

Consumer Knowledge and Perception of Organic Foods

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Abstract:- Organic farming is rapidly gaining popularity in Sri Lanka as consumers become increasingly concerned about toxic chemical residues in their food. This study conducted 100 interviews with consumers at organic food sale centers in Colombo to assess consumer perception and knowledge gaps regarding organic food labels. The findings revealed that consumers were primarily motivated to purchase organic products due to anticipated positive health effects and the desire to avoid toxic chemicals. However, consumers who did not buy organic products cited difficulties in finding them, a lack of understanding about organic labeling, and satisfaction with other labeled safe products. The study identified a general lack of knowledge among consumers regarding organic farming, specific production methods, and the distinction between "safe" and "organic" food. Consumers struggled to identify organic products due to limited knowledge of organic labels. Despite this, the study found a significant level of awareness and consumption of organic food among the sample population, with consumers believing it was safer for their health. However, availability was cited as a barrier by eight percent of non-consumers. Based on the research findings, recommendations include the development of government policies for organic food production, production of organic foods under responsible brand names, establishment of organic production standards, educational programs on organic farming, and increasing the availability of organic foods. In conclusion, this study highlights the need to improve consumer knowledge and awareness of organic labels in Sri Lanka. The findings emphasize the importance of increasing the availability of organic products and implementing measures to educate consumers about organic farming and its benefits.

Keywords:- Consumers, Organic Foods, Perception, Safe Foods.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Sri Lanka has experienced a growing interest in organic foods, mirroring the global trend fueled by concerns about health, environmental sustainability, and food safety. The term "organic" denotes an ecological management production system that emphasizes biodiversity and reduced reliance on off-farm inputs (IFOAM, 2014). Organic foods, comprising various items like fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy products, and meat, are cultivated or raised without synthetic

fertilizers, genetic engineering, or harmful chemicals (USDA, n.d.; Paull, 2011). Sri Lankan consumers are increasingly aware of the benefits of organic foods, ranging from potential health advantages to environmental responsibility. However, challenges persist in terms of market availability, affordability, and consumer perceptions. This research delves into consumer perceptions of organic foods in Sri Lanka, exploring their understanding, preferences, and behaviors towards these products. Factors influencing consumer demand, such as awareness, attitudes, price, and perceived quality of organic foods, are examined to provide valuable insights for policymakers, producers, and consumers in Sri Lanka, fostering a thriving organic food market in the country. Despite the growing interest, a gap remains between the market availability of organic food products and establishing a strong consumer base, making it crucial to address these challenges and comprehend consumer perceptions in Sri Lanka to bridge the gap and nurture the organic food market. The significance of this study lies in its ability to uncover consumer attitudes towards organic food consumption and raise awareness about the benefits of organic products. By promoting healthier choices, the research aims to reduce the consumption of harmful food items, ultimately contributing to the improvement of consumers' overall health and well-being

II. OBJECTIVES

The research objectives of this study are twofold. The general objective is to investigate and understand consumer perceptions of the demand for organic foods and to develop strategies that can enhance and promote the demand for organic food products. In pursuit of this overarching goal, the specific objectives are as follows: Firstly, to assess consumer awareness regarding organic food, gauging their knowledge and familiarity with these products. Secondly, to explore consumers' attitudes towards the purity and authenticity of available organic foods in the market. Lastly, to identify and analyze the various factors that influence consumers to increase their consumption of organic foods, gaining insights into the determinants of their purchasing behavior in this context. By addressing these specific objectives, the study aims to shed light on consumer perspectives and preferences regarding organic foods, enabling the formulation of effective strategies to bolster the demand and acceptance of organic products.

III. METHODOLOGY

Primary data was gathered through questionnaires and field observations, while secondary data was collected from various sources like books, research articles, reports, and the internet. A purposive sampling technique was employed to select 100 consumers for the survey conducted at the Food Sales Center of in Colombo. By combining primary and secondary data, the study successfully achieved its objectives and shed light on consumer awareness and attitudes towards organic food products

A. Conceptual Framework

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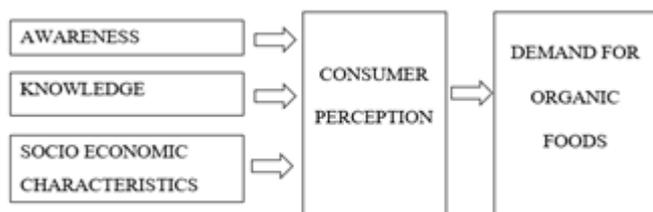


Fig. 1. Conceptual Framework

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A.) Demographic Distribution of Sample

The survey's demographic analysis revealed a diverse representation of age groups among respondents. A total of 4% were aged between 21 to 30, 21% between 31 to 40, 31% between 41 to 50, 27% between 51 to 60, and 17% between 61 to 70, reflecting a wide age range of participants. Furthermore, the male and female consumer population demonstrated balanced participation, with each group accounting for 50% of the sample.

B.) Education Levels and Awareness

Regarding education levels, 45% of consumers reported studying up to Advanced Level, 23% up to Ordinary Level, and 32% had pursued higher education, including degrees, diplomas, and other courses. Notably, a high level of consumer awareness (97%) about organic food was observed, with education and personal experience being the primary sources of awareness. Newspaper articles and TV programs also contributed significantly to spreading knowledge about organic foods.

C.) Consumer Motives and Purchasing Patterns

The survey delved into consumers' motivations for choosing organic foods. The results indicated that health concerns were paramount, with 54% of consumers favoring organic foods due to their perceived safety for health. Additionally, 46% preferred organic foods because of their chemical-free production. Among organic food buyers, 83% opted for organic vegetables, while 10% chose organic fruits, and merely 1% purchased processed foods with organic ingredients.

D.) Availability and Consumer Perceptions

Availability emerged as a major challenge for the organic food market. A significant majority (70%) of consumers acquired organic foods from specialized organic food sale centers. However, a limited number of consumers used other outlets like agriculture farm outlets, central markets, super markets, and health food shops. Home gardening also played a role in obtaining organic produce. Despite the positive perceptions about organic foods' health benefits (96% of consumers), 67% perceived them as safe and reliable. Additionally, 94% of consumers agreed that organic foods offered superior taste, and 95% acknowledged their high nutritional value.

E.) Price and Trust Concerns

Price remained a significant concern for consumers, with 93% considering organic foods as expensive. Moreover, 93% of respondents expressed dissatisfaction with the availability of organic products, leading to a lack of trust in their accessibility among 61% of consumers.

F.) Consumer Preferences for New Varieties

A strong desire for increased popularity and awareness of organic foods was evident among consumers, with 99% supporting the introduction of new organic food items. Processed organic foods (e.g., biscuits), organic meat products (e.g., chicken, sausages), and organic raw materials were identified as potential areas for expansion.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the research underscored the importance of promoting organic food consumption among consumers, addressing issues related to taste, appearance, availability, and pricing. The findings provide valuable insights for stakeholders in Sri Lanka's organic food industry to enhance their offerings and cater to consumer demands effectively. By prioritizing increased awareness and diversity in product offerings, the organic food market can thrive and contribute to a sustainable and health-conscious consumer base in the country.

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