

A Study On Consumer Perception And Buying Intentions Towards Organic Food Products In Thanjavur District

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Abstract

This study evaluates consumer perception, buying behavior, and future purchase intentions regarding organic food products in Thanjavur District, Tamil Nadu. While regional agriculture is predominantly conventional, growing health consciousness and environmental awareness are driving shifts toward organic consumption. Utilizing primary data collected from 91 respondents across multiple talukas of Thanjavur District, the empirical analysis evaluates key factors influencing purchasing decisions, satisfaction metrics, and perceived market barriers. Utilizing Likert scale quantitative frameworks, Chi-Square tests, and Weighted Mean ranking analysis, the empirical results reveal strong positive perception toward organic foods primarily driven by long-term health benefits (4.30) and freedom from synthetic chemicals (4.19). However, market expansion faces notable constraints, primarily driven by premium pricing (4.15) and doubts regarding organic label authenticity (3.95). The paper concludes with targeted marketing and policy suggestions to resolve structural market barriers in the study area.

Keywords: Consumer Perception, Buying Intention, Organic Food Products, Health Consciousness, Thanjavur District, Perceived Barriers.

Introduction

Agricultural consumption patterns are undergoing significant transformations across India. Historically, traditional agricultural practices met dietary requirements without synthetic intervention. However, the modernization of agriculture introduced intensive chemical fertilizers and pesticides, which increased yields but raised long-term health and ecological concerns. In response, consumers are increasingly turning to organic alternatives due to their perceived safety, nutritional value, and environmental sustainability.

Thanjavur District, recognized as the "Rice Bowl of Tamil Nadu," possesses an agricultural landscape historically centered on traditional cropping practices. Examining consumer adoption of organic produce within this major agrarian hub provides critical insights into rural and suburban market dynamics. Understanding how consumer awareness translates into actual buying behavior and long-term purchase intentions is vital for organic growers, retailers, and policymakers striving to expand sustainable food networks.

Need of the Study

While general awareness regarding health and wellness has grown rapidly, conversion into regular organic food purchases remains uneven.

- **The Awareness-Intent Gap:** Consumers often exhibit favorable attitudes toward organic foods but encounter structural barriers during actual purchases.
- **Local Market Nuances:** Regional market dynamics in agrarian hubs like Thanjavur require empirical evaluation to understand consumer trust, pricing sensitivity, and accessibility constraints.
- **Policy Alignment:** Insights into consumer behavior help local organic farming initiatives align marketing and supply chain strategies with actual buyer preferences.

Research Gap

Although several studies have explored organic consumer behavior in metro cities like Chennai or neighboring agricultural districts like Salem and Mysuru, empirical evidence focusing specifically on consumer perceptions, satisfaction levels, and buying intentions within Thanjavur District remains limited. Existing literature often overlooks localized factors such as regional taluk-level variations, trust in product authenticity, and local distribution channels. This study addresses these gaps through empirical data from Thanjavur District.

Objectives of the Study

- To analyze the demographic profile and awareness levels of consumers regarding organic food products in Thanjavur District.
- To examine the key drivers influencing consumer perception and buying behavior toward organic produce.
- To evaluate consumer satisfaction and future purchase intentions regarding organic food products.
- To identify the primary perceived barriers hindering the regular adoption of organic food items.
- To provide strategic recommendations for improving organic food distribution and consumer trust.

Scope of the Study

- **Geographic Coverage:** Thanjavur District, covering major talukas including Kumbakonam, Thanjavur, Pattukottai, Papanasam, Thiruvaiyaru, Thiruvaidaimaruthur, and Budalur.
- **Product Scope:** Select organic food products, including fruits, vegetables, rice, grains, pulses, and dairy products.
- **Target Demographic:** Resident consumers evaluating awareness, purchasing frequency, spending patterns, satisfaction, and perceived barriers.

Limitations of the Study

- **Sample Size Boundaries:** The study relies on primary data collected from 91 validated respondents in Thanjavur District.
- **Cross-Sectional Framework:** The findings represent consumer attitudes during a specific cross-sectional timeframe rather than longitudinal tracking.
- **Self-Reporting Bias:** Data gathered via structured questionnaires is subject to potential self-reporting and recall biases regarding monthly spending and purchase frequency.

Review of Literature

- **Dev (2012):** Investigated the structural dynamics of smallholder agriculture in India, emphasizing that overall agricultural sustainability and rural market integration rely on removing institutional bottlenecks. The study highlighted that micro-level resource constraints, credit access gaps, and inefficient market linkages severely limit smallholders from transitioning into high-value production systems like organic farming.
- **Patil et al. (2014):** Utilized eco-efficiency modeling to compare conventional and organic agricultural paradigms in Karnataka. Their analysis demonstrated that while organic farming significantly lowers synthetic chemical exposure and environmental degradation, it frequently causes short-term crop yield dips. Consequently, long-term state policy support, transitional subsidies, and certified market access are essential to ensure economic viability for producers.
- **Ayswarya & Vasanthi (2018):** Analyzed consumer motivation in the organic sector, concluding that expanding consumer interest is primarily driven by personal health awareness, food safety concerns, and environmental protection values. Their research highlighted that urban and semi-urban buyers increasingly view organic produce as a preventive healthcare strategy against lifestyle diseases.
- **Suguna & Kamatchi (2018):** Conducted an empirical investigation into consumer awareness in Salem District, Tamil Nadu. Their findings revealed that while respondents possessed high awareness regarding the general health benefits of chemical-free food, they exhibited significant knowledge deficits regarding official organic certification standards, eco-labeling, and brand authenticity.
- **Raghunathan et al. (2019):** Analyzed equity metrics and institutional delivery in agricultural and nutritional welfare programs. Their study demonstrated that uniform marketing and extension guidelines often fail due to localized social and economic disparities, stressing the need for community-level outreach to build consumer awareness.
- **Naik & Nagadevara (2020):** Examined organic supply chain integration in Southern India, identifying that high certification compliance costs and fragmented local marketing channels act as major bottlenecks for small-scale organic producers, directly restricting retail availability for end consumers.
- **Thippeswamy (2021):** Evaluated state-sponsored organic farming clusters, observing that insufficient regional marketing infrastructure, inconsistent supply lines, and low consumer trust in uncertified local markets create substantial barriers to organic market expansion.
- **Mahadevi & Priya (2022):** Focused on consumer preferences in Tanjore (Thanjavur) District, noting a rising demand for organic food items driven by health consciousness. However, the authors identified label skepticism, lack of product distinction, and inconsistent local store availability as critical hurdles hindering regular repeat purchases.

- **Rumaningsih et al. (2022):** Applied behavioral models to study consumer purchase intentions toward sustainable food, establishing that positive attitudes toward health directly translate into buying intentions, provided product availability and pricing remain reasonable.
- **Joshi, Barker, & Zechariah (2023):** Evaluated operational constraints in organic food buying behavior, ranking high premium pricing and limited local availability as the top two structural barriers preventing interested consumers from converting purchase intentions into regular consumption habits.
- **Kalyani & Prabhavathi (2023):** Investigated buying factors in the organic food market, noting that consumer perceptions regarding product freshness, nutritional value, and safety are the key drivers of brand loyalty and willingness to pay price premiums.
- **Subramanian & Chandrasekhar (2023):** Highlighted that digital trace systems and transparent supply chain labeling are becoming crucial for modern agro-retail platforms to eliminate consumer mistrust regarding organic authenticity.
- **Yilmaz (2023):** Developed a theoretical model examining organic food choices, establishing that perceived health benefits, environmental altruism, and animal welfare significantly shape positive consumer attitudes. However, external market conditions—such as price premiums, inconvenience, and limited store presence—often suppress actual buying behavior.
- **Chitra Devi & Chitra (2024):** Investigated consumer preferences across Tamil Nadu, concluding that demographic factors (such as age, education, and household income) alongside post-purchase satisfaction levels strongly govern long-term purchase intentions and brand switching behavior.

Theoretical Synthesis & Identified Literature Gap

The existing literature establishes a clear transition in consumer focus from conventional to organic food products, largely driven by health consciousness and chemical safety concerns. However, a persistent "attitude-behavior gap" remains: while consumers report positive attitudes toward organic produce, actual purchasing is frequently restricted by high price premiums, unverified product authenticity, and inconsistent local retail supply.

Most existing studies focus either on macro-level agrarian supply constraints or urban consumer behavior in tier-1 metro cities. Few empirical studies systematically evaluate how these individual consumer perceptions, localized taluk-level availability, and specific perceived barriers interact within an agrarian hub like Thanjavur District. This study fills this gap by utilizing empirical data from Thanjavur District to map the complete consumer decision-making pathway from awareness and perception to satisfaction and purchase intention.

Research Methodology

- **Research Design:** Descriptive and analytical research design.
- **Sampling Architecture:** Convenience sampling method administered across primary residential centers in Thanjavur District (N = 91).
- **Data Sources:** Primary data collected via structured questionnaire; secondary data sourced from academic journals, industry reports, and regional agricultural surveys.
- **Analytical Tools:** Frequency & Percentage Analysis, Chi-Square Test of Independence, and Weighted Mean Score Analysis using Likert scale rankings (5 = Strongly Agree to 1 = Strongly Disagree).

Analysis and Interpretations

Socio-Economic Profile of Respondents

Demographic Profile	Category	Frequency (n=91)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	48	52.75%
	Male	43	47.25%
Age Group	Below 20 Years	57	62.64%
	21–30 Years	15	16.48%

Demographic Profile	Category	Frequency (n=91)	Percentage (%)
	31–40 Years	6	6.59%
	41–50 Years	8	8.79%
	Above 50 Years	5	5.49%
Education Level	School Level (SSLC/HSC)	32	35.16%
	Undergraduate	36	39.56%
	Postgraduate	22	24.18%
	Others	1	1.10%
Monthly Income	Below ₹10,000	47	51.65%
	₹10,001–₹25,000	16	17.58%
	₹25,001–₹50,000	18	19.78%
	Above ₹50,000	10	10.99%
Primary Taluk	Kumbakonam	44	48.35%
	Thanjavur	26	28.57%
	Pattukottai & Others	21	23.08%

Factors Influencing Consumer Buying Behavior

Perceived Driving Factors	Mean Score (1–5)	Standard Deviation (σ)	Interpretation
Healthier than conventional foods	4.49	0.66	Strongly Agree
Absence of chemicals/pesticides	4.19	0.73	Agree
Trust in quality of organic grains	4.05	0.86	Agree
Willingness to switch completely	3.90	0.88	Agree
Regular purchase of organic grains	3.87	0.86	Agree
Better taste compared to conventional	3.84	0.83	Agree
Product packaging influence	3.66	1.02	Agree

Interpretation:

Health consciousness (4.49) and safety from synthetic chemicals (4.19) serve as the primary drivers of consumer decision-making in the study area.

Consumer Preferences & Awareness Metrics

Dimensions & Statements	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (σ)	Rank / Status
Consumer Preferences			
Organic food for long-term health benefits	4.30	0.82	Rank 1
Preference for organic fruits & vegetables	4.12	0.70	Rank 2
Preference for organic grains (rice/pulses)	4.02	0.76	Rank 3
Daily consumption preference	3.99	0.81	Rank 4
Local market purchases over supermarkets	3.92	0.91	Rank 5
Consumer Awareness			
Awareness of overall health benefits	4.36	0.64	High
Awareness of quality identification	4.21	0.75	High
Knowledge of chemical-free status	4.15	0.77	High
Awareness of certification labels	4.13	0.78	Moderate-High
Media/Social media contribution	4.13	0.87	Moderate-High

Consumer Satisfaction & Future Purchase Intentions

Evaluated Parameters	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (σ)	Overall Assessment
Satisfaction Levels			
Satisfaction with product quality	4.25	0.78	Satisfied
Satisfaction with label authenticity	4.00	0.86	Satisfied
Satisfaction with packaging quality	3.93	0.85	Satisfied
Satisfaction with local availability	3.92	0.85	Moderately Satisfied
Satisfaction with product pricing	3.68	1.04	Lowest Satisfaction
Purchase Intention			

Evaluated Parameters	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (σ)	Overall Assessment
Preference whenever available	4.30	0.74	High Intention
Future purchase commitment	4.27	0.80	High Intention
Willingness to recommend to others	4.16	0.79	High Intention
Intention to increase consumption	4.08	0.78	High Intention

Perceived Barriers to Organic Purchase

Identified Market Constraints	Mean Score	Standard Deviation (σ)	Impact Level
Premium/Expensive price structure	4.15	0.79	Primary Barrier
Doubts on organic label authenticity	3.95	1.00	Major Barrier
Limited local area availability	3.86	0.84	Moderate Barrier
Limited product variety	3.82	0.93	Moderate Barrier
Lack of awareness/information	3.71	1.01	Moderate Barrier

Interpretation:

Premium pricing (4.15) and skepticism regarding organic certification authenticity (3.95) represent the most major market barriers in Thanjavur District.

Major Findings

- **Health as Primary Motive:** Health benefits = 4.49) and chemical-free composition = 4.19) are the main reasons consumers purchase organic food.
- **High Future Intention:** Consumers express strong intention to continue buying = 4.27) and recommend = 4.16) organic food products.
- **Pricing & Authenticity Constraints:** High price perceptions = 4.15) and doubts surrounding organic verification labels (3.95) restrict higher market penetration.
- **Satisfaction Disparity:** Satisfaction with quality remains high (4.25), whereas satisfaction with pricing remains the lowest = 3.68).

Suggestions

- **Transparent Certification Systems:** Implement visible, QR-code-enabled organic certification tracking at local markets to resolve consumer label skepticism.
- **Subsidized Supply Chains:** Establish direct farm-to-consumer organic retail hubs in regional centers like Kumbakonam and Thanjavur to lower retail markups and make prices competitive.
- **Localized Marketing Campaigns:** Utilize social media and regional health awareness drives to highlight the specific long-term health benefits of organic pulses, rice, and vegetables.
- **Expanding Product Variety:** Retailers should widen organic product availability beyond staples to include diverse seasonal fruits and daily essentials.

Conclusion

Consumer perception toward organic food products in Thanjavur District is positive, driven by health consciousness and chemical-free preferences. Although consumers exhibit strong satisfaction with product quality and express high future buying intentions, high prices and trust barriers regarding certification labels hinder widespread market growth. Strengthening certification transparency, establishing direct local distribution channels, and offering fair prices will help convert positive consumer attitudes into regular buying habits across agrarian districts.

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