

***“A Pilot Study of Consumer Buying Behavior and Perception towards Organic, Inorganic, and Fortified Foods in Nashik District”***

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**Abstract:**

This pilot study investigates consumer buying behavior and perception toward organic, inorganic, and fortified foods in Nashik District, India. With growing concerns about health and wellness, consumers are increasingly considering these food categories as part of their diet. The study aims to assess consumer awareness, perception, and buying behavior regarding organic, inorganic, and fortified foods, and to explore the factors influencing their purchasing decisions. A total of 100 respondents from urban and rural areas of Nashik participated in the survey. Preliminary results suggest that while consumers are highly aware of organic foods, price sensitivity, availability, and labeling are significant barriers. The study's findings provide insights for marketers and policymakers, offering strategies to promote healthier food choices in the region.

**1. Introduction:**

**1.1 Background**

In recent years, there has been a surge in demand for organic, inorganic, and fortified foods as consumers become more health-conscious. In India, consumers are increasingly making food choices based on factors such as nutritional content, health benefits, and sustainability. Nashik District, known for its agricultural heritage, is seeing a rise in both the availability and consumption of organic and fortified foods. However, understanding how consumer perceptions influence buying behavior in this region has not been extensively explored.

**1.2 Problem Statement**

Despite the increasing popularity of organic and fortified foods in Nashik, there is a lack of empirical research on how customer perceptions of these food categories impact purchasing behavior. The current

study aims to fill this gap by analyzing consumer perceptions and the factors that influence their buying behavior towards these food categories.

### **1.3 Research Objectives**

The primary objectives of this pilot study are:

- To assess consumer awareness and perception of organic, inorganic, and fortified foods in Nashik District.
- To examine how these perceptions affect purchasing behavior.
- To identify the barriers that influence the purchase of organic and fortified foods.

### **1.4 Research Significance**

This study is significant because it provides preliminary insights into consumer behavior in a developing food market, offering valuable information for food producers, marketers, and policymakers. The findings can guide businesses in better targeting their consumer base and improving marketing strategies for organic and fortified food products.

## **2. Literature Review:**

### **2.1 Consumer Perception of Organic Foods**

Previous studies have indicated that consumer perceptions of organic foods are often linked to health benefits, environmental sustainability, and better quality. According to a study by Sharma and Hegde (2018), consumers are willing to pay a premium for organic foods, perceiving them as healthier and free from harmful chemicals. However, high prices and limited availability remain significant barriers.

### **2.2 Buying Behavior in the Context of Food Products**

Buying behavior is influenced by several factors including price, quality, taste, and product labeling. A study by Singh et al. (2020) found that Indian consumers consider price and taste as primary factors when purchasing food products. However, health concerns are increasingly influencing their decisions, especially among the urban population.

### **2.3 Fortified Foods and Consumer Awareness**

Fortified foods are gaining popularity as an effective way to address nutritional deficiencies. According to the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), fortified foods such as cereals, dairy products, and salt are increasingly being promoted to improve public health. However, consumer awareness about these products remains low, particularly in rural areas.

### **2.4 The Indian Context**

The Indian food market has seen rapid changes, with more consumers shifting toward health-conscious eating. Research by Nair (2021) highlights that although awareness about organic and fortified foods is growing, price sensitivity and lack of trust in labels remain significant challenges in consumer buying behavior.

## **3. Methodology:**

### **3.1 Research Design**

This pilot study follows an exploratory research design to gather preliminary insights into consumer buying behavior and perception towards organic, inorganic, and fortified foods. The study is conducted in Nashik District to provide context-specific findings.

### **3.2 Population and Sampling**

The study targets consumers in both urban and rural areas of Nashik District. A total of 100 respondents were selected using convenience sampling, ensuring a mix of age groups, genders, and income levels. The sample size is adequate for a pilot study, offering a foundation for future, more extensive research.

### **3.3 Data Collection Method**

Data was collected using a structured questionnaire that was distributed to participants through face-to-face interactions. The questionnaire included both closed and open-ended questions, focusing on:

- Consumer awareness of organic, inorganic, and fortified foods.
- Perceptions of the health benefits, taste, and environmental impact of these foods.
- Factors influencing their buying decisions (e.g., price, taste, health benefits).

### 3.4 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics, including frequency counts, means, and percentages. The results were then interpreted to identify trends in consumer behavior. SPSS software was used for the analysis of categorical variables, and Chi-square tests were performed to explore relationships between consumer demographics and their perceptions.

## 4. Results:

### 4.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

- **Age:** 40% were aged 18-30, 35% were aged 31-45, and 25% were aged 46 and above.
- **Gender:** 55% male, 45% female.
- **Income Level:** 30% had a monthly income below ₹20,000, 50% between ₹20,000-₹50,000, and 20% above ₹50,000.

### 4.2 Awareness of Organic, Inorganic, and Fortified Foods

- 85% of respondents were aware of organic foods, while 60% knew about fortified foods. Awareness of inorganic foods was higher, with 95% of respondents familiar with them.

### 4.3 Consumer Perception of Organic, Inorganic, and Fortified Foods

- **Organic Foods:** 70% of respondents believed organic foods were healthier, while 40% were concerned about their higher price.
- **Fortified Foods:** 55% of respondents saw fortified foods as a good source of nutrition, but 30% expressed skepticism about their effectiveness.

### 4.4 Factors Influencing Purchase Behavior

- **Health Concerns:** 60% of respondents cited health as the primary reason for purchasing organic foods.
- **Price Sensitivity:** 45% of respondents indicated that high prices deterred them from buying organic and fortified foods.

- **Taste and Availability:** 50% of respondents mentioned that taste and easy availability influenced their food choices.

#### 4.5 Barriers to Buying Organic and Fortified Foods

- **Organic Foods:** 40% cited higher prices, 30% cited limited availability, and 20% doubted the authenticity of organic labels.
- **Fortified Foods:** 35% of respondents were unaware of the benefits, and 25% were skeptical about the effectiveness of fortified products.

### 5. Discussion:

#### 5.1 Comparison with Literature

The findings align with previous studies which suggest that health consciousness is a major driver for purchasing organic foods, but barriers such as price and availability significantly impact buying behavior. These findings are consistent with the research by Sharma and Hegde (2018), who noted similar concerns in other regions of India.

#### 5.2 Implications for Marketers

Marketers should focus on educating consumers about the health benefits of organic and fortified foods. Offering promotions, reducing prices, and ensuring product availability in local markets could encourage higher consumption.

#### 5.3 Policy Implications

Policymakers should consider implementing regulatory measures to ensure transparent labeling and standardization of organic and fortified food certifications. Incentives for farmers and food producers could help lower costs and increase supply.

## 6. Conclusion:

### 6.1 Summary of Findings

The pilot study reveals that consumer awareness of organic, inorganic, and fortified foods is generally high in Nashik District, with health concerns being the primary motivator for purchasing these foods. However, barriers such as high prices, limited availability, and skepticism about labeling continue to hinder widespread adoption.

### 6.2 Limitations

The study is limited by its small sample size and the convenience sampling method, which may not fully represent the broader consumer population in Nashik District. Additionally, the findings are preliminary and need further validation.

### 6.3 Recommendations for Future Research

Future research should involve a larger sample size, explore deeper into the role of trust in food labels, and extend to other districts for a more comprehensive analysis of consumer behavior in the organic and fortified food sectors.

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## 7. References:

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