

‘Health Halo’: A new opportunity for Organic Food in COVID upsurge

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Abstract.

Purpose- In order to find out the health impact of organic food, this paper is a systematic review of prevalent literature that summarizes the health implications of organic food vs. non organic food or conventional food on human health. With the upsurge in COVID cases globally, the demand for organic food has increased over the years. People have shifted toward organically grown food perceiving it to be healthy and safe for consumption which is also claimed to be an immunity booster. This paper not only underlines the health benefits of organic food, but is also an attempt to find out the health halo if any behind such formed conventions and believes.

Design/Method/Approach- The paper draws its knowledge from published work in reliable sources and attempts to understand the believes of organic food consumers.

Findings- It was found that the people living in developed cities in India are aware of the prevalent benefits of consuming organic food products. They not only prefer organic food products but also consider them safe. Many states of India are working towards achieving the aim of getting 100% organic in coming years. Various owners of super markets in India have witnessed 30-40% increase in the sales of organic food in last two year.

Research Gap- Clinical research is required to further validate the claimed health benefits by medical professionals.

Index Terms::Organic Food Products, Healthy Food, Health Halo, COVID

1. Introduction

COVID-19 outbreak has been an awakening call for many across the globe. One of the most affected nation India has officially reported more than 2.5Cr active cases taking the death toll to more than 3,00,000. The pandemic situation in the country has compelled people to go back on the phrase which says “Health is Wealth”. Amidst the time of pandemic, people have shown many changes in lifestyle, food habits etc. one such major change has been witnessed in the organic food industry. Organic food has seen a major upsurge in the demand of organic food globally. In order to eat healthy conciseness in human has taken him back to the consumption of naturally grow and processed food, which is free from chemical fertilizers pesticides etc.

Started in 1960s Organic movement was first seen in the western world. The world which is sustained on packed and processed food has always welcomed the healthy organic food. But, due people all over the globe have shift their paradigm from nonorganic to organic food as it is perceived to be healthy which is not only safe for consumption but also boosts the immunity. Today consumers have shifted their focus on the terms like ‘Healthy’, ‘Adulteration’, ‘Organic’, ‘Fresh from the farm’ etc. The buying behavior as reported by various super market owners, is no

more on attractive packaging or free bees, whereas the focus is more on ingredients used in processing, production or storage.

India witnessed its first lockdown in March, 2020, the increased demand and sales of organic food is enough to reflect the changed needs and preferences of consumer. Talking of New Delhi, the capital of India where we have a branch of almost every organic company, or its availability in markets is comparatively easier has reported 25-100% increase in the demand of organic food in last 9-10 months. Various super markets in New Delhi like the modern bazaar has reported an increase of 25% in the sales of organic food. Yet another organic food aggregator at isayorganic.com has reported a hike of 100% in the sales of organic food in last year. A leading company of organic food in Rajasthan, Nature land Organics, has also reported 60% spike in the sales of organic food since lockdown.

Whereas in Gujrat, several organic food stores have witnessed an upsurge in sales of organic food by 25-30%. Retailers like Healthy Buddha in Bangalore has also seen an increased demand of organic food. Many established brands supplying organic food pan India like the Organic Company, naturally yours, Organic world etc. have also seen spike in the sales of organic food products.

2. Research Design & Methodology

Organic Food has successfully created a buzz over the years. It has gained more popularity and has gathered more attention because of the labels it come it. The tags like safe, healthy, nutritious, fresh, immunity booster, natural etc. has gained weightage in the recent times. In order to understand the health believes attached to organic food, a systematic review of prevalent literature was conducted. Information from published articles, journal, newspaper reports, conference proceedings etc. was collected to understand the consumer believes and perception towards organic food consumptions.

3. Objectives of the Study

The study has drawn following objectives in reference to prevalent literature

- i. To conduct an updated review of organic market.
- ii. To understand the claimed health benefits of organic food.

4. Findings from Literature

Organic Market (Indian and Global Scenario)

Organic Market has rapidly increased since its origination the year 2020, the value of Indian organic market was recorded at a value of USD 849.5 million. It is expected to cross the mark of USD 2601 million by the end of year 2026 and is expected to grow at a rate of CAGR 20.5%. Heath has been the key driver of growth in the demand of organic food. The nutrition value of organic food, lifestyle of Indian consumer and inclination toward healthy environment has been the key elements for the increased demand of organic food in India.

According to **Dr. AK Yadav**, Advisor, Department of Agriculture, Government of Uttar Pradesh, India has great future for Organic food and it will continue to grow at an increasing rate. He also mentioned that government of India has assured to provide full assistance for organic farming and plans to increase the organic farming area by 100% in coming 5 years,(Rawat, 2020).

The Global Organic Market is also reported to grow from \$ 110.25 billion in 2016 to 262.85 million in 2022 recording a growth rate of CAGR 16.5%(TechSci, 2017).

Figure: 01Global Organic Market Food Share



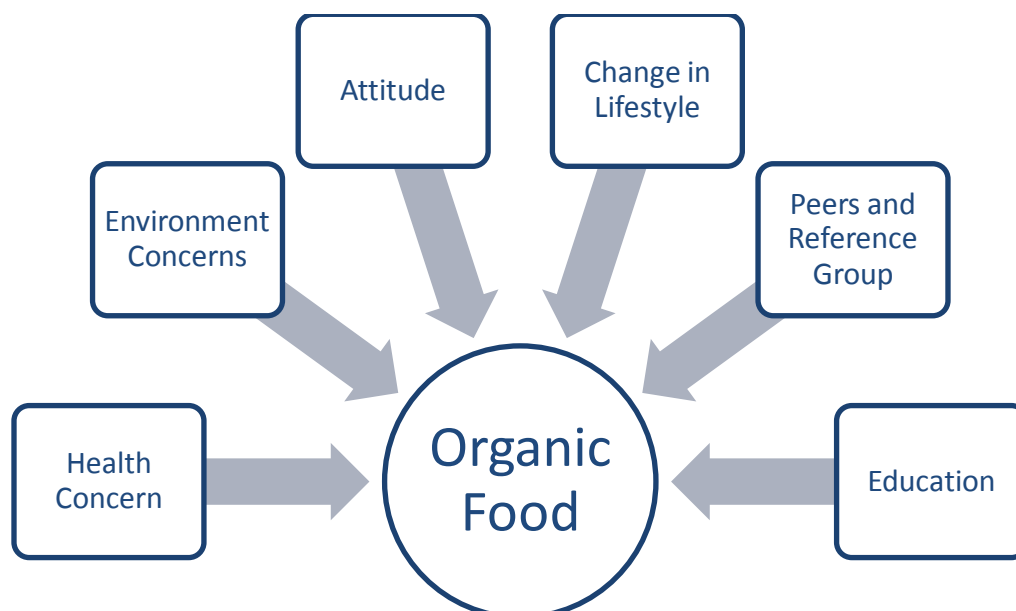
Source: Techsci Research, 2017

(Yadav et al, 2010⁸) in his article have said that various European nations like the Germany, Italy, Switzerland, Austria will be the leading manufacturers of organic fruits and a source of exports of organic fruit across the globe. Yet another Report published in 2012, by the (*National Program on Organic production*) the organic food market is expected to grow at the rate of 47% in Europe, 28% in USA & Canada, at a remarkable rate in Singapore and Italy. It is also believed that though the large number of demands can be met by the countries themselves, but the increased growth rate will be an opportunity for India Market to export organic food in these developed nations. India is reportedly the top 10 players in organic global market in terms of farmer engagement in organic farming, but the domestic sales is still not as it should be. The reason indented is the lack of availability and easy accessibility of organic food (Balaji and Injodey, 2017)²⁷. It was reported by (Lernoud and Willer 2016)²⁸ the Indian organic industry is expected to witness an upsurge. He also said, total certified organic agricultural land is just 1% 46. hectare which is 4 time the area covered for organic food in 1999.

Consumer Perception and Driving Factors for the demand of Organic food

The various factors identified for the demand of organic food through various studies are health, education, lifestyle, peer pressure, changing lifestyle, awareness of people, perceived health benefits, concerns for environment etc.

Figure 02: Factors Affecting demand of organic food



Source: Prevalent Literature

(Deepak Pandey et.al, 2019), identified prevalent organic information like the health benefits, subjective norms and perceived information as the main sources of demand of organic food in India. They said that all these factors contribute towards building a trust there after converting demand into sales in Indian context. (Brian Harris, David Burress & Sharon Eicher, 2000) claims life style, education or income are not the factors for demand of organic food IN US market. It is demanded because of awareness of consumers on health benefits. (Drichoutis et. all, 2006) found

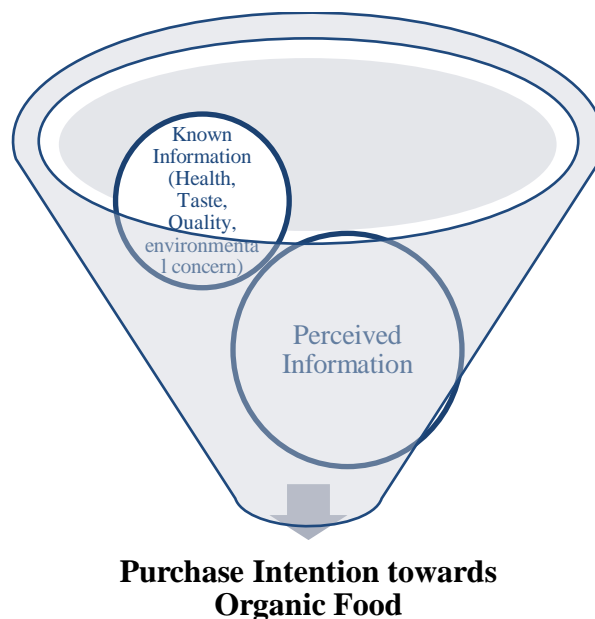
that the driving force in buying organic food was the label safe and nutritious. Whereas (*Efthimia Tsakiridou, Chritina Boutsouki and Kostantinos Mattas, 2007*), in their study, suggested that women were the prime consumers of organic food as compared to male. He also concluded that income played an important role and said organic food were demanded more in the house that had kids.

(*Rene'e Shaw Hughner et.all, 2007*) in their paper said despite awareness and health concerns, demand for organic food is limited because of the lack of support formal bodies and lack of advertisement about the organic food from authorities. Research in their study also mentioned, that organic food though labeled safe but are perceived to be for niche target group with high income. They divided the consumers into two category, one who was sensitive towards price and therefore did not demand organic food and second, people who were more concerned for health and less sensitive towards price and therefore demanded organic food as compared to conventionally grown food.

Yet another consumer category was identified by (*Essoussi & Zahaf 2012*), They identified consumers as conventional and emergent consumers. Classic were the once who were ready to pay premium price for consumption of organic food, while emergent were the once who were interested in convince shopping.

Whereas organic food was considered to be safe and healthy in china as compared to non-organic or conventionally grown food (*Rongduo Liu a,b, 2013*). Income, age, education were identified as the main factors for the demand of organic food by (*Magnusson et al., 2001*).

Figure 03: Purchase Intention towards organic food



Source: Prevalent Literature.

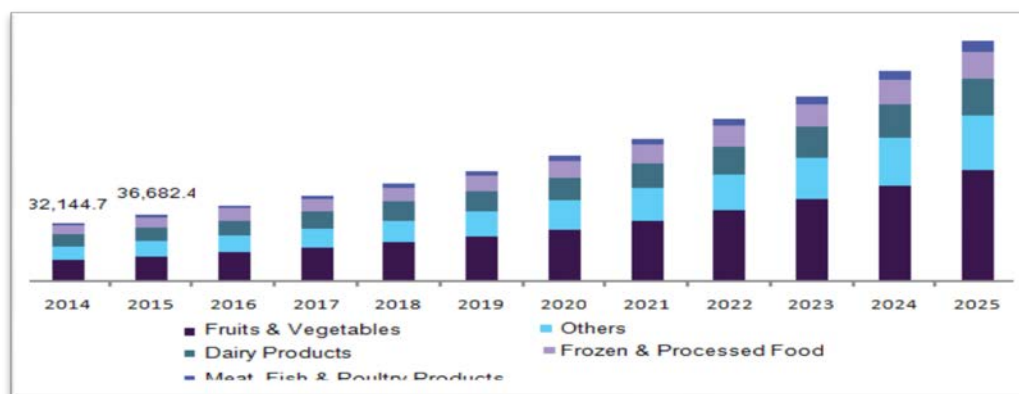
In a report published by the Department of Agriculture, Government of Uttar Pradesh in 2018, State is about halfway towards its ambitious goal of going 100% organic and agriculturally self-sufficient by 2020. The report also said, that people of Kerala are aware of the health benefits and therefore demand for organic food is higher in Kerala.

5. Organic Food during COVID-19

As COVID-19 has hit the entire world, India is not left behind. With about 2.5Cr active cases and more than 3,00,000 deaths, the people of India are bound to think about their health and physical wellbeing.

With more and more people getting cautious about their health, demand for organic food is expected to increase in India in large numbers. People are now demanding healthy food, which is nutritious, healthy, straight from nature's lap and is safe for consumption.

Figure 04: Demand for organic food in India



Source: : grandviewresearch.com

The government of India has initiated several beneficiary programs for the promotion of organic farming in the nation. With easy in generating certificates, to training the farmers on the methods of organic food, government has become serious for Turing the farming wheels back to from where it started. The problems of non-availability of organic food, or problems in supply chain of organic food is also beingdealt by the government bodies. Government has introduced several schemes for the growth of organic farming in India. Some of them are:

1. Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY)
2. Mission **Organic** Value Chain Development for North Eastern Region (MOVCDNER)
3. 3.Capital Investment Subsidy Scheme (CISS) under Soil Health Management Scheme
4. National Mission on Oilseeds and Oil Palm (NMOOP)
5. National Food Security Mission (NFSM)

The aim of all these schemes is to foster organic farming by proving, easy certification, financial assistance, training etc to the farmers and people involved in organic farming in India.

6. Findings

From the existing literature, it is clear that health, education, income, concern for environment, healthy lifestyle is the driving force for the demand of organic food in India. Though developing nations like India are finding it difficult to feed such a large population with food alone, but schemes started for the upliftment of organic food shows the positive development and a ray of hope in the field of organic. It is also clear that though COVID-19 has taken many lives, but has also shown the world the path of healthy living and the value of protecting human and environment health for one selves and generations to come.

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