

A Study of Perception and Attitude of the Millennials towards Organic Food with Special Reference to Pune City

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Abstract

In recent years the lifestyle of the residents has changed drastically. The main reasons are population growth and the increased expectations of life leading to increased demand for food in India. This enlarged demand has resulted in the overuse of non-convertible natural resources. These non-renewable resources have reduced the ecological balance and have impacted adversely on the health of the end consumer. Therefore, it seems in advance to shift the selection to natural food products with quality food and improved health. The organic farming is fastest growing sector in India. Maharashtra being a state of farmers is no exception for that. In fact, this organic farming is more appreciated and practiced by young farmers striving to provide quality food to their upcoming generations. This research aims at assessing the level of awareness about the organic food products, its availability, and importance and health benefits amongst the residents with special reference to students in Pune. The study also focuses on the factors influencing the food habits of this generation.

Keywords: Organic Food, Consumer Awareness, Natural Resources, Conservation

INTRODUCTION

The Agricultural industry always has been the mainstay of Indian economy. The farmers have contributed to the agricultural industry through their innovative techniques of growing various crops in rich fertile Indian land. Because of which many local as well foreign crops have been grown successfully by adapting and twisting various farming techniques as per the climatic conditions in various regions in India.

This successful farming has resulted into the increased demand of food products compelling farmers to start producing crops multiple times in a year against their natural production cycle. This has impacted adversely on the fertility of the soil and uncontrollable use of pesticides. The crops produced are without any nutrition and of a poor quality.

The obvious result of this is the unhealthy lifestyle of people, especially the youth.

The generation has observed their unhealthy lifestyle, their inclination towards fast food and also the buying trend towards hybrid food products. Sudden rise in number of diseases and poor health at very young age has enforced them to evaluate their life style.

Food is an integral part of human life. Nutrition is most important aspect of choosing a right lifestyle. Students are generally seen adapting wrong eating practices. Another change seen in speedy increase in the growing numbers of restaurant swaying people to eat fast food.

The youngsters when enter the dynamic phase of their life and experience the independence from their parents that is characterized by changed environment, new relationship, peer pressure, creating social presence etc. Also, the stress of work-life balance and altered pattern of life have significant role in leading to unhealthy lifestyle. The food that we eat today is more of hunger satisfying than providing necessary nutrition hence it is important to inculcate the awareness about healthy eating rather than eating palatable satisfying food.

Hence, most of the people have changed their preference from fast food to organic food, because of its qualities. The food is naturally grown and doesn't encourage the use of pesticides.

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Organic farming is beneficial to the environment as it does not cause pollution or results into way lesser pollution than regular farming procedures. It also helps in water conservation and improves soil fertility as only natural resources are used as fertilizers. It also promotes controlled energy consumption. It also allows animals to feed on naturally grown feeds and prevents them from use of antibiotics or growth hormones.

Organic farming also addresses the issues of biodiversity and biological cycles very effectively. Hence, it is a safer and effective way of farming, present cohort wants to adapt. People in fact are ready to spend more money to buy these products but definitely do not want to compromise on the quality. The need of an hour is to create an awareness amongst the young generation and encouraging them to replace junk or mal-nutritious food habits with organic foods.

This study focuses on the perception and acceptance of organic food in the young generation, with special reference to college students. The college going students cover major segment of the Pune population since it's an education hub of the country.

BENEFITS OF ORGANIC FARMING

The first benefit of growing food organically is it regulates the use of pesticides and allows a crop or a product to grow in its natural habitat. When the use of pesticides is controlled, it automatically reduces the pollution levels as well. The soil quality improves and fertility increases. The end result of the same is a quality produce with desired nutrition.

The improved health of the end consumer is another benefit of organic farming. Pesticides not just hamper the soil quality but the minute they enter any waterbody, the traces are seen in fishes, plants etc. when the buyer consumes these products with pesticides residue in it, the accumulated substances are released in the body causing unwanted reactions like stomach upset or even food poisoning. Organic farming prevents these health hazards completely.

Naturally grown products result into good health hence avoid the exposure to artificial medicines. The lifespan increases with healthy food. Even when poultry or sea food is grown in a natural environment without getting

adulterated, the end consumer doesn't face any issues related to health and is assured that he is consuming a quality products and bio products like milk or eggs.

When the food is grown naturally, it tastes better as the required contents are present enhancing the taste of the product. It is more connected to the nature and doesn't require any additions to its appearance and flavors. These products are far better than hybrid products both taste wise and on nutrition content. Hence, the end user can also understand the difference clearly and is always more convinced for buying organic products.

The availability of these fresh products also reduces the need of having cold storage for storing these products. Since organic food products are free from preservatives, they are almost sold fresh at all the time. The farmer's market is a growing trend worldwide providing opportunity to the end buyer to have a wide range of organically produced food.

Organic food production reduces farming cost as the maximum cost incurred by a farmer is on fertilizers and pesticides. Farmers either go for locally made fertilizers or recycle their farming waste to produce these fertilizers.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Patel (2021) mentions in his research article that, organic food is everyone's choice over what we get in the market nowadays but what influences their buying decision is the premium price that they have to pay for the same. However, what is more surprising is millennials are completely sold on the concept of organic food and its benefits not only because of its nutritional benefits but also its contribution towards environment sustainability. This has generated a great trust in the minds of millennials about the organic food.

Cachero-Martínez (2020) records in his research paper that, due to the pandemic in 2020, the entire perception of health, eating habits, immunity and environmental care have changed drastically. The world has seen a situation which they never imagined before. The result of this is that everyone is taking conscious efforts of maintaining a healthy lifestyle in order to boost the immunity and increase their life span. There is major shift observed in choice of food. Organic food is more preferred specially by the millennials because of the health benefits and also their sustainability characteristics. The avoidance of

chemicals and fertilizers while growing a food helps to maintain the natural nutrients resulting into a quality food and for which paying a premium price is not a big deal today.

Rizzo and Borrello (2020) understands that the reason of a major shift in consumption of food from conventional to organic is due to the healthiness of the organic products. The least or no use of fertilizers and chemicals and allowing the vegetables or fruits to grow in natural environment is the main reason for its quality. Also the easy access to these farming sites where people can visit and be assured about the quality of food is a major influencing factor on buying behaviour of the consumer.

Tondon (2020) mentions in her paper that, recent years have witnessed an increasing inclination among consumers to adopt food produced through organic methods, as it is seen as a healthy and environmentally sustainable alternative. The pandemic has struck the world questioning their lifestyle which was assumed healthier and population was looked as well immune. But today the millennials are of different opinion. According to them only the food grown using organic method is to be considered healthy and hence buying pattern has inclined towards organic food over the conventional food.

Ayswarya and Vansathi (2018) analyses the consumers on their perception about organic food. The findings that have come across emphasizes of the choices made by the local people of Mysore. The prime focus of the local's is to consume locally grown products and if need be the local crops can be grown organically. But they do not want to import or accept anything which doesn't belong to their native.

Sundaresh and Babu (2017) carried out a study on awareness level towards organic food in college students. The conclusion of the study was, the students are very well aware about the organic food products but still have mixed opinion about incorporating these products into their food habits. The reason behind this confusion is the not so appealing appearance and taste of the food. But lot of students also admitted the health benefits of the organic food products if they replace it with unhealthy and junk food.

Amudha and Kanagarathinam (2017) conducted a survey on awareness level of the residents of Coimbatore about

organic food. The study showed that there is noticeable awareness in the residents however, they are not aware about its availability in their near vicinity. The residents also shown keen interest in buying these products knowing the long-lasting health benefits. So, the only challenge faced by them is the easy availability of the products in the market.

Akhtar and Nisar (2016) discuss in their study about the awareness and acceptance towards organic food in the young generation of Kashmir. According to the author, the generation is keener on consuming products which are eye appealing and pallet pleasing. However, when the study was conducted on the awareness level, the findings were that the teenager girls are more aware and ready to accept the organic food compared to teenager boys.

Priya and Parameswari (2016) discovered about the overall attitude of the consumers for buying organic food. The study revealed that, buyers are very much keen on buying organic food however, they find these products to be little expensive compared to the food products that they consume on a daily basis. Even if the benefits of consuming organic food are more and are good for a long run, the cost factor is unavoidable. Hence, the buyers only buy the products which are in the nearest price range of their daily consumed products. Also, another influencing factor observed by the authors is, the buying pattern of these organic products is highly dependent upon the belief of a buyer. If the product fits into belief criteria of the consumer, then do not hesitate to spend more than their budget.

Zanoli (2002) discuss in their research that the common perception about the organic food is the food which is expensive and difficult to find. At the same time consumers associate organic food as a healthy food and would like to inculcate the habit of consuming it in the young adolescents. The only hindrance in replacing the organic food with junk food is taste of the products. The organic food will be accepted easily if it is good, tasty and filled with nutrition. Davies (1995) in the research finds out that the common motivation behind buying the organic products is the concern towards the environment. Organic food not only benefits the health but doesn't damage environment or eco system. Having said that what matters the most is the availability and cost of the

products. The age group ranging from 30-50 and disposable income of the young earners are highly motivated to buy organic products as it meets both the parameters of health benefits and cost of the products.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The sample size of this research involves 121 respondents that were selected on the basis of supporting the purpose of study.

Convenient sampling method has been used to collect the primary data on the basis of availability of time and respondents.

The primary data has been collected by observation, interview and survey through social media. To collect the primary data various malls and organic product retail outlets of the study area has been visited and the buyers were observed and interviewed with the help of a structured questionnaire. The secondary data has been taken from journals, previous research work of the same or related fields, online library of marketing agency of organic products such as ECOCERT India Pvt Ltd and many more.

Closed questions were presented to respondents and a 5-point Likert scale was used to measure consumer motivation.

OBJECTIVES OF THE RESEARCH

- To study the awareness of organic food in the market among people of Pune.
- To study briefly the consumption pattern of the consumers in Pune.
- To give an idea about factors affecting consumption of organic food by the consumers in Pune.

DATA ANALYSIS

Analysis on Consumption of Organic Food

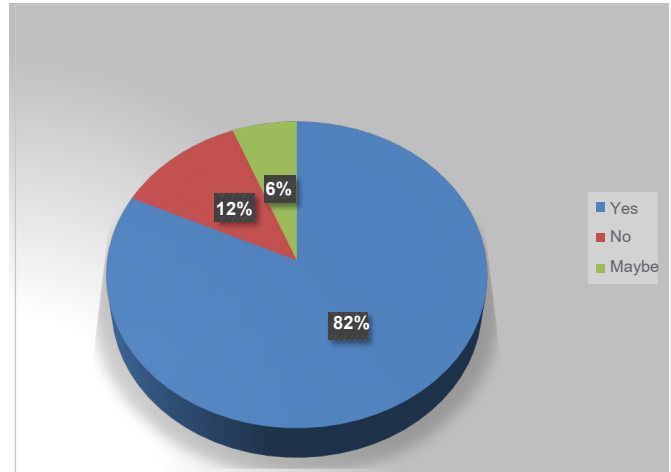


Fig. 1

82% of respondents have agreed to the statement that they consider themselves to consume healthy organic food routinely. 12% have answered “No” and 6% answered “Maybe”.

Now the demographic factors like age, sex, number of family members, marital status and educational qualification are considered. Since the data collection is done in Pune and there are many respondents staying in Pune are from various states and cities of India, for the purpose of jobs, alternative factor has been taken into consideration. This factor is defined as native and hence got 2 outcomes viz. Pune and outside.

Awareness of Organic Food According to different Age-Groups

Table 1

Age Group	% of Awareness According to Age Group
16-18	13%
19-21	26%
21-25	48%

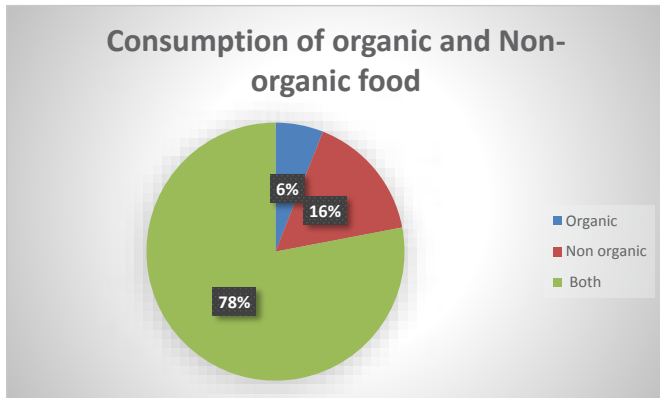


Fig. 2

According to the data above, only 6% of the respondents solely consume organic food, which is low. 16% people consume only non-organic food products, while 78% people consume both organic and non-organic food. This makes it clear that most of the respondents do not depend solely on organic food on a daily basis.

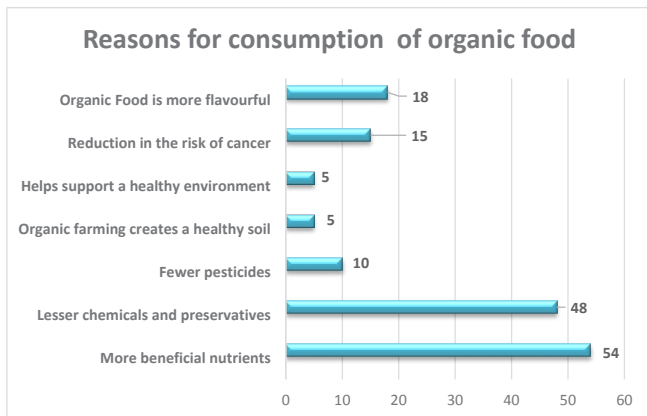


Fig. 3

Reasons for which people consume organic food are mentioned in Fig. 3. 54% of the respondents prefer organic food due to its benefits provided to health conditions as well as 48% do mention that since there are lesser chemicals.

The most common reason by respondents for consuming non organic food is the cost factor. 42% of respondents state that organic food is more expensive than non-organic food and 33% state that organic food deteriorates faster than non-organic food which lead to their preference of purchasing and consuming non- organic food on a regular basis.

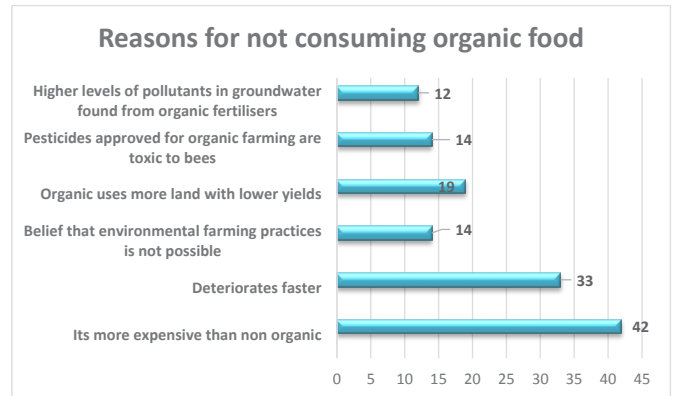


Fig. 4

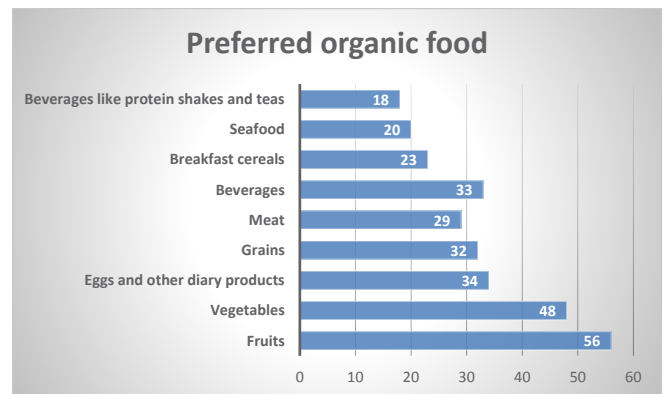


Fig. 5

The Fig. 5 represents that Fruits (56%) and vegetables (48%) have the most preference for purchase and consumption as organic food. This was followed by consumers preferring dairy products (34%) and beverages (33%) and grains (32%).

FINDINGS

From the above data it is apparent that the awareness of organic food is high and consumers are well aware of the availability and types of organic foods. Respondents are also well aware of organic food and the benefits derived from it. Consumption of organic food products do reduce health hazards leading to a healthy blissful life.

Consumers of all age-groups, income and educational qualification have enough knowledge regarding organic food, even so a good number of respondents choose to ignore the benefits and avoid consuming them (organic products).

The most common response for not consuming organic products has been the cost of the products, as stated by the data above.

The millennial being busy with educational and work commitments, do not get enough time to look and procure organic food products which are not commonly available at the grocery stores and the availability online stores is not frequent.

SUGGESTIONS

- Commercial advertisements should be made depicting the health and environmental benefits of organic farming and consumption of organic food. This can surely be an effective way to motivate millennials, especially those who are educated to consume and partake in organic food products.
- Organic products should be made available more easily and economically. If millennial compare and discover that price of non-organic food products are cheaper than organic ones, automatically they will have developed tendency to move towards non-organic even after acknowledging its bad effects on health and environment.
- The government can play a vital role and effective role by reducing the price of organic food as well as take various measures to promote production, consumption and advertisement of organic products.

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