

Understanding Key Drivers Influencing Consumer Choices For Organic Products In Uttarakhand, India

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ABSTRACT

This study delves into the intricate landscape of consumer choices regarding organic products in Uttarakhand, India, with a focus on understanding the key drivers shaping purchasing decisions. Employing a judgemental sampling technique, data was gathered from 212 participants across the Kumaon and Garhwal regions of Uttarakhand. The investigation sought to assess current awareness levels among consumers regarding organic products and delve into factors influencing perceptions of quality and trustworthiness.

The study identified seven critical factors—price, trust, health, convenience, accessibility, certification, and product labelling—as integral elements impacting consumer preferences in the organic food market. Utilizing SPSS 25 for data analysis, the study revealed that these factors collectively contribute to 74.35% of the variance in consumer choices. Notably, trust and price emerged as prominent influencers, contributing 15.25% and 14.30% to the explained variance, respectively.

The findings offer valuable insights into the dynamics of consumer decision-making in Uttarakhand, shedding light on factors that significantly shape preferences in the organic food sector. The limitations of the study, including the sample size of 212 and the judgemental sampling approach, are acknowledged, emphasizing the need for caution in generalizing the results. This research contributes to the growing body of knowledge surrounding consumer behavior in the context of organic products and provides a foundation for future studies and industry initiatives in the region.

Keywords: Convenience, Accessibility, Trust, Price, Organic products.

1. Introduction

In an era marked by heightened health consciousness and environmental awareness, consumer choices in the realm of food consumption have undergone a discernible shift. Organic products, characterized by their adherence to stringent cultivation practices, have emerged as a compelling option for individuals seeking a harmonious blend of personal well-being and ecological sustainability. As the organic food market gains prominence globally, the factors shaping consumer preferences become increasingly crucial for both scholars and practitioners in the field.

Uttarakhand, a state nestled in the lap of the Himalayas, reflects this paradigm shift in consumer behavior. With a rich agrarian heritage, the region has witnessed a growing interest in organic products. This study aims to unravel the key drivers influencing consumer choices for organic products in Uttarakhand, India, where the juxtaposition of traditional agricultural practices and evolving consumer preferences creates a fascinating dynamic.

While the organic food market burgeons, the relative paucity of research exploring the nuances of consumer decision-making in specific regional contexts remains apparent. Previous studies often generalize findings from broader geographic scopes, overlooking the distinct socio-cultural and economic factors that might influence consumer choices at a local level (Smith et al., 2020). Moreover, the existing body of knowledge predominantly focuses on the positive attributes of organic products, neglecting a comprehensive

understanding of the interplay between factors influencing both organic and inorganic product choices (Jones & Green, 2018).

The divergence in consumer preferences between organic and inorganic products remains an underexplored facet of existing literature. This study seeks to bridge this gap by elucidating the intricacies of consumer choices in Uttarakhand, considering factors such as certification, trust, price, and accessibility that are pivotal in shaping perceptions and, consequently, purchasing decisions.

As the organic and inorganic product landscapes continue to evolve, a nuanced exploration of consumer behavior in the context of Uttarakhand becomes imperative. This research aims to contribute to the existing body of knowledge by providing region-specific insights into the determinants of consumer choices, thereby fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between individual preferences, environmental considerations, and agricultural practices.

2. Literature Review

"The burgeoning interest in organic products among consumers in Uttarakhand, India, is emblematic of a global shift towards health-conscious and environmentally sustainable choices (Joshi, 2019; Kumar & Sharma, 2021). As consumers navigate this evolving landscape, factors influencing their preferences become paramount for understanding the dynamics of the organic food market. Uttarakhand, nestled in the Himalayan region, presents a unique context where traditional agricultural practices intersect with a rising demand for organic alternatives (Negi et al., 2022). The identification and analysis of potential factors influencing consumer choices in this region can offer valuable insights for both academia and industry.

Potential factors such as certification, product labelling, trust, price, convenience, accessibility, and health are expected to emerge as pivotal in shaping consumer decisions in the organic food market (Arora & Bansal, 2018; Khatri & Sharma, 2020). Certification and product labelling, serving as potential indicators of adherence to organic standards, are anticipated to contribute significantly to consumer perceptions of product quality (Dhanda & Juneja, 2019; Jha et al., 2021). Trust, a multifaceted construct encompassing perceptions of reliability, integrity, and transparency in the supply chain, is expected to play a central role in shaping consumer confidence in organic products (Pant & Verma, 2018; Sharma et al., 2020). Price, often cited as a potential barrier to organic product adoption, is expected to reflect the economic considerations that influence consumer choices (Negi et al., 2022; Raj & Srivastava, 2019). Convenience and accessibility, intertwined concepts in the consumer decision-making process, are anticipated to be crucial factors that determine the feasibility and ease of incorporating organic products into daily lifestyles (Kumari & Singhal, 2020; Sharma & Kumar, 2018).

In addition, lifestyle considerations and health concerns are expected to significantly influence consumer preferences for organic products in Uttarakhand (Kumar et al., 2019; Singh & Pathak, 2020). The shift towards organic consumption is anticipated to align with a growing trend where consumers view their dietary choices not only as a matter of sustenance but also as a lifestyle statement. The emphasis on wellness and a holistic approach to health is expected to become integral to consumer decision-making, with organic products often perceived as a means to enhance overall well-being (Kumar et al., 2019). Furthermore, health concerns related to pesticide residues and chemical additives in conventional products are expected to motivate consumers to opt for organically produced alternatives, reflecting a heightened awareness of the potential impact of food choices on personal health (Singh & Pathak, 2020).

The existing body of knowledge highlights a gap in the literature regarding region-specific studies that consider the interplay of these potential factors within the context of Uttarakhand. Previous research has tended to generalize findings from broader geographic scopes, overlooking the nuanced socio-cultural and economic factors influencing consumer choices at the local level (Chaudhary & Kaur, 2021; Kansal et al., 2019). This study aims to address this gap by providing an in-depth examination of the potential factors within the specific socio-economic and cultural context of Uttarakhand.

Based on the above discussion, following are the objectives of the present research.

- Assess the current awareness levels among consumers in Uttarakhand regarding organic products.
- Investigate the factors influencing consumers' perceptions of the quality and trustworthiness of organic products in Uttarakhand.

3. Research Methodology

In this research, a systematic and robust methodology was employed to investigate the factors influencing consumers' preferences for organic food products in Uttarakhand, focusing specifically on the Garhwal and Kumaon regions. The sampling strategy utilized a combination of stratified and judgmental sampling techniques to ensure a representative and diverse sample of consumers in these regions. Stratified sampling allowed for the selection of subgroups within each region, enhancing the study's ability to capture variations in consumer behavior.

A total of 300 questionnaires were strategically distributed among respondents, seeking their insights into the factors shaping their choices in the organic food market. The high validity rate of 70.6%, as evidenced by the

receipt and analysis of 212 completed questionnaires, underscores the reliability and relevance of the collected data.

The questionnaire, crafted with precision, utilized a Likert scale ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 denoted the least influence, and 5 signified the most influence. This nuanced scale facilitated a detailed assessment of respondents' perceptions and preferences, allowing for a comprehensive understanding of the factors impacting their organic food purchasing decisions.

To deepen the analysis, the research delved into various dimensions using the powerful statistical tool SPSS-25. Descriptive analysis was employed to unveil patterns and trends related to awareness levels, demographic traits, and other pertinent variables. This provided a rich contextual backdrop for the subsequent investigation. Further strengthening the analytical rigor, factor analysis, specifically employing the principal components analysis method, was conducted. This advanced statistical technique unveiled underlying patterns and relationships among the potential factors influencing consumers. By applying factor analysis, the study aimed to distil key variables, providing a clearer and more concise understanding of the factors that significantly influence consumers in their choice of organic food products.

4. Data Analysis and Interpretation:

4.1 Demographic Analysis- Table 4.1 gives a brief description of the consumers profile who are resident of Uttarakhand.

Profile of Consumers	Frequency	%	
Age	<28 Years	45	21.23
	28-35 years	54	25.47
	35-42 Years	43	20.28
	42-49 Years	37	17.45
	>49 years	33	15.57
Gender	Male	141	66.51
	Female	71	33.49
Education	Graduate	89	41.98
	Post Graduate	58	27.36
	Professional	35	16.51
	Other	30	14.15
Income	<10 lakhs	147	69.34
	10-20 lakhs	42	19.81
	> 20 lakhs	23	10.85
Service	Govt Service	42	19.81
	Business	26	12.26
	Private Service	117	55.19
	Others	27	12.74
Awareness	Yes	212	100.00
	No	0	0.00

Source: Authors Analysis

The demographic analysis of consumers reveals a diverse profile among the surveyed group. In terms of age distribution, a significant portion falls within the 28-35 years range, constituting 25.47%, followed closely by those under 28 years at 21.23%. The gender distribution indicates a higher representation of males, accounting for 66.51% of the respondents. Regarding education, the majority are graduates (41.98%), with a substantial proportion holding postgraduate degrees (27.36%). In terms of income, the largest group earns less than 10 lakhs (69.34%), highlighting a predominant middle-income demographic. Occupation-wise, private service professionals dominate at 55.19%, followed by government service at 19.81%. Notably, the entire surveyed population is aware of organic products, indicating a widespread consciousness and potential market interest in environmentally friendly and sustainable options among consumers of varying demographics. This comprehensive demographic analysis provides valuable insights for businesses aiming to tailor their organic product offerings to specific consumer segments based on age, gender, education, income, and occupation.

4.2 Factor Analysis

To explore the underlying factors influencing consumers' preferences for purchasing organic products in the Uttarakhand region, a rigorous analysis was conducted using statistical methods. Firstly, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure, yielding a commendable value of 0.87, affirmed the appropriateness of the dataset for factor analysis. This was further substantiated by the Bartlett Test of Sphericity, establishing the significance of the correlations within the data. Employing SPSS-25, a comprehensive principle component analysis was executed through multiple iterations, revealing seven robust factors with eigenvalues surpassing one. These factors collectively elucidated a substantial 74.35% of the variance, indicating their considerable explanatory power. The detailed insights into these factors, their respective loadings, and their influence on consumers'

proclivity toward organic product purchases are meticulously presented in Table 4.2 to 4.9, offering a nuanced understanding of the multifaceted dynamics shaping consumer behavior in the Uttarakhand region. This analytical approach not only validates the relevance of the identified factors but also contributes significantly to the comprehension of the key drivers steering consumer choices in the realm of organic product consumption.

(a) Factor1: Price

From Table 4.2, it is evident that the price dimension holds significant influence, contributing to 17.85% of the total explained variance of 75.4%. This underscores the relevance of affordability and pricing considerations in shaping consumers' decisions regarding organic product purchases in the surveyed region. The high factor loadings, ranging from 0.69 to 0.81, further emphasize the strength of the relationship between the stated attributes and the overarching price factor.

Table 4.2: Price

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Attributes</i>	<i>Factor Loading</i>	<i>% of Variance</i>
Price	Affordability of organic products influence your purchase decision	0.81	17.85%
	Price of organic products influences your decision to purchase them	0.77	
	Price plays a significant role in your decision-making process	0.69	
	I buy expensive organic product over a cheaper non-organic alternative	0.72	

Source: Authors Analysis

The findings suggest that consumers in the Uttarakhand region are notably sensitive to the affordability of organic products, with a consensus that the price of such items plays a crucial role in their purchase decisions. The inclination to choose an expensive organic product over a cheaper non-organic alternative, as indicated by a factor loading of 0.72, implies that consumers are willing to invest in the perceived benefits associated with organic products, even if it entails a higher cost. This matches with the findings of Kumar et al (2019).

Factor 2: Trust

The second factor identified in the research, Trust, is a pivotal dimension influencing consumer decisions in the organic food market in Uttarakhand. This factor encompasses several attributes that collectively contribute to the perception of reliability and confidence in organic products. Consumers express a robust belief (loading factor of 0.76) that organic products are sourced from trustworthy and reliable suppliers. This trust extends to the point where they recommend organic products to friends and family based on their confidence in the standards and quality adhered to in the production process. The information provided on product labels plays a significant role (loading factor of 0.69) in fostering trust, indicating that clear and transparent labelling contributes to building consumer confidence. Additionally, the organic certification process is a key driver (loading factor of 0.72) in generating trust among consumers, highlighting the importance of certification standards in shaping their perceptions of product authenticity.

Table 4.3: Trust

<i>Dimension</i>	<i>Attributes</i>	<i>Factor Loading</i>	<i>% of Variance</i>
Trust	I believe organic products are purchased from trustworthy and reliable suppliers	0.76	14.25%
	I recommend organic products to friends and family based on my trust on standards and quality	0.76	
	Information on label helps in generating trust	0.69	
	Organic certification generates trust towards purchase	0.72	

Source: Authors Analysis

This factor, Trust, emerges as a critical aspect, explaining 14.25% of the total variance in consumer choices for organic products. It underlines the significance consumers attribute to the reliability of the supply chain, the credibility of organic certification, and the transparency of product information. Trust is not merely a functional aspect but is deeply intertwined with consumers' belief in the positive impact of organic products on their health and well-being, reinforcing the notion that organic choices contribute to a healthier lifestyle. The findings align with prior research in the field. Studies by Sharma et al. (2020) and Pant & Verma (2018) emphasized the importance of trust in organic products, highlighting its multifaceted nature, including reliability, integrity, and transparency. The positive correlation between trust and consumer willingness to recommend organic products resonates with the findings of Jha et al. (2021), who explored similar patterns in consumer behavior in the organic food market.

Factor3: Health

The Health dimension, as revealed in Table 4.4, plays a substantial role in influencing consumers to purchase organic products in Uttarakhand, India. This factor is characterized by multiple attributes, each contributing to the overall variance in consumer behavior. Respondents express a firm belief (loading factor of 0.69) that the consumption of organic products positively contributes to their overall health and well-being, emphasizing the perceived health benefits associated with organic choices.

Table 4.4: Health

Dimension	Attributes	Factor Loading	% of Variance
Health	To what extent do you believe that consuming organic products positively contributes to your overall health and well-being	0.69	10.74%
	How likely are you to choose organic products over conventional ones due to the perceived health benefits	0.76	
	I purchase organic goods because of less usage of pesticides and chemicals	0.74	
	Nutritional superiority of organic products are good to maintain sound health	0.75	

Source: Authors Analysis

Furthermore, the likelihood of choosing organic products over conventional ones is notably high (loading factor of 0.76), underscoring the significant impact of health considerations on consumer preferences. The conscious decision to purchase organic goods due to reduced pesticide and chemical usage (loading factor of 0.74) aligns with the findings of previous research (e.g., Kumar et al., 2019), emphasizing consumers' growing awareness and concern about the potential health risks associated with conventional agricultural practices. Additionally, the acknowledgment of the nutritional superiority of organic products as a driver for maintaining sound health (loading factor of 0.75) resonates with studies by Singh and Pathak (2020), reflecting a broader trend wherein consumers perceive organic choices as integral to their pursuit of a healthier lifestyle.

(b) Factor 4: Accessibility

The Accessibility dimension, as indicated by the factor loadings in Table 4.5, plays a significant role in shaping consumer choices for organic products in Uttarakhand, India. Respondents express that the ease of accessibility of organic food in local stores is a notable factor (loading factor of 0.67) influencing their purchasing decisions, emphasizing the importance of convenient local availability. Moreover, the influence of product availability (loading factor of 0.73) on consumers' organic product choices underscores the impact of a diverse range of options on purchasing behavior. The increasing significance of online platforms is evident, with a high factor loading of 0.77, signifying that the accessibility of organic products through online channels significantly impacts consumers' decision-making processes.

Table 4.5: Accessibility

Dimension	Attributes	Factor Loading	% of Variance
Accessibility	Accessibility of organic food in local stores are easy	0.67	9.25%
	Availability of organic products influences the purchase of organic products	0.73	
	Availability of online platforms impact your decision to purchase them	0.77	

Source: Authors Analysis

This aligns with previous research by Kumari and Singhal (2020), highlighting the increasing role of online platforms in shaping consumer behavior and preferences for organic products. Similarly, findings by Sharma and Kumar (2018) emphasize the influence of local store accessibility on consumer choices, reinforcing the multifaceted nature of accessibility as a key determinant in the organic food market.

(c) Factor 5: Convenience

The Convenience dimension, highlighted in Table 4.6, emerges as a pivotal factor influencing consumer choices for organic products in Uttarakhand, India. The factor loading of 0.77 suggests that consumers perceive it as easier to purchase organic food products with convenience, emphasizing the importance of a streamlined purchasing process. Additionally, the factor loading of 0.62 indicates that the easy availability and conveniences associated with organic products play a significant role in incorporating them into consumers' daily routines. Furthermore, respondents express a likelihood to choose organic products over conventional ones when they are easily accessible and require minimal effort for purchase, as indicated by the factor loading of 0.63.

Table 4.6: Convenience

Dimension	Attributes	Factor Loading	% of Variance
Convenience	It is easier to purchase organic food products with ease	0.77	8.25%
	Easy availability & conveniences made you to incorporate organic products into your daily routine	0.62	
	I choose organic products over conventional ones if they are easily accessible and require minimal effort for purchase	0.63	

Source: Authors Analysis

These findings resonate with the work of Kumari and Singhal (2020), who highlighted the importance of convenience in online shopping behavior. Similarly, research by Sharma and Kumar (2018) emphasized the influence of convenience factors in shaping consumer behavior in the organic food market, further supporting the significance of convenience as a driving force behind consumer preferences.

(d) Factor 6: Product Labelling

The Product Labelling dimension, as detailed in Table 4.7, is a significant factor influencing consumer choices for organic products in Uttarakhand, India. The factor loading of 0.66 suggests that consumers attribute importance to clear and informative product labels, indicating that such labels play a role in influencing their purchase decisions. Furthermore, the factor loading of 0.71 highlights that consumers express a notable level of confidence in interpreting the information provided on organic product labels, emphasizing the role of label clarity in building consumer trust. Additionally, the factor loading of 0.74 indicates that the absence of clear and comprehensive product labels is perceived as a noteworthy factor affecting the purchase of organic products.

Table 4.7: Product Labelling

Dimension	Attributes	Factor Loading	% of Variance
Product labelling	Clear and informative product labels influence my purchase decision	0.66	7.65%
	Your level of confidence in interpreting the information provided on organic product	0.71	
	the absence of clear and comprehensive product labels information affects my purchase of organic products.	0.74	

Source: Authors Analysis

These findings align with previous research by Dhanda and Juneja (2019), emphasizing the impact of product labelling on consumer perceptions of organic product quality. Similarly, Jha et al. (2021) found that consumer confidence in organic products is influenced by the clarity and completeness of product information, underscoring the universal importance of transparent product labelling.

Factor 7: Certification

The Certification dimension, as outlined in Table 4.8, is a critical factor influencing consumer choices for organic products in Uttarakhand, India. The factor loading of 0.72 indicates that consumers place significance on the presence of official organic certification, suggesting that such certification plays a role in influencing their purchase decisions. Moreover, the factor loading of 0.69 emphasizes that consumers are more likely to choose a product with a recognizable organic certification label over one without any certification, underscoring the importance of certification in shaping consumer preferences. Additionally, the factor loading of 0.59 suggests that the absence of an official organic certification label may have a noticeable impact on consumers' purchasing decisions.

Table 4.8: Certification

Dimension	Attributes	Factor Loading	% of Variance
Certification	To what extent does the presence of official organic certification influence your purchase.	0.72	7.41%
	I am most likely to choose a product with a organic certification label over one without any certification	0.69	
	the absence of an official organic certification will affect my purchase	0.59	

Source: Authors Analysis

These findings align with prior research by Dhanda and Juneja (2019), who highlighted the influence of certification on consumer perceptions of organic product authenticity. Similarly, Arora and Bansal (2018) found that consumers are more inclined to trust and choose products with official certification labels, reinforcing the universal importance of certification in the organic food market.

5. Conclusion

The study examined seven vital factors that impact customer preferences for organic products in Uttarakhand, India. The considerations encompass Certification, Product Labelling, Convenience, Accessibility, Health, Trust, and Price. After conducting a thorough investigation, it was shown that these elements combined have a substantial impact on customers' preferences and purchase decisions in the organic food industry. The highlighted parameters provide useful insights for both academics and business in comprehending the intricate dynamics of consumer behavior in this region.

Managerial Implications:

Strategic Marketing: Managers can leverage the identified factors to develop targeted marketing strategies. Emphasizing clear product labeling, highlighting certifications, and addressing accessibility concerns can enhance the appeal of organic products.

Supply Chain Enhancement: Investments in improving accessibility, both in local stores and through online platforms, can enhance consumer convenience. Collaborating with certification bodies to ensure product labels align with consumer understanding and expectations can build trust.

Pricing Strategies: Understanding that price is a significant factor, managers can explore competitive pricing strategies or promotional offers to make organic products more economically viable for consumers.

Scope for Future Study:

Regional Variations: Further research can explore variations in consumer preferences and factors influencing choices across different regions within Uttarakhand. This will provide a more nuanced understanding of local influences.

Longitudinal Studies: Conducting longitudinal studies to track changes in consumer preferences over time can offer insights into evolving trends and the impact of external factors on organic product choices.

Cultural Influences: Exploring the role of cultural influences on consumer perceptions and behaviors towards organic products could provide a deeper understanding of the socio-cultural factors shaping preferences.

Comparative Analysis: Comparative studies with other regions in India or globally can shed light on unique factors influencing consumer choices in Uttarakhand, contributing to a broader understanding of organic food markets.

By addressing these areas, future studies can contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior in the organic food sector, allowing for more targeted and effective strategies for both businesses and policymakers.

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