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## Fostering organic food consumption in India through wellness centers

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### Abstract

The consumer of the modern era gives due weightage to the quality and safety aspects in his consumption pattern due to increasing concern about nutritive food and health issues. There are various reasons responsible for the shift in the Indian consumers' attitude towards organic food as organic food satisfies the quality and safety concerns of the rationale consumer. But still there is niche market for this food in India. This paper aims to study as to how wellness centres can contribute in increasing the organic food consumption so as to ensure a safer and sufficient food for better health for all. The Analysis is based on Secondary data derived from different Research Papers focused on Health and safety aspects of organic food.

**Keywords:** Organic food, wellness centres, organic food consumption, consumers' attitude

### Introduction

Over the last two and half decades there has been a greater awareness among the world community for preserving environmental degradation and of quality food products. Food consumption habits have been changing rapidly due to rising health problems (stress, depression, obesity, heart disorders, cancer etc.), environmental problems (depletion of natural resources, the loss of biodiversity, rural depopulation etc.). As a result healthier food products have entered the Global markets and are rapidly gaining market share. The food industry has reacted to this trend by developing a growing variety of new products with health-related claims and images, including organic and functional foods that are selected by consumers for their health-promoting properties (Azzurra & Paola, 2009) <sup>[1]</sup>. A greater interest has been developing among people towards Organic food products throughout the world as organic products are closely related to a healthy, responsible and sustainable lifestyle (Gotze *et al.* 2016) <sup>[17]</sup>. Especially during the COVID 19 pandemic the demand for organic food went up as consumers perceived them as being healthier and good for immunity. However, otherwise too, as awareness about the benefits of organic food is growing, demand for organic food is also increasing at a continuous pace. While the production and sale of organic food comes mainly from developed countries, even developing countries have begun to produce and export organic food and products.

### Research Objectives

This paper investigates the reasons underlying the shift in Indian consumers' attitude towards organic food. The existing research is therefore undertaken to review and synthesize the research to understand the reasons underlying the shift in Indian consumers' attitude towards organic food, and to identify the role of wellness centres in fostering the sale of organic food in the niche market of India.

### Method

To address the above objectives, the author reviewed the related literature in detail with the help of secondary data published in the form of research papers, reports and articles highlighting the various reasons responsible for the shift in consumers' attitude towards organic food. As the purpose of this research was to recap the findings of the previous studies, the current review should be considered a narrative review.

## Literature and theory

This section gives an overview of organic food and general trends, which will help us better understand the nature of organic food and its place in customers' minds.

### An overview Organic food

Organic food is described in the literature as "local," "fresh," "pure," "natural" (Tariq *et al.*, 2019)<sup>[14]</sup>, "healthy" (Melovic *et al.*, 2020), "traditional," "rustic," "Green," "Eco-friendly," "Sustainable," "Pahadi," "old fashioned" (Thogersen; 2015). According to USDA, "Organic is a labeling term that indicates that the food or other agricultural product has been produced through approved methods".

### Present Status of organic food market in India

Following the pandemic in 2020, a paradigm change occurred in India, with consumers beginning to purchase more organic goods as a preventive health strategy. This shift in mindset is anticipated to continue to fuel the organic food market's growth in the future. In 2018, the Indian organic food market was worth USD 704 million. According to a survey published by Expert Market Research, the Indian organic food market will be worth USD 849.5 million in 2020. In the years 2020-21, the total amount of organic food exported was roughly INR 707849.52 lakhs (1040.95 million USD). Experts predict that by 2024, it will have grown at a CAGR of 20%, reaching USD 2091 million (Gumber & Rana; 2021). The total area under organic certification (registered under the National Programme for Organic Production) was 4339184.93 ha as of March 31, 2021. (2020-21).

### Reasons for the shift in consumer's attitude towards organic food – A literature review Primary reasons

#### Nutritional value in Organic food – Health concern

There has been a lot of research done on people's perceptions of the health benefits of organic foods. The desire to eat organic food is largely motivated by health concerns (Rana & Paul, 2019). Organic foods are in high demand in both the domestic and international markets because of their high nutritional value. When compared to conventionally grown meals, organic foods include more antioxidants, making them better for health.

#### Quality Certification – Concern for food safety

The key factor driving the increased demand for organic food was discovered to be certification of quality and safety. (Canavari *et al.* 2007; Labros *et al.*, 2014; Lucas *et al.*, 2008; Zanolli and Naspetti, 2002; Tariq *et al.* 2019)<sup>[9, 11, 14]</sup>. As a result of recent food scandals in several nations, people regard food safety as a critical and fundamental virtue. (Azzurra *et al.*, 2018)<sup>[21]</sup>. They regard regular food as the most dangerous. Consumers expect the modern food system to provide them with safe, risk-free food. Consumers trust certification marks and labels when it comes to food safety (Gumber & Rana, 2021).

#### Protection of Eco System – Environmental Concern

Organic products have become more important as a result of the negative consequences of contemporary farming practises. Each of the Green Revolution's three pillars—irrigation, chemical inputs, and pesticides—has weakened the natural ecosystem. In most parts of India, the high irrigation requirements of high-yielding variety (HYV) crops have resulted in an alarming decline in groundwater levels. Consumers are also encouraged to buy organic food because of animal welfare concerns. Synthetic pesticides,

herbicides, and other chemicals kill more than just weeds and insects; they also destroy a variety of species that are vital to maintaining natural equilibrium. Overuse of fertilizers has contaminated ground and surface water, while high nitrate levels have resulted in eutrophication and ecosystem disruption. Organic food production is expected to meet high animal welfare standards by consumers.

(Hofer & Spiller; 2015). People's sentiments about organic food are more favourable when they are concerned about environmental and animal rights issues (Honkanes *et al.* 2006). Deliana, (2012)<sup>[3]</sup>, also stated that Providing ecologically friendly products involves not only conserving our ecosystem but also relieving customers of pesticides, synthetic fertilisers, and synthetic chemicals.

It is undeniable that health, product quality, and the prevention of natural environmental damage are the primary motivations for purchasing organic foods; nonetheless, the health aspect has always ranked first on the priority list. (Rana & Paul, 2019).

### Several other reasons

Organic food is preferred by consumers for a variety of reasons other than health (Brantsæter *et al.*, 2016), quality and environment concerns. People have become more aware of other beneficial impacts of organic foods in the recent decade, such as the following:

**Awareness & Knowledge about Organic Food:** Consumer knowledge is another personal aspect that influences views toward organic food. (Dickieson & Arkus, 2009; Valerian *et al.*, 2011; Akbari and Asadi, 2008; Zanolli and Naspetti, 2002; Harris, Burrell, 2000; Thøgersen *et al.*, 2010)<sup>[12, 11, 18]</sup>. The level of customer understanding of organic foods is a significant aspect in organic food's success (Pastek *et al.*, 2018). Organic food awareness and understanding also assisted consumers in distinguishing between conventional and organic foods. Consumers discovered organic food to be healthier after learning the difference.

**Subjective Norms:** The organic food market is founded on word-of-mouth and other people's suggestions. Subjective norms (friends', family members', and others' opinions) have a big part in determining how people feel about organic food (Pastek *et al.*, 2018). If consumers believe that individuals who matter to them think organic goods are good, they will be more likely to purchase organic foods. (Teng & Wang, 2015).

**Interest in culture & Tradition:** Another reason why people buy organic food is to preserve their social and cultural value. They wish to preserve their traditional culinary methods. The study of Gumber and Rana, 2021 inferred that Organic food is linked to India's old customs and fosters Indian culture and heritage.

**Status/ lifestyle:** Organic food is purchased by upper-class consumers who believe it will raise their social position. These consumers are drawn to organic food because of its high price, media attention, and promotional initiatives. (Hill & lynchehaun, 2002). These consumers wish to be class apart by having organic food in their meal.

**Superior Taste:** As per several studies, taste is a significant quality dimension in the context of organic food. (The Packer, 2001; Wolf 2002; Bonti –Ankoah & Yiridoe, 2006; Valerian *et al.*, 2011; Demeritt, 2002; Cunningham, 2002)<sup>[12]</sup>. Consumers desire organic food not only out of fear, but

also because of its taste. They are willing to pay a premium price for it because of its genuine flavour. (Hill and lychehann, 2002; Gumber & Rana, 2021).

### Discussion

The literature review has also shown that opinions about organic food being considered as a healthier diet is accepted by most of the studies. The study of Melovic *et al.*, 2020; Rana & Paul; 2019; also, confirmed Health care to be the dominant driving motivator/ factor in influencing the purchase of organic products. Therefore it can be concluded that the adoption of organic food can be fostered by appealing at consumer's health motives and by increasing health concern providing health-related information (Apaolaza *et al.* 2018)<sup>[20]</sup>.

### Recommendations and Conclusion

India is a land of people with believes and faith. Here medical practitioners are given the status equivalent to God. As a result, organic food producers and marketers should consider hospitals, medical dispensaries, Ayurveda homoeopathic and naturopathy clinics, diet clinics, yoga and meditation centres (gyms, etc.) and other connected medical institutions as viable markets for organic food promotion. These will be effective locations for organic food promotion. These wellness centres can aid in the effective and favourable promotion of organic food through word of mouth.

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