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CONSUMER PREFERENCES AND BUYING BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS ORGANIC AND HERBAL PRODUCTS

[1] Ishika Tripahi, [2] Maya Singh, [3] Dr. Sneha Singh
[1,2] Student, [3] Associate Professor
[1,2,3]Department of Business Administration, Vindhya Institute of Management and Science, Satna, M.P
Email – [1] ishikatripathi0486@gmail.com, [2] mayasingh2022singh@gmail.com, [3] snehasingh682@gmail.com

Abstract: *Twenty years ago, organic and herbal products were mostly found in a few specialty shops. Today they are sold in supermarkets, pharmacies and on e-commerce sites, and many ordinary households buy them. This paper asks why people choose these products, what stops them, and what they actually do at the point of purchase. It is a conceptual study built on published literature and two well-known frameworks, the Theory of Planned Behavior and the five-stage consumer decision process. The factors discussed are health, concern for the environment, trust in labels, price, availability, brand image and the influence of family and friends. Specific observation is given to the gap between what consumers say they will buy and what ends up in their basket. The reading of the literature is that attitudes are largely positive, but high prices, doubts about whether products are genuine, and low awareness stop many people from buying regularly. Suggestions are given for marketers, retailers, regulators and consumers.*

Keywords: *organic products, herbal products, consumer preference, buying behaviour, purchase intention, health consciousness, green marketing*

1. INTRODUCTION :

1.1. Background:

The things people eat, put on their skin or take when they are unwell reflect what they care about. For many years the main concerns were convenience and cost. That has changed to some extent. More consumers now say they want to know what is inside a product and how it was made, and this has brought organic and herbal goods into everyday shopping. Organic products are usually understood as those grown or made without synthetic fertilizers, chemical pesticides, genetically modified organisms or artificial additives, and certified by a recognized body. Herbal products are made wholly or largely from plant material (leaves, roots, seeds, flowers or extracts) and appear in foods, drinks, cosmetics, hygiene products and traditional medicine. A herbal shampoo need not be organic, and organic vegetables are not herbal. Shoppers, however, tend to group them together, since both suggest something natural, clean and safe. This is more pronounced where plant-based healing has a long history. In India, Ayurveda, Unani and Siddha have influenced home remedies for generations, and turmeric, neem, tulsi, aloe vera and amla are familiar to nearly everyone. The growing demand of branded herbal and organic products can be read as a commercial form of an old cultural habit, now strengthen by concern regarding pesticide residues, pollution and lifestyle diseases.

1.1. Need for the Study:

There are several reasons to study this behavior. Companies want to understand who buys and why before they can design and price a product. Farmers thinking of moving to organic methods need some assurance that buyers exist. Regulators want to understand how much consumers rely on labels and where they are being misled. For researchers, the open question is why favorable attitudes so often do not lead to a purchase.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW:

2.1. Organic food consumers:

Hughner et al. (2007) reviewed a large number of studies on organic food buyers. Health, taste, concern for the environment, food safety and support for local or small farms came up most often as reasons to buy. On the other hand, the prominent reasons for not purchasing were price, limited availability, doubts about labels and contentment with

conventional food. Later studies repeat much of this. Yiridoe et al. (2005) compared perceptions of organic and conventional food and found that people regard organic food as healthier and safer, yet are reluctant to pay a large premium. They also discussed that willingness-to-pay results depend a good deal on how the question is put to respondents. In Sweden, Magnusson et al. (2003) found that attitudes were closely tied to what people bought: worry about animal welfare, health and the environment pushed attitudes up, while the belief that organic food is costly and hard to find pulled them down.

2.2. Herbal products and the idea of "natural"

The herbal literature has a somewhat different emphasis. Many consumers believe that a plant-based product are gentler, cause very less side effects and is comparatively closer to nature than synthetic ones. Part of this comes from tradition and part from a distrust of chemicals. People who have reacted badly to a skin product or a medicine are more willing to try a herbal option. At the same time, the belief in safety is often stretched too far. A product made from plants can trigger allergies or interact with other medicines, so quality control and honest labelling are important.

2.3. Theory of Planned Behaviour:

Ajzen (1991) argued that behaviour follows from intention, and that intention depends on three things: the person's approach towards the behaviour, the subjective norm (the approval or pressure they feel from family, friends and community), and perceived behavioural control, meaning how easy or hard they think it is to act. For our purposes, a consumer will lean towards organic or herbal products if she thinks they are good for her, if people close to her use and approve of them, and if she believes she can find and afford them. The theory is helpful because it accounts for the person who likes the idea but does not buy: when price or access is a problem, perceived control is low.

2.4. The consumer decision process:

Kotler and Keller (2016) describe buying as five stages: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision and post-purchase behaviour. This sequence is used in Section 6, because each stage changes somewhat when the product makes a "natural" claim.

3. OBJECTIVES:

- To understand the concept of organic and herbal products from the consumer's point of view
- Identify the main factors that influence preference for them
- Suggest practical steps to raise consumer confidence and adoption.

4. METHODOLOGY:

The study is descriptive and conceptual and rests entirely on secondary sources: journal articles, textbooks on consumer behaviour and marketing, and the wider published work on organic and green consumption. No survey was conducted, so the discussion should be taken as a synthesis of what the literature generally reports and not as new statistical findings. Two frameworks guide the analysis, the Theory of Planned Behaviour and the five-stage decision model, both introduced in Section 3. Anyone wishing to test these ideas for a particular city or region could do so with a structured questionnaire using Likert-scale items, and analyse the answers with percentages, correlation and regression.

5. DISCUSSION:

FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER PREFERENCE:

The literature suggests that several factors act together. None of them explains preference alone, and their weight varies from one person to another.

- **Health consciousness**

Health is nearly always the strongest motive. People who watch their diet and fitness are more inclined towards organic food and herbal remedies, and many believe that organic produce carries fewer pesticide residues and has more nutritional value. The scientific evidence on nutrition is mixed, but it is the perception of healthfulness that shapes behaviour. With herbal products, buyers mention avoiding side effects, building immunity, managing stress and treating small complaints without strong medicines. Interest increased noticeably after the global pandemic, when immunity became a concern in most homes.

- **Environmental concern**

Another group buys out of concern for the planet. They link organic farming with healthier soil, less chemical runoff, biodiversity and lower pollution, and see their purchase as an expression of their values. This motive seems stronger among younger, better-educated and urban consumers, though that is only a tendency.

- **Trust, certification and labelling**

A shopper cannot tell by looking whether a product is truly organic or herbal, so trust matters a great deal.

Economists call such products credence goods, because their main quality cannot be checked even after using them. Buyers therefore depend on certification marks, brand reputation and the seller's credibility. Confidence falls when labels are confusing or when different logos appear on different products. News of fake organic produce or adulterated herbal goods harms not only the seller involved but the whole category.

- **Price**

These products usually cost more than conventional ones. Organic yields can be lower, certification has a cost, supply chains are small and good ingredients are expensive. Price is therefore the barrier mentioned most often. Even consumers who like the products describe them as too expensive for regular use. Higher-income households can buy them more often, while others buy occasionally or only in certain categories, such as baby food, spices or skincare.

- **Availability and convenience**

A product that is hard to find is seldom bought. Organic items were once available mainly in specialty stores, weekly farmers' markets or directly from farms. Supermarkets and online platforms have widened access, but it is still uneven, particularly in smaller towns and rural areas. Pack size, shelf life and the ease of finding reliable information also count as convenience.

- **Brand image and marketing**

Branding matters most for herbal products. Brands known for natural ingredients, or those that draw on traditional knowledge, are trusted more. Advertising, packaging, ingredient lists naming plants, and endorsements by doctors or celebrities all have an effect. Yet when words like "pure" and "natural" are used with nothing behind them, consumers become skeptical. This is often called green washing.

- **Social influence and culture**

Family, friends and neighbours have a strong say in what people buy. A relative's recommendation often counts for more than an advertisement. Where older family members value traditional remedies, children tend to grow up using herbal products. Social media and influencers now add to this, spreading ideas about clean eating and natural living quickly, although not always accurately.

- **Demographic characteristics**

Age, gender, income, education, occupation and household make-up all play a part. Women, who often make household decisions about food and personal care, tend to show more interest. Parents of young children are an especially committed group because they worry about what their children consume. Education is generally linked to more knowledge and more favourable attitudes, and income to the ability to pay. Even so, interest exists in every group, and these patterns should be read as general ones only. In short, preference rests on several motives at once, with health and trust at the centre. Price and availability decide whether a favourable attitude is acted on.

6. BUYING BEHAVIOUR:

Need recognition:

The process usually starts with a trigger. It may be an illness in the family, a doctor's advice on diet, a news report on pesticide contamination, a skin reaction, a pregnancy, or just a wish to live more healthily. Sometimes the trigger is simply exposure, such as seeing organic staples in a friend's kitchen or noticing a herbal brand in an advertisement.

Information search:

These products are less familiar and cost more, so buyers search harder than they would for an everyday item. They ask relatives, read labels, check certification, look at online reviews, watch videos and consult health professionals. First-time buyers search the most. Once a brand or seller has earned trust, searching drops and buying becomes routine.

Evaluation of alternatives

Consumers compare the product with conventional options on price, quality, appearance, taste, brand and expected benefit. Organic fruit and vegetables often look less perfect, which puts some buyers off, while others take the irregular look as a sign that the produce is genuine. For herbal personal care, the comparison usually turns on ingredients, fragrance, visible results and whether the product feels gentle.

Purchase decision

The decision depends on personal preference and on practical limits. Many consumers buy selectively. They pick organic or herbal versions of certain items, such as baby food, milk, leafy vegetables, honey, spices, herbal teas, soaps or hair oils, and stay with conventional products for everything else. This partial, category-by-category buying is among the most consistent findings in the field. The place of purchase also matters: supermarkets for convenience, specialty stores for range, online platforms for variety and home delivery, and farmers' markets or farms for freshness

and personal trust.

Post-purchase behaviour:

What happens after use decides whether the customer comes back. If taste, effect and safety meet expectations, she is likely to buy again, add more items and recommend the brand. If she is disappointed, or begins to doubt that the product is genuine, she may return to conventional products and tell others. Since trust is easily damaged in this category, word of mouth, good or bad, spreads far.

The attitude–behaviour gap:

A much-discussed problem is the distance between intention and action. In surveys many respondents say they plan to buy organic or herbal goods, but these goods make up a far smaller part of what they actually spend. Several reasons are suggested. Respondents may give answers they think are socially acceptable. The extra cost may look fine on paper and feel heavy at the checkout. Habit, shortage of time and poor availability can override good intentions, and a last-minute doubt about authenticity can end the purchase. Narrowing this gap is probably the biggest practical challenge for marketers and policymakers. In short, buyers go through the stages carefully and often buy in only a few categories. Most of the potential sales are lost in the gap between intention and purchase.

Barriers to Purchase:

Table 1: Main barriers to purchasing organic and herbal products

Barrier	Description
High price	The premium is the most common complaint, particularly for regular, large-volume buying.
Doubts about authenticity	Consumers worry that products labeled organic or herbal may not be genuine, or that certification is weak.
Low awareness	Some consumers are unsure what "organic" or "herbal" means or how such products differ from ordinary ones.
Limited availability	Products can be hard to find in small towns, and stock may be irregular.
No visible benefit	Gains such as better long-term health are not immediate, so some see no clear return on the extra money.
Shelf life and appearance	Fresh organic produce may spoil faster and look less attractive.
Satisfaction with conventional products	Many people feel no real need to change.

7. RESULTS :

Taken together, the literature shows favorable attitudes alongside careful, selective buying. Consumers are not against organic and herbal products; most of them respect these products. But they shop with care and weigh their beliefs against their budgets. In terms of the Theory of Planned Behavior, attitude and social norms are mostly supportive, whereas perceived behavioral control, which depends on price, access and trust, is the weak point. That is why intention so seldom matches purchase. Trust needs particular attention. The buyer cannot verify quality, so the market runs on signals that people find believable, and a single widely reported fraud can set the whole sector back. For this reason certification, open sourcing of ingredients and honest advertising are commercial needs and not merely legal requirements. The motives behind the two categories are also different. Buyers of organic food often combine health, environmental and ethical reasons, while buyers of herbal products care more about safety, tradition and results. A company that speaks to both in the same way will probably miss what each wants to hear. Lastly, many hesitant consumers do not oppose these products at all; they simply do not have clear and reliable information. Plain labels, guidance in stores and honest communication may do more to widen the market than heavy advertising.

The main findings can be stated briefly:

- Attitudes are positive, but buying is selective and occasional.
- Health is the leading motive, followed by concern for the environment.
- Price is the main barrier and keeps many favourable consumers from buying regularly.
- Trust is fragile; certification and brand reputation often decide the sale.
- Low awareness and confusing labels hold back hesitant buyers.
- Advice from family and friends often counts for more than advertising.

8. CONCLUSION:

Organic and herbal products now have a firm place in everyday consumption, supported by concern for health and the environment and by a renewed interest in traditional knowledge. Most consumers prefer them and regard them as safer, purer and better for the body and the planet. Actual buying, however, is more cautious. High prices, doubts about authenticity, uneven availability and low awareness mean that many consumers buy only some products, buy them only now and then, or do not buy at all. Growth depends on turning goodwill into trust and trust into habit. That calls for honest labelling, reliable quality, fair prices and clear communication. Producers and marketers who earn the consumer's confidence, and policymakers who protect it, are best placed to help the market grow in a way that benefits buyers, farmers and the environment.

9. LIMITATIONS:

The paper relies on secondary sources and a conceptual framework, so it offers no new statistical evidence. Consumer behavior also varies between countries, regions and cultures, and general findings may not hold equally everywhere. Later studies could use primary surveys to measure how strongly each factor operates in a given area, compare buyers with non-buyers, look at how social media shapes herbal product choices, assess the long-term effect of certification on trust, or follow the same consumers over time to see whether their stated intentions turn into purchases.

10. SUGGESTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS:

Marketers and producers: Trust should come before sales pressure. Certification should be displayed clearly, the source of ingredients explained, and exaggerated claims avoided. Small and trial packs let new buyers try the product cheaply. It makes sense to concentrate first on categories where people will pay more, such as baby products, staples and personal care, and to extend the range slowly. Distribution in smaller cities and online needs strengthening.

Retailers: Organic and herbal products should have clearly marked sections, staff should be able to answer basic questions, and prices should be easy to compare. Direct links with farmers and cooperatives can shorten the supply chain and bring costs down.

Policymakers and regulators: Certification standards should be clear, unified and properly enforced, and false labeling should be dealt with quickly. Farmers who want to shift to organic methods need training, subsidies and access to markets, so that supply grows and prices ease over time. Awareness campaigns can explain what labels actually mean.

Consumers: Buyers should look for recognized certification, read ingredient lists, buy from reliable sellers and remember that "herbal" does not mean harmless. Anyone with a medical condition, who is pregnant or who takes regular medication should consult a qualified health professional before using herbal remedies.

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