

## **Promoting Sustainable Consumption: A Study of Consumer Behavior towards Organic Food**

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### **Abstract:**

Rising environmental issues have brought about the concept of sustainable consumption, which has changed the trend of consumer behavior and food purchasing patterns. This enhanced the purchase intention and attitude towards environmentally sustainable products such as organic foods, which contributes altogether to the improvement of environment quality. Final responses from 321 young consumers were analyzed by applying confirmatory factor analysis to confirm consumer attitudes toward organic food for sustainability. According to multivariate data analysis using Structure equation modeling, health consciousness, environmental consciousness, food safety issues, and animal welfare all played a major role in the creation of a positive attitude toward organic food. The buying intent for organic food is strongly influenced by one's attitude toward organic food. Model fit indices illustrate the appropriateness of the model. Furthermore, the research found that attitude is a strong predictor of buying intention for organic foods. Consumers perceive organic food is expensive but provide value for money. Furthermore, directions for social-environmental organizations and policy-makers to draft policies for promoting sustainable consumption and building up positive attitude towards organic food have also been discussed. Finally, the drawbacks and future research directions of the study have also been addressed.

**Keywords:** Attitude, Purchase intention, Structural Equation Modelling, Organic Food, Sustainability.

### **Introduction:**

The rising environmental issues like the exploitation of natural resources, downfall of biodiversity, and the continuous urbanization have gloomy impact on the human health (Verain et al., 2012; De Haen and Requillart, 2014). It has become a significant matter of concern among government, practitioners, and researchers (Haytko and Matulich, 2008). Growing ecological issues have put forwarded environmentally sustainable behavior, which thus has

changed the trend of consumer behavior (Mendleson and Polonsky, 1995). For the development of environmentally sustainable lifestyles, the use of organic foods acts as a core component (Lockie et al., 2002). A close connection is depicted between the sustainability concerns and magnitude of organic consumption, which includes health, social and environmental concerns (Ueasangkomsate 2016; Vermeir& Verbeke, 2006; Lijuan, 2003). Young consumers are the key stake holders of both present and future, as young consumers will play crucial role in the adoption of more sustainable food consumption. The primary motive of this study is to add to the ongoing discussion on young consumers' attitude and purchase intention in relation to sustainability issues and preference for organic food over premium price.

According to IFOAM (2005) "Organic food refers to the product obtained or made in accordance with the standards of organic agriculture that sustain and promote the welfare of soils, ecosystems and humans." Adoption of modern agriculture production methods increases the concerns for loss of soil fertility by erosion, acidification, salinization, desertification and soil pollution (Welch & Graham, 2000). Environment should not be harmed in the name of development. Agriculture production is needed to be stabilized due to continuous increase in population but it should be done in sustainable manner. A lot of researches emphasize the relevance of organic food in elevating sustainability (Ueasangkomsate 2016; Vermeir& Verbeke, 2006). The focus should be on sustainable agricultural production as the population is increasing tremendously (Vergragt et al., 2016). At present, the government is promoting organic food production and sustainable consumption by increasing awareness about sustainability and organic food in the country. Farmers are being provided with financial aids for engaging in adopting organic farming by offering different schemes (ASSOCHAM & EY, 2018).

With the increase of environmental issues in the global economy, the role of emerging markets has become increasingly important. Emerging markets, such as India, share several characteristics, such as rapidly rising consumption as a consequence of mounting income and demand (De Koning et al., 2015). Organic food is increasing popularity in such markets (Rana& Paul, 2017). Organic packaged food and beverages are growing as a niche industry in India, with high-income urbanites being the key customers. Overall market value for organic packaged food in India was found to be INR 533 million in 2016, up 17% from 2015, and is predicted to reach INR 871 million by 2021 (ASSOCHAM and E&Y, 2018).

The study of consumer behavior toward environmentally friendly items also covers several research on customer attitudes and purchasing intentions for organic food products (Yadav & Pathak, 2016). The surge in consumer demand for organic food has prompted academics to investigate consumers' intentions to buy organic food. Most organic food consumers nowadays associate organic food with direct health benefits rather than indirect environmental and animal welfare benefits (Wier & Calverley, 2002). There are significant variances in purchasing intentions for organic goods across different organic food customers.

### **Literature review:**

The literature reveals four major antecedents to attitude towards organic food viz. health consciousness, food safety concerns, animal welfare and environmental concern. Some

consumers are influenced by health consciousness, while others are concerned about the environment, while most of the consumers articulated combination of factors (Padel & Foster, 2005; Padilla-Bravo et al., 2013).

### **Health Consciousness:**

In conventional foods, there is excessive chemical contamination which leads to rise in diseases, ultimately there is increased demand of organic foods. Organic food consumption would keep the health of the consumers. Consumer demand towards healthier products like, organic food has been derived with increasing concern towards health (Pham et al., 2018; Fotopoulos & Krystallis 2002). The choice between organic and inorganic food is highly affected by the perceived health benefits of organic foods (Paul & Rana, 2012). The level of health consciousness determines the consumers' attitude towards organic food and the youth is more concerned about impact of pesticides on their health. Furthermore, Consumers awareness and satisfaction level with the health benefits of organic food were found to be high (Paul & Rana, 2012; Kapuge, 2016; Misra & Singh, 2016). High nutritional value of organic products has resulted in building up of positive attitude and perception about their unique health benefits in comparison to conventional food (Pham et al., 2018; Kapuge, 2016; Misra & Singh, 2016; Ueasangkomsate & Santiteerakul, 2016)

### **Environmental Consciousness:**

A universal knowledge based on the data, concepts and relationship between natural environment and its major ecosystems is described as environmental knowledge (Fryxall and Lo, 2003). Organic foods are believed to be contributing more towards environmental protection than conventional food. Environment protection and sustainability motivate the consumer for the organic food consumption. Eco-friendly contents of any product increase its value to the consumers (Paul & Rana, 2012). Liang (2013) in his study postulated that the consumers are more inclined towards the local items developing a belief that organic foods are environment friendly and provide good health benefits. A strong positive impact of environmental concern and environmental knowledge was reported on attitude towards green products (Yadav & Pathak, 2016). Honkanen, et al. (2006) postulated that one of the key driver of consumers attitude towards organic food is organic farming because it is environment friendly (Scalvedi & Saba, 2018).

### **Food Safety Concerns:**

Food safety concern is an important factor that tends consumers to shift from traditional food products to organic food products. Consumers relate organic food with food safety (Rezai et al., 2012). Food safety concerns play integral role in shaping the attitude towards organic food (Pham et al., 2018). According to Sobhanifard & Balighi, (2018) organic food consumption level is positively affected by trust. They find truth in organic product claims and psychological security in the use of organic products. Höfer et al., (2015) revealed in their study that organic foods are expected to be chemical free, no GMO, few additives, and natural it must be mention on label of products. It is found in congruence with past studies that consumers' egoistic motive and food safety concern build up their attitude for organic food (Michaelidou & Hassan, 2008;

Truong et al., 2012). Somnath (2010) highlighted in his study about the importance of safety concerns towards organic food in India (Basha & Lal, 2018).

### **Animal welfare:**

Basha & Lal, (2018) highlighted in their research that before buying the products many Consumers were found to be concerned about the welfare of the animals like how they were treated, type of food provided and measures taken for their wellbeing. Consumers also opt for the shops which were against the animal cruelty. It was further stated that organic food consumers are not only concerned about health and environmental issues but also showed their concern towards animal welfare (Basha & Lal, 2018). According to Shafie & Rennie, (2012) consumers perceive that organic food is associated with Animal welfare. Consumer intend to consume green food because it leads to animal welfare (Rezai et al., 2012). Ethical values related to animal rights have strong influence on the attitude towards organic food (Honkanen et al., 2006). Consequently, animal welfare was found to be important determinate that motivate consumers to buy organic foods.

### **Attitude and purchase intention towards Organic food:**

Green or organic food, which contains less chemical residues, is becoming rapidly common around the world (Yu, Gao and Zeng 2014). A number of research studies aimed at defining the link between between customer attitude and purchasing intentions, and the results demonstrate that there is a crucial relationship between attitude and purchase intentions (Liang, 2013; Wang et al., 2014; Lee & Yun, 2015; Yadav & Pathak, 2016; Ueasangkomaste and Santiteerakul, 2016; Pham *et al.*, 2019; Le-Anh and Nguyen-To, 2020). As per Ajzen (1985), behavioral intentions are associated with the intensity of an individual's tendency to execute a certain behaviour. Attitudes, on the other hand, are broad groups of views and judgments, both positive and negative. Attitudes toward buying organic food are presumed to be more reliable than attitudes toward organic food itself in determining purchase intention (Lee & Yun 2015). While Wang et al., (2014) concluded that environmental benefit and environmental awareness were significant predictors of purchase intentions toward organic foods, Lee and Yun (2015) indicated a strong association between perceptions about the environmental soundness of organic food and attitude. These findings were further supported by Pham *et al.* (2019) as food safety concerns, health consciousness, and media coverage all had considerable effects on attitudes toward organic food but environmental concerns and food taste had negligible effects which are contradicting the extant literature on the topic. However, Le-Anh and Nguyen-To (2020) reported almost similar results, in relation to emerging markets, where understanding of organic food, food safety concerns, and perceived value found to be shaping attitudes toward organic food significantly, while environmental concerns had insignificant impacts.

### **Research methodology:**

#### **Sampling and sample size:**

According to the report of UNDP youth strategy 2014-2017, India's youth population is between 15 to 34 age was about 422 million in 2011 which further projected to increase to 490.4 million in 2031. Young people are the guardians of the future planet resources, so it is

imperative to pay attention to their attitude and concerns. Present study considers the response of young consumers between the age group of 15 – 35 years. It is necessary to pay heed to the attitude and intention of those who are the future of present generation towards sustainability aspects of organic food products. Convenience sampling is used to collect the data. Though convenience sampling limits the generalization of the results but Today’s youth population is larger than ever and the sample of young consumers is suggested for these kind of studies (Cheah &Phau, 2011; DelVecchio, 2000).Different authors used different method to determine the sample size for their study, but CFA and SEM requires larger sample size for better results (Aggarwal et al., 2018b). This present study used more than ten respondents against each parameter of the study (Aggarwal et al., 2020). In present study we have 22 statements and data of 321 respondents has been used for analysis purpose. There should be minimum 10 respondents per item. So, a minimum sample of 220 is required, as present study consist 22 items. Therefore the final sample for this study consists of 321 respondents, fulfilling this priori condition.

**Methods and techniques:**

Majority of the studies includes only frequencies, comparisons, cross tabulations, factor and cluster analysis (Tregear et al., 1994; Hutchins and Greenhalgh, 1997), though many researches also used qualitative techniques to explore the field of sustainability (Makatouni, 2002; Zanolli and Naspetti, 2002). But in this present study, efforts have been made to confirm the factors related to attitude towards sustainability of organic food with the help of AMOS 21. Further Structure equation modelling has been used to build relations, which is relatively a robust tool to build models.

**Analysis and Interpretation:**

**Participants profile:**

Young consumers have been considered for analyzing attitude of the consumer and intention to buy organic food for sustainability. Quantitative data related to demographic profile of all the respondents between 15 to 35 age group is given table 1.

**Table 1:**

<b>Demographic of the Respondents</b>			
<b>Characteristic</b>	<b>Classification</b>	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	100	31.2
	Female	221	68.8
<b>Age</b>	15yrs-20yrs	28	8.7
	20yrs-25yrs	214	66.7
	25yrs-30yrs	50	15.6
	30yrs-35yrs	29	9.0
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	64	19.9
	Unmarried	257	80.1
<b>Occupation</b>	Business	13	4.0

	Service	68	21.2
	Farming	4	1.2
	Household	13	4.0
	Students	205	63.9
	Others	18	5.6
<b>Family Income</b>	less than 2 lakh	131	40.8
	2-5 lakh	107	33.3
	5-10 lakh	53	16.5
	above 10 lakh	30	9.3
<b>Educational Qualification</b>	Matric	8	2.5
	Higher Secondary	25	7.8
	Graduate	90	28.0
	Post Graduate	176	54.8
	Ph.D	22	6.9

### Analysis and discussion:

There is no missing value found in collected data. Multivariate outliers were checked by using Mahalanobis Distance (D2) (Byrne, 2010). Result of the present study reflects that there is no issue of multivariate outliers.

Table 2, shows the attitude of respondents towards organic food in regard to each dimension forming attitude. The highest mean score (4.14) was for health consciousness dimension which indicated that attitude of respondents was highly positive in regard to organic food being healthier in consistent with the findings of Ueasangkomsate & Santiteerakul(2016). It was followed by concern for food safety (4.02). Further, the dimension for animal welfare ranked at the third place with a mean score of 3.90. Pham (2019) found that environmental concerns are least effective in contributing to the formation of positive attitude towards organic food, this finding is in line with the responses of the participants of the current study. They are also highly concerned about environmental issues, but attitude towards organic food in relation to environments is less as compared to other variables. But Ueasangkomsate & Santiteerakul (2016) dictate that environmental concerns are highly contributing factor in formation of attitude towards organic food.

Table 2: Showing mean score of different dimensions

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>
Health Consciousness	4.14
Food safety Concerns	4.02
Animal Welfare	3.90
Environment Consciousness	3.78
Purchase Intentions	3.92

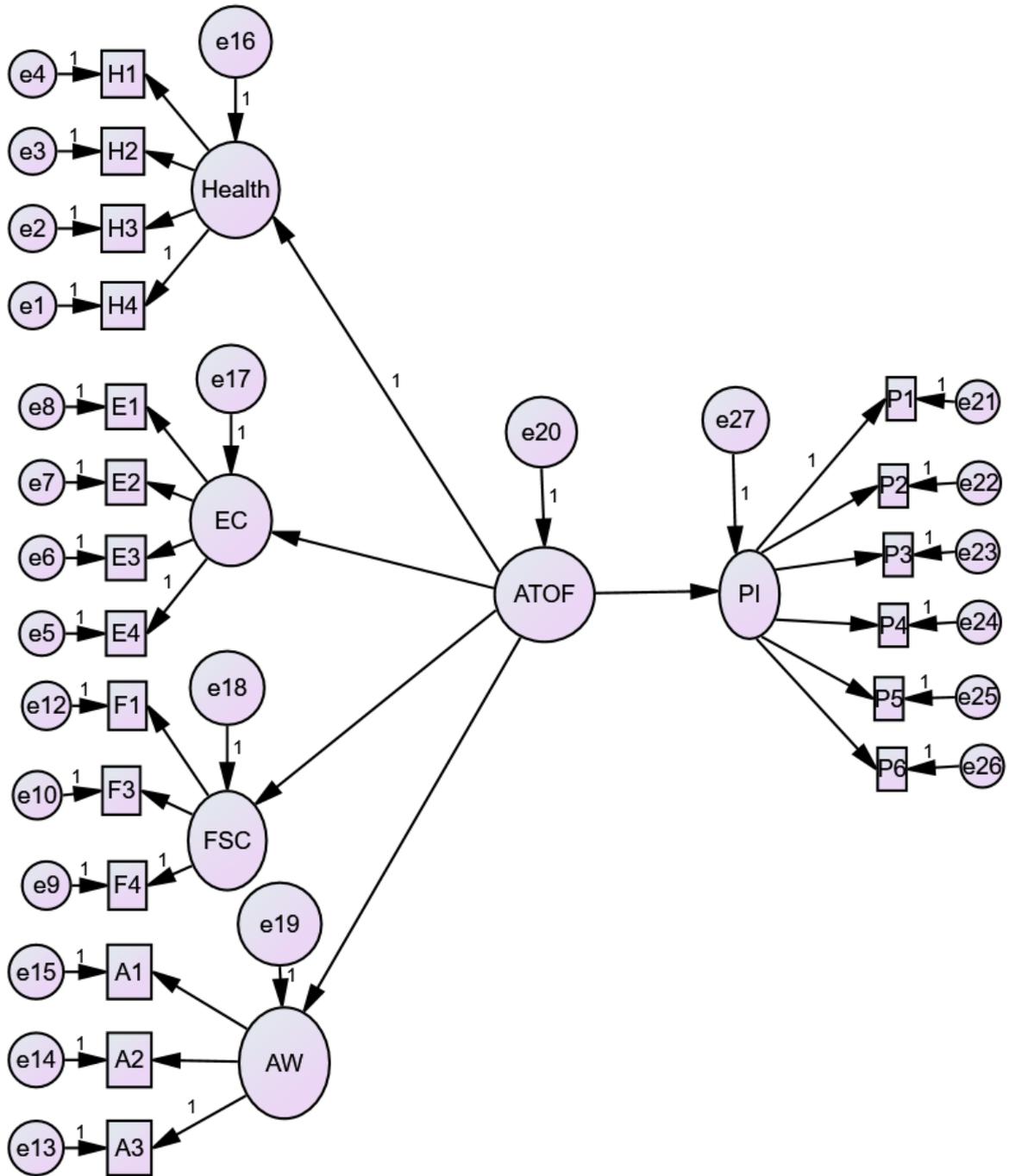
Firstly, respondents showed high positive attitude towards the health safety in using organic foods where 42% of respondents were strongly agree and 49% respondents were agree, with

the statement, “Organic foods are safe for health”, with a highest mean score of 4.18. Respondents were found to be highly concerned about the quality of food with a mean score of 4.02 under food safety concern dimension. Consumption of organic foods added most to the to the environment dimension with a mean score of 3.95 where 88% respondents demonstrated an agreement towards the statement.

Majority of respondents (89%) believed those animals are not harmed while producing the organic foods as the mean score was 3.94 highest in the animal welfare dimension. Along with these findings, purchase intentions were also high among the respondents with an overall mean score of 3.92 and about 90% respondents were ready to buy organic food in near future. Respondents are looking for sustainability aspects of organic food and they intent to buy organic food products in near future that is in accordance with (Yilmazn & Ilter, 2017).

Confirmatory Factor Analysis: CFA was performed to find out the factors which act as antecedents to attitude towards organic food. A hypothesis was tested using SEM for validation of the proposed model in Figure1. The model fit was analyzed by GFI, CFI, TLI, RMSEA, RMR. The model returned good fit, as the following Indices show significantly higher values,  $GFI = 0.865 \geq 0.8$  (Tarkiainen& Sundqvist, 2005),  $CFI = .947 \geq 0.9$  (Hair et al., 2016; Tarkiainen& Sundqvist, 2005, Aggarwal et al., 2020);  $RMSEA = .079 \leq .08$  (Hair et al., 2016) or  $RMSEA \leq 0.087$  (Tarkiainen& Sundqvist, 2005) ; root mean square residual = .037 (Steiger, 1990),  $NFI= 0.924 \geq 0.9$  (Giri & Biswas, 2019). The reliability of the factors is checked by Cronbach's alpha (Cronbach, 1951) and its validity is confirmed using Gaskin's validity toolkit estimates.

Fig 1: Path Model



Results in the Table 3 indicate high internal consistency, as the coefficient of composite reliability (CR) is more than the critical value of 0.7, for each unobserved variable (Nunnally & Bernstein, 1967).  $CMIN = 497.885$ ,  $DF = 165$ ,  $\chi^2/df = 3.017$ , which is  $>1$  and  $<5$  (Yadav

& Pathak, 2016). The value of comparative fit index (CFI) is 0.947, which happens to be more than 0.90, this reflects one-dimensionality in the scale given by Byrne (2010).

**Table :3**

<b>Construct</b>	<b>Statements</b>	$\lambda$	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>Source</b>
<b>Health Consciousness</b>	H4: Organic foods are healthier than conventional food	0.91	0.95	0.91	Ueasangkomsate & Santiteerakul (2016), Pham (2018)
	H3: Organic foods are safe for health.	0.91			
	H2: Organic foods have high nutrition value	0.92			
	H1: Organic foods are natural and pure.	0.89			
<b>Environmental Consciousness</b>	E4: Consuming organic foods protects the environment	0.87	0.83	0.72	Yadav & Pathak (2016), Ueasangkomsate & Santiteerakul (2016)
	E3: Production of organic food reduce soil, air, and, water pollution	0.87			
	E2: Production of organic food is done in environment friendly manner	0.84			
	E1: Production of organic food uses less energy	0.28			
<b>Food Safety Concern</b>	F4: Organic food are chemical and GMO free	0.80	0.83	0.79	Höfer M. et al., (2015), Ueasangkomsate & Santiteerakul (2016)
	F3: Organic food reduce the risk of disease	0.89			
	F1: I am concerned about the quality of the food	0.68			
<b>Animal Welfare</b>	A3: Organic food production is concerned with animal well being	0.88	0.88	0.85	Ueasangkomsate & Santiteerakul (2016); Mishra and Kaushik (2013)
	A2: Animals are not harmed in Production of organic foods	0.79			

	A1: Animal rights are respected while producing organic food	0.87			
<b>Purchase Intentions</b>	P1: I will buy organic foods in future	0.85	0.94	0.84	Ueasangkomsate & Santiteerakul (2016), Pham et al., (2018)
	P2: I intend to buy organic food for healthy life	0.92			
	P3: I buy organic foods because they are environment friendly	0.90			
	P4: I buy organic foods because concerned with animal welfare	0.82			
	P5: I buy organic foods to help local farmers	0.87			
	P6: Pay more for organic foods because they are sustainable	0.70			

This study shows attitude towards organic food has significant impact on intention to buying organic food for the sake of sustainability. (Davari & Strutton, 2014; Van Doorn & Verhoef, 2015) also shows the same result, which contributes altogether towards adopting sustainability approach in order to elevate the environmental quality.

The worth of AVE (Average Variance Extracted) for every one of the construct is more than 0.5, and all of the items have a standardized factor loading larger than 0.5. According to Fornell and Larcker (1981), for having convergent validity the worth of CR ought to be more than 0.7; AVE ought to surpass 0.5 and CR ought to be more than AVE. Consequently, following similar lines, the proposed estimation model backings and affirm the presence of convergent validity (Aggarwal et al., 2018).

Findings of the present study revealed that attitude about effect of organic foods on health exerted great influence on the consumer's choice of organic which supports the researches by Paul & Rana, 2012 and Ueasangkomsate & Santiteerakul (2016). As per the previous studies (Michaelidou & Hassan (2008); Pham et al., (2018) food safety concerns has important role in building up of consumers' attitudes about organic food. Though Pham et al., (2018) in his research reported that for young consumers environmental concerns were not so important to determine their attitude towards organic foods but present research contradicted those results as environmental concerns dimension contributed exceedingly to positive attitude towards organic foods and supporting the research of Ueasangkomsate & Santiteerakul (2016).

### **Conclusion:**

Organic food production was practiced in India from ancient times but after independence due to exponential growth in population there was a sudden decline in the availability of food. This introduced the green revolution, which further resulted in increased use of chemical fertilizers, GMOs, insecticides, and harmful substances in Indian Agri - production sectors. Organic food market in India is growing from past, but it is still lacking when compared with developed countries like Australia, China, and USA. Therefore, it has become a need of an hour to motivate Indian consumers to consume organic food in order to promote and expand the sustainable food system.

The motive behind this research is to study young Indians attitudes toward organic foods in four attributes. Moreover, this paper also studied the impact of Attitude toward organic food on purchase intention. Results show that positive consumer's attitude towards organic foods has great influence on their purchase intentions. Apart from that high purchase intentions among respondents showed their intention to buy organic foods even when they perceive organic food is expensive. Health consciousness, Food safety concerns, environmental consciousness along with animal welfare contribute to the formation of positive attitude towards organic food.

For further research, we suggest researchers of this field to study organic food purchase behavior in relation to sustainability and willingness to pay for the same. Researches in the field of organic production and organic food supply chain must be encouraged. This paper lacks the study of moderating effects such as socio-demographics, so future research could extend the findings by examining such moderating effects. The study cannot be generalizes to all kinds of organic products as the main focus of present study was on organic foods.

### **Implications**

The results derived from the study provide several implications to frame policies and practices in order to promote the consumption of organic foods. In India people often face diseases because of various types of adulterations, pesticides and chemicals used in food products. Through organic farming these issues can be resolved and healthy food can be provided to the society. Organic farming creates a win-win situation not only for farmers but environment and consumers as well.

The marketers can communicate the health benefits of the organic foods in order to attract more consumers and increase their purchase of organic foods. As food safety concerns, environmental consciousness and animal welfare also greatly contributed to positive attitude towards organic foods, the marketers can use these words in labeling as well as advertising to attract more consumers and expand the market of organic foods. Further, the respondents perceived that organic foods are expensive than conventional food but were still ready to pay more for sustainability.

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