions. Approximately 29% of participants concur that organic food is more beneficial for the environment, but a somewhat greater proportion (approximately 39%) hold the opposite

EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook (SEEO) ISSN: 2348-4101
Volume: 11 | Issue: 7 | July 2024 | SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.284 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0314 | Peer-Reviewed Journal

view. Approximately 32% of respondents are uncertain, suggesting a notable lack of clarity or conviction regarding this topic.

Different viewpoints exist about the degree to which the use of organic food contributes to the reduction of environmental pollution. Approximately 40% of individuals either strongly agree or agree with the statement, while nearly 34% either disagree or strongly disagree. Furthermore, almost 25% of participants express a neutral stance, indicating a certain level of ambivalence or ambiguity regarding the influence of consuming organic food on environmental pollution.

Table 5. Perspectives of Consumers towards Organic Food Consumption

How much do you agree with the statement: Consuming organic food helps reduce environmental pollution		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Strongly agree	45	23.7
	Agree	31	16.3
	Neutral	48	25.3
	Disagree	31	16.3
	Strongly disagree	35	18.4
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

The distribution of comments about the observation of changes in health or lifestyle after ingesting organic food is relatively balanced. Approximately 34% of participants acknowledge perceiving alterations, whilst approximately 27% indicate no discernible changes. Once again, a substantial percentage (about 39%) of individuals express ambiguity, suggesting a lack of definite identification of the causes of changes in consumption patterns related to organic food.

Table 5.1. Perspectives of Consumers towards Organic Food Consumption

Have you noticed any changes in your health or lifestyle since consuming organic food		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	64	33.7
	No	52	27.4
	Unsure	74	38.9
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

The opinions on the long-term viability of organic farming practices compared to conventional farming practices are divided. Approximately 35% of respondents hold the belief that organic farming is more sustainable, while an equal percentage express skepticism. Approximately 31% of individuals are uncertain, indicating a lack of agreement or clarity regarding this matter.

Table 5.2. Perspectives of Consumers towards Organic Food Consumption

Do you think organic farming practices are more sustainable in the long term compared to conventional farming practices?		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	66	34.7
	No	66	34.7
	Unsure	58	30.5
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

Table 8
Regarding the probability of suggesting organic food products to others due to environmental concerns, there is a wide range of replies. Approximately 39% of respondents indicate a certain degree of likelihood to recommend, whereas a nearly equal amount (around 37%) express either neutrality or a lack of chance to recommend. Approximately 15% express a highly improbable probability of recommending, implying a level of doubt or reluctance in supporting organic food products for environmental concerns.

EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook (SEEO) ISSN: 2348-4101
Volume: 11 | Issue: 7 | July 2024 | SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.284 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0314 | Peer-Reviewed Journal

Table 5.3. Perspectives of Consumers towards Organic Food Consumption

How likely are you to recommend organic food products to others based on environmental concerns			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very likely	36	18.9
	Likely	38	20.0
	Neutral	44	23.2
	Unlikely	44	23.2
	Very unlikely	28	14.7
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

The ANOVA results gave insight into the correlation between individuals' environmental concerns and their propensity of suggesting organic food products. The discovery of a large disparity in the likelihood of endorsing organic food products among various groups with varied levels of environmental concerns is a noteworthy observation. The small p-value of 0.032, along with the F-statistic of 2.803, indicates that the observed variance is highly unlikely to be due to random chance alone. This suggests that people's environmental concerns have a noticeable impact on their inclination to support the use of organic food.

Table 6. ANOVA TESTING

ANOVA

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	20.103	4	5.026	2.803	.032
Within Groups	331.712	185	1.793		
Total	337.474	189			

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

Nevertheless, it is crucial to provide a contextual framework for understanding the importance of these discoveries. Although the impact size, as indicated by the F-value of 2.803, is statistically significant, it is considered to be modest. This implies that although there are variations in the probability of endorsing organic food products due to environmental concerns, the extent of these variations may not be significant. Hence, although environmental factors may impact individuals' views towards organic food, there are additional elements that can also influence their decision-making process.

Objective 2: To identify the factors that promote the use of organic food to provide practical solutions for increasing market demand and improving accessibility

Respondents indicate endorsement for many efforts and policies designed to promote the consumption of organic food. The initiatives that received the highest level of support are the provision of incentives for organic farmers, which was favored by 23.7% of respondents, followed by awareness campaigns highlighting the environmental benefits of organic farming, which received support from 20.0% of respondents, and the implementation of mandated labeling for organic products, which was favored by 21.1% of respondents.

Table 7. Factors promoting the use of organic food & increasing market demand and improving accessibility

What initiatives or policies do you think could encourage more people to consume organic food?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Government subsidies on organic products	35	18.4
	Awareness campaigns about environmental benefits	38	20.0
	Incentives for organic farmers	45	23.7
	Mandatory labelling of organic products	40	21.1
	Tax breaks for organic food businesses	32	16.8
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook (SEEO) ISSN: 2348-4101
Volume: 11 | Issue: 7 | July 2024 | SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.284 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0314 | Peer-Reviewed Journal

A significant proportion of respondents (32.6%) are willing to pay more for organic food products in order to promote environmental sustainability. However, a somewhat larger percentage (36.3%) state that they are not willing to do so. In addition, a total of 31.1% of individuals are unsure or have no definite answer. This indicates that although there is a certain level of customer endorsement for ecologically sustainable methods, the degree to which prices affect purchase choices remains a substantial element.

Table 7. 1. Factors promoting the use of organic food & increasing market demand and improving accessibility

Would you be willing to pay a premium for organic food products to support environmental sustainability?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	62	32.6
	No	69	36.3
	Maybe	59	31.1
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

Opinions on the significance of supermarkets and grocery stores providing a diverse range of organic food products differ among participants. While a segment of the population regards it as highly significant (20.0%) or significant (18.9%), a significant percentage perceives it as unimportant (21.1%) or completely unimportant (24.2%). This suggests that customers have different preferences when it comes to the presence of organic choices in retail environments.
Table 13

Table 7. 2. Factors promoting the use of organic food & increasing market demand and improving accessibility

How important do you think it is for supermarkets and grocery stores to offer a wide selection of organic food products?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very Important	38	20.0
	Important	36	18.9
	Neutral	30	15.8
	Not important	40	21.1
	Not at all important	46	24.2
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data
The issue of whether the government should increase its support for organic farming techniques is a subject of debate. Among the respondents, 30.0% are in favor of such assistance, 33.7% are against it, and 36.3% are uncertain. This demonstrates a subtle viewpoint on the impact of government action in advancing organic agriculture.

Table 7. 3. Factors promoting the use of organic food & increasing market demand and improving accessibility

Do you think the government should provide more support for organic farming practices?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	57	30.0
	No	64	33.7
	Unsure	69	36.3
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

The main obstacles that restrict individuals from consuming more organic food products are price, limited availability, lack of information, and uncertainties regarding effectiveness. This highlights the significance of tackling multiple aspects to encourage increased consumption of organic food, such as ensuring it is affordable, and accessible, and promoting education about it.

EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook (SEEO) ISSN: 2348-4101
Volume: 11 | Issue: 7 | July 2024 | SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.284 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0314 | Peer-Reviewed Journal

Table 7. 4. Factors promoting the use of organic food & increasing market demand and improving accessibility

What are the main barriers preventing you from consuming more organic food products?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Price	43	22.6
	Limited availability	44	23.2
	Lack of information	52	27.4
	Doubt about effectiveness	51	26.8
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

Respondents had diverse perceptions regarding the environmental impact of organic food production in comparison to conventional methods. While a portion of individuals hold the belief that organic farming has a lesser influence on the environment (41.1%), others feel it to be comparable (21.6%) or even more (37.4%).

Table 7. 5. Factors promoting the use of organic food & increasing market demand and improving accessibility

How do you think the environmental impact of organic food production compares to conventional food production?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Organic food production has a significantly lower environmental impact	37	19.5
	Organic food production has a somewhat lower environmental impact	41	21.6
	Organic food production has about the same environmental impact	41	21.6
	Organic food production has a somewhat higher environmental impact	29	15.3
	Organic food production has a significantly higher environmental impact	42	22.1
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

The perception of the ability of organic food production to alleviate climate change is divided, with approximately equal numbers of respondents expressing belief, denial, or uncertainty.

Table 7. 6. Factors promoting the use of organic food & increasing market demand and improving accessibility

Do you believe that organic food production can help mitigate climate change?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	63	33.2
	No	64	33.7
	Unsure	63	33.2
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

Likewise, although many participants acknowledge the potential advantages of consuming organic food for local communities, there is variation in the reported effects, such as backing for local farmers, a decrease in pollution, and encouragement of healthy lives.

EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook (SEEO) ISSN: 2348-4101
Volume: 11 | Issue: 7 | July 2024 | SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.284 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0314 | Peer-Reviewed Journal

Table 7. 7. Factors promoting the use of organic food & increasing market demand and improving accessibility

How do you think the consumption of organic food products can benefit local communities?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Supports local farmers	71	37.4
	Reduces environmental pollution	60	31.6
	Promotes healthier lifestyles	59	31.1
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

A significant percentage of respondents (30.5% yes, 35.3% maybe) demonstrate a keen interest in engaging in workshops or activities focused on organic farming and its ecological consequences.

Table 7. 8. Factors promoting the use of organic food & increasing market demand and improving accessibility

Would you be interested in participating in workshops or events about organic farming and its environmental impact?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Yes	58	30.5
	No	65	34.2
	Maybe	67	35.3
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

The research indicates that respondents have different levels of involvement with environmental sustainability material. About 25% of respondents reported connecting with this content daily, whereas fewer percentages engaged weekly or monthly. A considerable proportion of individuals occasionally show curiosity, suggesting intermittent engagement with environmental subjects. Nevertheless, a significant subgroup of participants, accounting for more than 20% of the sample, said that they never interacted with environmental sustainability material.

Table 7. 9. Factors promoting the use of organic food & increasing market demand and improving accessibility

How often do you read or watch content related to environmental sustainability?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Daily	47	24.7
	Weekly	31	16.3
	Monthly	34	17.9
	Occasionally	37	19.5
	Never	41	21.6
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

The data demonstrates a range of self-evaluated degrees of knowledge regarding organic farming and its influence on the environment among the participants. Although a small percentage of individuals identify as highly educated or knowledgeable, totalling 35.8% together, a somewhat larger group view themselves as moderately knowledgeable, suggesting a reasonable level of understanding. In contrast, a substantial percentage of individuals assess themselves as having limited or no expertise, accounting for 44.7% of the participants. The results indicate a significant lack of knowledge among a large portion of the public regarding organic agricultural practices and their environmental impact. This emphasizes the possible necessity for additional educational and awareness campaigns in this field.

EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook (SEEO) ISSN: 2348-4101
Volume: 11 | Issue: 7 | July 2024 | SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.284 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0314 | Peer-Reviewed Journal

Table 7. 8. Factors promoting the use of organic food & increasing market demand and improving accessibility

How would you rate your overall knowledge about organic farming and its environmental impact?			
		Frequency	Percent
Valid	Very knowledgeable	33	17.4
	Knowledgeable	35	18.4
	Somewhat knowledgeable	37	19.5
	Not very knowledgeable	42	22.1
	Not knowledgeable at all	43	22.6
	Total	190	100.0

Source: Author's calculations based on primary data

DISCUSSION

The data analysis confirms a correlation between the frequency at which consumers purchase organic food products and their level of environmental awareness, providing support for Hypothesis 1. The frequency of purchasing organic food varies among respondents, with a substantial proportion consistently purchasing organic products. Furthermore, environmental sustainability plays a crucial role in shaping consumers' choices when it comes to buying organic food products. Furthermore, a significant proportion of survey participants actively pursue information regarding the ecological consequences of the products they purchase, suggesting a connection between environmental consciousness and consumer behaviour.

It has also been shown that trust and awareness of certification/naming brands used for sustainable or organic products have an important influence upon consumer attitudes towards organic food, i.e. hypothesis 2. Though a large percentage of participants know these marks of authenticity, their level of trust in them varies. But a large percentage of customers trust certificates, and this can have a good effect on their views of organic food products. In the study, a combination of qualitative, quantitative methods is used to investigate the relationship between socio-demographic characteristics including age, gender and education level on consumer attitudes and behavior with respect to consuming organic food specifically focusing on hypothesis 3. The research reveals the complicated nature of customer attitudes and actions over organic food commodities. It is not only asks for the consideration of several elements in understanding customer choices: environmental factors, health benefits; access to information on certification; but also reveals how important it seems that one should be made aware of these different factors.

The results further indicate the need for special education programs as well as regulatory measures to encourage eating organic foods and clear obstacles to that first step such as perceptions of high prices, poor accessibility and lack of information. This study's findings can provide valuable information for policy makers, marketers and organic food producers. The information makes it possible to formulate effective strategies which will increase the market's demand for organic products. In order to open up policy space conducive to eating organic food environments can be created by giving grants to organic farmers, raising public awareness in campaigns, insistent labelling that cannot be mistaken or forged, and government help for agricultural methods natural for organic produce. Also, in the work of addressing of obstacles such as price fears and limited availability, organic foods can be brought within reach of a wider range of consumers.

In conclusion, the findings of this research offer key insights into how consumers perceive, behave, and prefer to consume organic foods. By understanding the basic factors that influence consumer attitudes and actions, stakeholders can develop targeted interventions to promote sustainable eating practices and satisfy an increasingly strong appetite for organic products. However, more research is needed to thoroughly investigate particular aspects of consumer behavior and attitudes in different circumstances.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study of consumer attitudes towards organic food in Maharashtra, there are several recommendations for further research or policy intervention to enhance the motivation of citizens to eat organic and sustainably produced food. These include the following:
Longitudinal studies: Researchers may need to conduct longitudinal studies to trace changes in consumer behavior and attitudes towards organic food over time. There is a strong belief that such studies would help achieve a better

EPRA International Journal of Socio-Economic and Environmental Outlook (SEEO) ISSN: 2348-4101
Volume: 11 | Issue: 7 | July 2024 | SJIF Impact Factor (2024): 8.284 | Journal DOI: 10.36713/epra0314 | Peer-Reviewed Journal

understanding of the causes driving these changes and devise strategies of promoting organic food consumption among citizens.

Qualitative Research: In addition to quantitative research, we can utilize firm's qualitative methods, such as focus groups or in-depth interviews. Qualitative methods can deliver deeper insight into consumers' motives, perceptions and thought processes on organic foods as well less prejudices indirectly helping to bring forth latent hues of attitudes and beliefs.

Geographical Expansion: Widening the geographical scope of the research to cover various places in India would be an added advantage. This is important because learning from various social economic conditions and cultural differences would enable those who do the research to come up with a more general idea of how consumers from all over India view organic foods.

Intervention Studies: Develop and execute action studies for assessing the effect of policy measures and marketing tactics on consumption of organic foods. Through experimentation with different interventions in practical situations, policymakers are able to find working models for encouraging sustainable food consumption as well as making it easier for people to reach organically produced stuff.

Education and Awareness Campaigns: Spend on educational initiatives and build awareness campaigns that would increase consumer knowledge and understanding of organic farming as well as environmental sustainability. If we want our communication strategies be effective it is important that they target certain groups of consumers who may not be familiar with these concepts hence spreading misinformation or not trusting in what others say even when it is accurate.

Cost Reduction and Usability: Legislation advancing natural farming methods would set production costs, assist small-scale producers and promote organic farming. As a plus, they need to negotiate with their suppliers–to get more organic products for sale at reasonable prices to common people and let them have any choices they wish in life.

Consumer Participation: Expand consumer participation using participatory techniques such as workshops, events, and community programs on organic farming and environmental conservation. This may include asking consumers to join in the publicity of organic foods as well as in decisions on what to buy rationally both in terms environmental sustainability and economic balance.

Policy Support: It must take measures at both the national and state level to create a good environment for sustainable agriculture and organic food systems. That may involve issuing discount and preferential tax policies as well as laws which give incentives examples of organic farming techniques, procedures for certification in organic agriculture and research into sustainable farming methods.

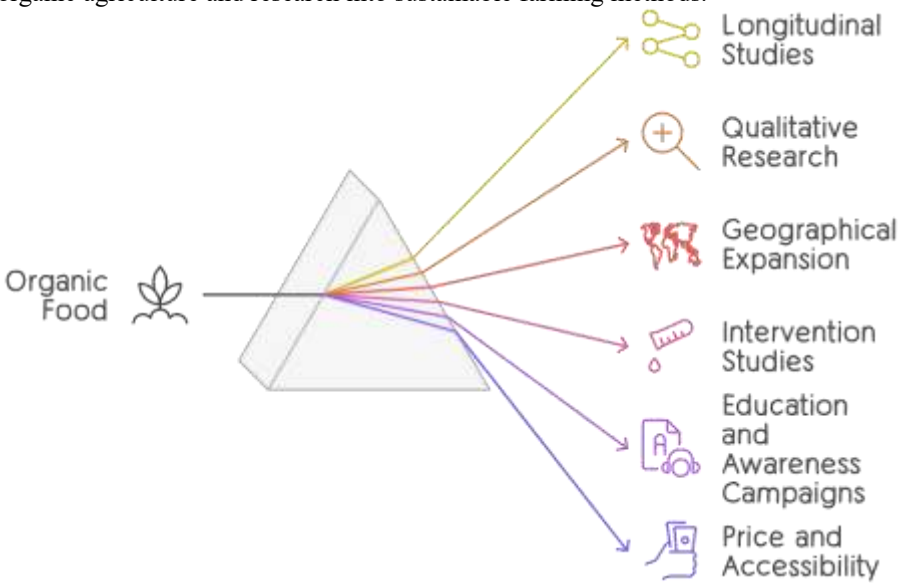

Figure 2: The diagrammatic representation of the recommendations suggested

At the end of it all, for the widespread acceptance of organic food in India, stakeholders should face it with multidimensional tactics such as research, policy interventions and consumer engagements. Moreover, this can

also assist to create a sustainable culture concerning food consumption thereby encouraging organics' use all over India. For this reason if only people can overcome impediments, they will have made some contribution to conserving nature rather than benefiting themselves alone through exploitation of this resource. For more secure and just food system, these blockades need to be dismantled, sensitization campaigns carried out and support directed towards farming of organics.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research provides important insights into the perception of organic food among consumers from Maharashtra. It finds a complex relationship between multiple factors that influence decision-making regarding purchase, perception of consequences for the environment, and willingness to promote the development of the sphere. The findings stress the significance of overcoming barriers related to cost, availability, and lack of information through targeted policies. It is recommended that in the future, the authorities should focus on promoting the consumption of organic food by leveraging educational campaigns, the implementation of measures that will make this kind of food more affordable and obtainable, and by engaging consumers while ensuring that they trust the offered food and certifications. Through combined efforts of several spheres and the reliance on Research and Development findings, important stakeholders have the power to direct the positive change and work towards leveraging the Indian food system sustainable and fair.

REFERENCES

1. *Ahmad, R., Rafiq, M., & Arif, M. (2023). Global trends in digital preservation: Outsourcing versus in-house practices. Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, 09610006231173461. https://doi.org/10.1177/09610006231173461*
2. *Basha, M. B., Mason, C., Shamsudin, M. F., Hussain, H. I., & Salem, M. A. (2015). Consumers Attitude Towards Organic Food. Procedia Economics and Finance, 31, 444–452. https://doi.org/10.1016/S2212-5671(15)01219-8*
3. *Baydas, A., Yalman, F., & Bayat, M. (2021). Consumer attitude towards organic food: Determinants of healthy behaviour. Marketing i Menedžment Innovacij, 1, 96–111.*
4. *Çabuk, S., Tanrikulu, C., & Gelibolu, L. (2014). Understanding organic food consumption: Attitude as a mediator. International Journal of Consumer Studies, 38(4), 337–345. https://doi.org/10.1111/ijcs.12094*
5. *Cheung, R., Lau, M. M., & Lam, A. Y. C. (2015). Factors affecting consumer attitude towards organic food: An empirical study in Hong Kong. Journal of Global Scholars of Marketing Science, 25(3), 216–231. https://doi.org/10.1080/21639159.2015.1041782*
6. *Gifford, K., & Bernard, J. C. (2006). Influencing consumer purchase likelihood of organic food. International Journal of Consumer Studies, 30(2), 155–163. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2005.00472.x*
7. *Hsu, C.-L., & Chen, M.-C. (2014). Explaining consumer attitudes and purchase intentions toward organic food: Contributions from regulatory fit and consumer characteristics. Food Quality and Preference, 35, 6–13.*
8. *Lee, H.-J., & Yun, Z.-S. (2015). Consumers' perceptions of organic food attributes and cognitive and affective attitudes as determinants of their purchase intentions toward organic food. Food Quality and Preference, 39, 259–267. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.foodqual.2014.06.002*
9. *Sahota, A. (2010). The Global Market for Organic Food & Drink1. In The World of organic agriculture (pp. 53–57). Routledge.*
10. *Tandon, A., Dhir, A., Kaur, P., Kushwah, S., & Salo, J. (2020). Why do people buy organic food? The moderating role of environmental concerns and trust. Journal of Retailing and Consumer Services, 57, 102247.*
11. *Vijay, P. A. (2021). Study of Consumer Behaviour Towards Organic Food Products in Mumbai District [PhD thesis]. Tilak Maharashtra Vidyapeeth.*