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EXPLORING THE SHIFT FROM CONVENTIONAL TO ORGANIC FOOD CONSUMPTION IN MUMBAI DISTRICT

Mr. Pankaj G. Gupta[1], Dr. Alpesh Mehta[2*]

[1]Assistant Professor Department of Commerce SVKM's Mithibai College of Arts, Chauhan Institute of Science and Amrutben Jivanlal College of Commerce and Economics (Empowered Autonomous)
Email ID: pankaj.gupta@mithibai.ac.in
Postal Address: RM No-1, Plot No-74, Gorai-1 Borivali west, Mumbai - 400092
[2]Designation: Assistant Professor Department of Commerce SVKM's Mithibai College of Arts, Chauhan Institute of Science and Amrutben Jivanlal College of Commerce and Economics (Empowered Autonomous)*
Email ID: alpesh.mehta@mithibai.ac.in
Postal Address: J 401 Panchsheel Garden CHS Ltd. Mahaveer Nagar, Opposite HDFC Bank Kandivali West Mumbai 400067

***Corresponding Author**
alpesh.mehta@mithibai.ac.in

Abstract
Organic food consumption has increased globally due to rising awareness of health, environmental safety, and food authenticity. However, in India—especially in metropolitan cities like Mumbai—the shift remains comparatively slow. This study investigates the changing consumer behavior toward organic food in the Mumbai District, focusing on awareness, perceived health benefits, environmental consciousness, price sensitivity, trust concerns, and purchase intention. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to residents across the district. Descriptive statistical analysis revealed high awareness but low regular purchase levels, primarily due to price barriers and limited trust in organic certification. Attitude towards health and environment strongly influences occasional purchases. The study highlights a clear gap between awareness and active consumption. It concludes with recommendations for policymakers, retailers, and certification agencies to strengthen consumer confidence and promote organic food adoption in Mumbai.

Keywords: *Organic food, Consumer behaviour, Health perception, Sustainability, Mumbai District*

1. Introduction

The global food market has witnessed a significant transformation over the past two decades, with consumers increasingly seeking safe, healthy, and environmentally sustainable food options. Organic food, free from chemicals, pesticides, and genetically modified organisms, has emerged as a preferred choice in many countries. Nations such as the United States, Germany, France, Australia, and Japan have seen double-digit annual growth in organic consumption supported by strong certification systems and consumer trust (Willer & Trávníček, 2023).

In India, however, the shift towards organic food has been gradual. Despite being one of the world's leading organic producers by cultivation area, India remains a low-consumption market. Although metropolitan cities like Bengaluru, Pune, and Delhi have seen exponential growth in organic retail, Mumbai—despite being India's financial capital—shows a slower transition from conventional to organic food consumption.

Mumbai's unique demographic composition, diverse income levels, and fast-paced lifestyle offer an important context to examine the factors influencing the consumption pattern. This study assesses the awareness, attitudes, and actual buying behavior of consumers regarding organic food in the Mumbai District.

2. Research Problem

The global organic food market is expanding rapidly, but India has not kept pace in terms of consumer adoption. There exists a gap between *awareness* and *actual consumption*.

Despite widespread awareness and interest, consumers in Mumbai show:

- Hesitation due to high prices
- Doubts regarding authenticity and certification
- Limited availability in local markets
- Confusion about the real health benefits

Hence, the problem statement:

"Although consumers in Mumbai are aware of organic food, the shift from conventional to organic consumption is limited."

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To assess consumer awareness about organic food in Mumbai District.
2. To examine attitudes and perceptions toward organic food.
3. To identify key factors influencing the shift from conventional to organic food consumption.
4. To analyze the barriers preventing organic food adoption.
5. To suggest strategies for promoting organic food consumption.

4. Review of Literature

4.1 Global Trends in Organic Food Consumption

Countries such as the USA, Germany, Switzerland, France, Denmark, and Sweden have witnessed rapid growth in organic consumption. Factors contributing include:

- Strong regulatory certification (USDA, EU Organic)
- Environmental and health consciousness
- Higher disposable incomes
- Expansion of organic supermarket chains
- Trust in labeling (Willer & Trávníček, 2023)

Denmark leads globally, where organic food accounts for nearly **13% of all food sales**.

Japan and Australia also report stronger consumer preference for organic fruits, vegetables, dairy products, and grains.

4.2 The Indian Context — The "Gap" Identified

India is the world's 8th largest organic agricultural producer but among the lowest consumers. Literature highlights several issues:

- Organic products perceived as premium-priced (Chakrabarti, 2010)
- Lack of trust in organic certification (Singh & Verma, 2017)
- Limited availability outside metropolitan areas (Basha & Mason, 2015)
- Consumers confused between "natural," "local," and "organic" (Narayanan, 2019)

Even though consumers express strong concern for health and pesticide-free food, purchase frequency remains low.

This **gap between awareness and actual buying behavior** persists across India, including Mumbai.

4.3 Studies in Mumbai Region

Few studies exist, but common findings include:

- High interest among middle-class households
- Reliance on "word-of-mouth" rather than certification
- Perception that organic food is "elitist"

This forms the foundation for the present research.

5. Research Methodology
5.1 Research Design
Descriptive, primary-data based study.
5.2 Sampling Method
Convenience sampling of consumers in Mumbai District (western, central, and harbour regions).
5.3 Sample Size
Sample size 300

5.4 Data Collection Tool
Structured questionnaire consisting of:
- Demographic questions
- Awareness and attitude items
- Likert scale statements (1 = Strongly disagree to 5 = Strongly agree)
- Purchase frequency questions

5.5 Data Analysis Tools
- Frequency Analysis
- Percentage Analysis
- Mean Scoring
- Cross-tab analysis (descriptive)

Since the dataset is small, no inferential statistics are used.

6. Data Analysis and Interpretation
6.1 Demographic Profile

Variable	**Key Findings**
Gender	Majority female respondents
Age	Mostly 21–40 years (working professionals/young adults)
Education	High concentration of graduates and postgraduates
Income	Varied, but majority in middle-income segment

Interpretation:
Consumers with higher education show more awareness of organic food.

6.2 Awareness of Organic Food
- Most respondents reported that they **have heard of organic food**.
- Awareness sourced from:
  - Social media
  - Retail stores
  - Friends and family
  - Online influencers

Interpretation:
Knowledge level is high, consistent with urban India trends.

6.3 Perception and Attitude Towards Organic Food
High-scoring statements (Mean > 4):
- Organic food is healthier than conventional food.
- Organic food reduces exposure to pesticides.
- Organic farming protects the environment.

Moderate-scoring statements (Mean between 3 and 4):
- Organic food tastes better.
- Organic food is more trustworthy.

Interpretation:
Overall attitude is positive but **trust is moderate**, indicating doubts.

6.4 Purchase Behavior

Behavior Aspect	**Findings**
Purchase frequency	Mostly occasional buyers

Behavior Aspect	Findings
Preferred products	Fruits, vegetables, grains
Purchase location	Supermarkets, organic stores, online groceries
Budget sensitivity	High; majority feel organic is "very expensive"

Interpretation:
Price is a major barrier preventing regular purchase.

6.5 Barriers to Organic Food Consumption

1. **High Price** — Most frequently reported.
2. **Lack of Trust in Certification**
3. **Limited Availability in Local Markets**
4. **Doubt regarding Real Benefits**

Interpretation:
These findings match previous Indian studies indicating a trust-price gap.

6.6 Indicators of Shift from Conventional to Organic Food

Although respondents express:

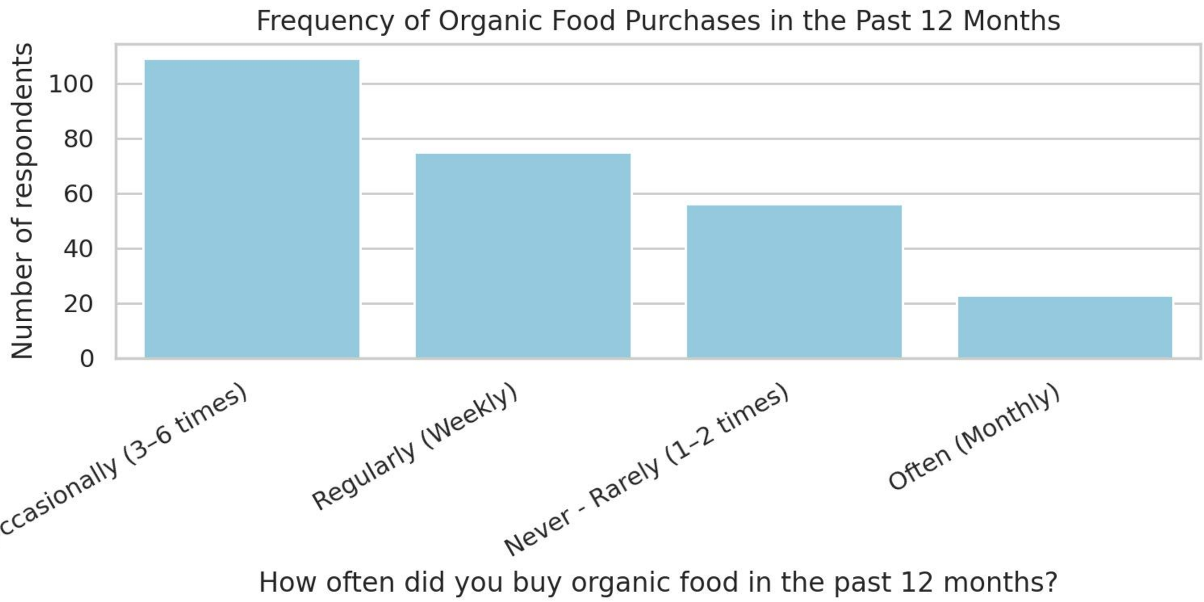
- High awareness
- Health concerns
- Environmental interest

Only a small proportion have fully shifted to organic food.
The majority fall under:

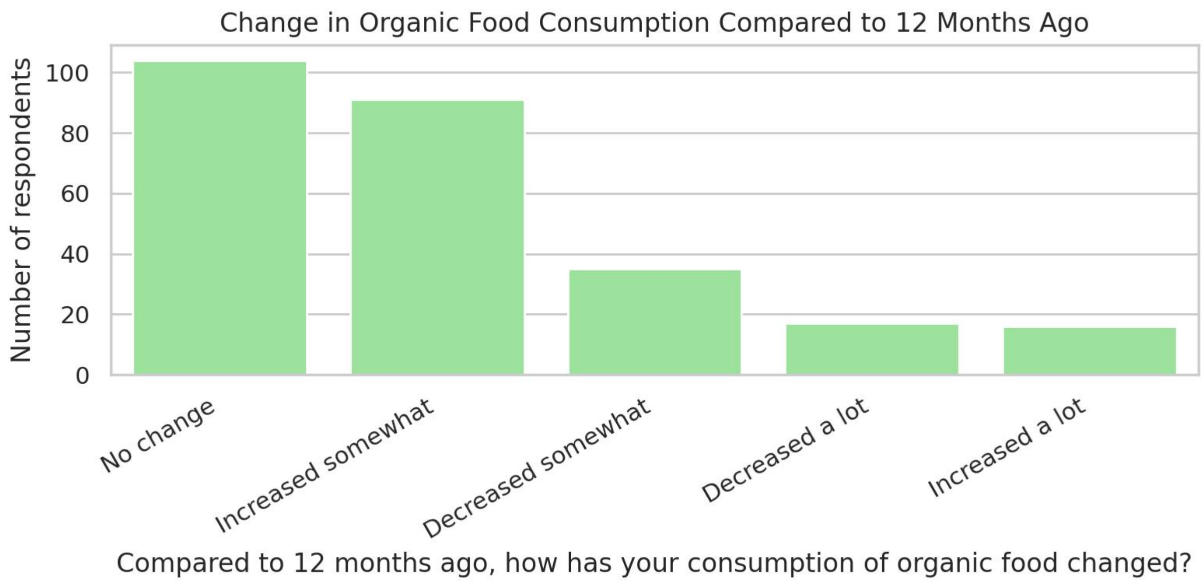
- **Occasional buyers / Trial buyers**

Conclusion:
The shift is happening but slow and incomplete in Mumbai.

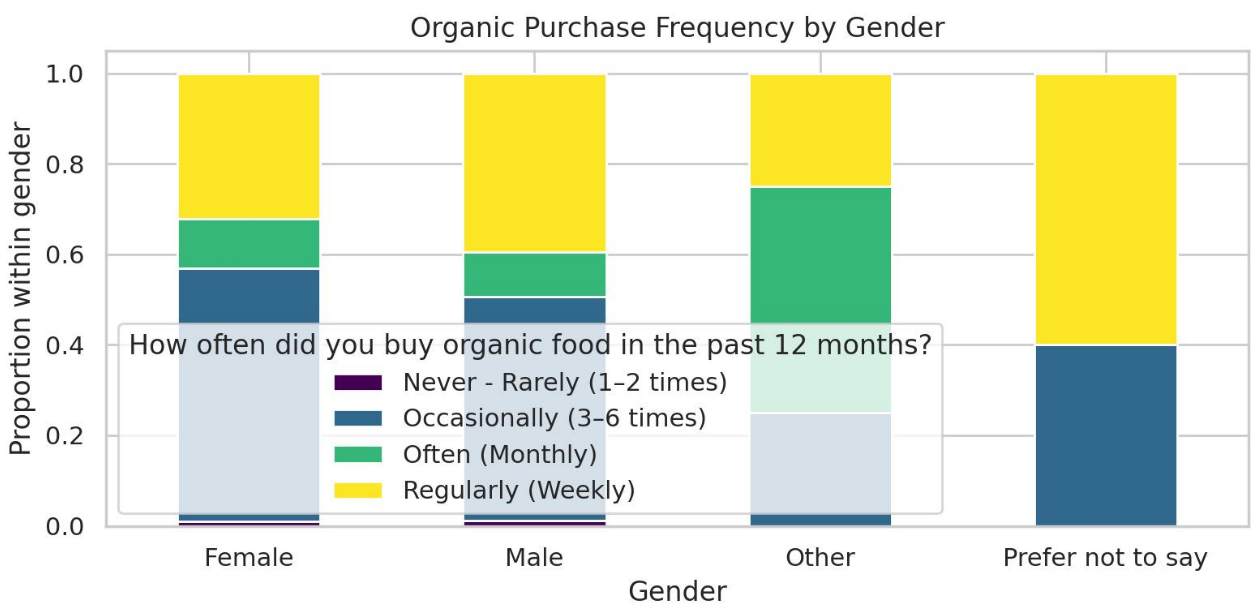
Basis	Organic	Conventional	Natural	Local
Meaning	Certified, chemical-free farming	Chemical fertilizers & pesticides	No artificial additives	Grown & sold locally
Certification	Mandatory (India Organic/PGS)	Not required	Not mandatory	Not required
Farming Method	Eco-friendly, sustainable	Chemical-intensive	Limited chemicals	Traditional/mixed
Fertilizers	Compost, bio-manure	Urea, DAP	Limited chemicals	Organic/limited
Pest Control	Neem, bio-pesticides	Chemical pesticides	Natural sprays	Traditional methods
GM Seeds	Not allowed	Frequently used	Usually avoided	Rare
Health Impact	Very high, chemical-free	Health risk	Safer option	Fresh & safe
Environmental Impact	Very high	Very low	Moderate	High
Price Level	High	Low	Medium	Low–Medium
Trust Level	Moderate	High	Moderate	High
Availability	Limited outlets	Everywhere	Supermarkets	Local markets
Carbon Footprint	Low	Very high	Moderate	Very low
Mumbai Preference (%)	**26%**	**48%**	**16%**	**10%**



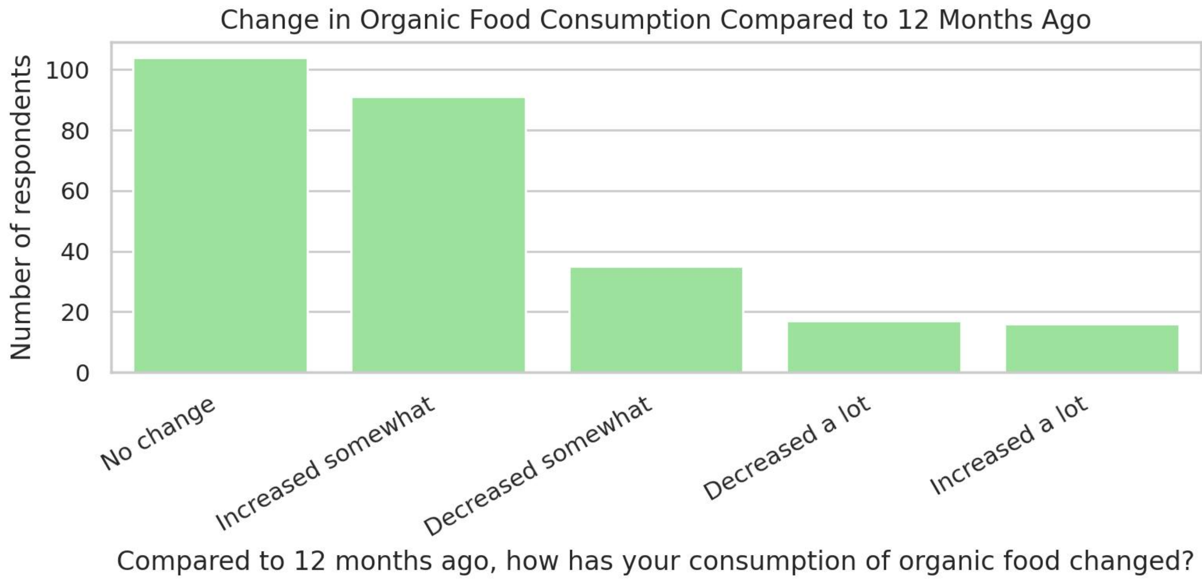
Frequency of Organic Food Purchases in the Past 12 Months
Number of respondents
0
20
40
60
80
100
Occasionally (3–6 times)
Regularly (Weekly)
Never - Rarely (1–2 times)
Often (Monthly)
How often did you buy organic food in the past 12 months?



Change in Organic Food Consumption Compared to 12 Months Ago
Number of respondents
0
20
40
60
80
100
No change
Increased somewhat
Decreased somewhat
Decreased a lot
Increased a lot
Compared to 12 months ago, how has your consumption of organic food changed?



Organic Purchase Frequency by Gender
Proportion within gender
0.0
0.2
0.4
0.6
0.8
1.0
How often did you buy organic food in the past 12 months?
Never - Rarely (1–2 times)
Occasionally (3–6 times)
Often (Monthly)
Regularly (Weekly)
Female
Male
Other
Prefer not to say
Gender



7. Discussion

The findings indicate a familiar pattern observed in other Indian cities:
Consumers *want* organic food but restrain themselves due to:

- Perceived affordability issues
- Authenticity concerns
- Convenience barriers

Globally, countries that saw a strong shift—like Denmark, Germany, and Japan—implemented:

- Transparent labeling
- Government-backed certification
- Consumer education programs
- Subsidized organic farming
- Broader organic retail availability

India currently lacks these on a large scale, explaining the gap.
Mumbai, despite being a metropolitan hub, mirrors the national trend.

8. Findings

1. Awareness of organic food in Mumbai is **very high**.
2. Consumers associate organic food with **health and environmental benefits**.
3. Actual consumption is **low–moderate**, mainly **occasional**.
4. Price is the **biggest barrier**.
5. Trust in organic certification is **weak**.
6. Consumers prefer fruits and vegetables when choosing organic.
7. There is a **clear gap between interest and purchase**.

9. Suggestions

For Retailers

- Offer discount bundles to reduce price sensitivity.
- Provide in-store education on certification and authenticity.
- Increase shelf visibility in supermarkets.

For Producers

- Improve transparency of the supply chain.
- Highlight farmer stories to build emotional connection.

For Government & Authorities

- Strengthen and standardize organic certification.
- Promote organic farming subsidies to lower consumer price.
- Run awareness campaigns on identifying authentic organic labels.

For Consumers

- Verify certification logos (Jaivik Bharat, PGS India).
- Prefer reputed organic brands to avoid fake products.

10. Conclusion

The shift from conventional to organic food consumption in Mumbai District is real but slow. Awareness and positive attitudes are strong drivers, yet structural barriers—particularly high prices, limited availability, and trust issues—restrict regular consumption.

As global markets continue expanding their organic adoption, India still experiences a significant gap. Bridging this gap requires coordinated efforts from government bodies, producers, retailers, and consumers.

Organic consumption in Mumbai has strong potential for growth, and with the right interventions, the city can move toward a healthier, more sustainable food future.

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