

A Comprehensive Study on Consumer Perceptions, Expectations, and Challenges for Organic Food in Bangladesh

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ABSTRACT:

This study explores consumer behavior, perceptions, and challenges related to organic food consumption in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Using a quantitative, cross-sectional research approach, data were collected from 150 urban respondents through a structured questionnaire. The research identifies health consciousness, environmental awareness, and perceived product quality as key drivers of organic food adoption, while price sensitivity, limited awareness, and lack of trust in certification systems are significant barriers. The study also highlights the role of socioeconomic status and the growing influence of social media in shaping consumer attitudes. The findings provide strategic insights for stakeholders to enhance trust, address affordability concerns, and leverage digital platforms to promote sustainable consumption in emerging markets like Bangladesh.

Keywords: *Organic food, Consumer perceptions, Health awareness, Social media influence, Sustainability*

INTRODUCTION

Background and Context

The global food market has witnessed a significant shift towards organic food consumption over the past two decades. This transition is primarily driven by increasing consumer awareness of the health, environmental, and safety concerns associated with conventional food production practices (Willer & Schlatter, 2019). Organic foods, produced without synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, or genetically modified organisms, are perceived to offer superior health benefits and contribute positively to environmental sustainability. This trend is evident across developed markets such as North America and Europe, where robust organic certification systems and extensive public awareness campaigns have facilitated widespread adoption. In Bangladesh, the organic food market is still in its nascent stages but holds immense potential. Urban middle-income groups, particularly in cities like Dhaka, are gradually adopting organic food due to growing concerns about the

harmful effects of chemical residues in conventional food products and an increasing focus on healthier lifestyles. Recent studies indicate a growing inclination towards organic food among urban consumers, driven by the availability of health facilities, fear of food adulteration, and an emphasis on environmental sustainability (Rahman & Hossain, 2021). However, unlike developed nations, organic food consumption in Bangladesh faces unique challenges, including limited consumer awareness, affordability issues, and the lack of a robust certification and regulatory framework. Globally, consumer attitudes toward organic food are shaped by various factors, including perceived health benefits, environmental awareness, and concerns about food safety. Studies by Crowder and Reganold (2015) suggest that organic farming practices, which promote biodiversity and reduce environmental pollution, appeal to environmentally conscious consumers.

Similarly, health-conscious individuals prioritize organic food due to its association with lower pesticide residues and higher nutritional value (Smith et al., 2020). In Bangladesh, while these factors are relevant, their influence is often moderated by socio-economic and cultural dynamics unique to the region. Despite these promising indicators, the organic food market in Bangladesh is constrained by several barriers. Limited consumer awareness and knowledge about the benefits of organic food create a significant impediment to market growth. Additionally, the high costs of organic food production and inefficient supply chains result in premium pricing, making organic products inaccessible to a large segment of the population. These challenges are further compounded by the absence of credible certification systems, leading to mistrust among consumers about the authenticity of organic food labels (Kendall et al., 2019). This study aims to

explore these dynamics in detail, focusing on the factors influencing consumer perceptions and expectations of organic food in Bangladesh. It seeks to identify the challenges faced by consumers and provide actionable insights for policymakers, producers, and marketers to enhance the adoption of organic food in the country

Statement of the Problem While the global demand for organic food has grown significantly, the same cannot be said for Bangladesh. The organic food market in the country remains underdeveloped and plagued by numerous challenges. The lack of consumer awareness and understanding of what constitutes organic food is a major barrier. Many consumers are unfamiliar with the health and environmental benefits of organic products, which limits their willingness to pay the premium prices often associated with such items (Karim & Biswas, 2016). Another critical issue is the absence of a robust certification system. Unlike in developed markets where certification ensures the authenticity of organic products, Bangladesh lacks an effective regulatory framework to govern organic food production and labeling. This has led to widespread mistrust among consumers, who are often skeptical about the authenticity of organic labels (Kendall et al., 2019). In addition to these issues, the high costs of organic food production, driven by limited adoption of organic farming practices and inefficient supply chains, result in premium pricing. This makes organic food unaffordable for the majority of the population, further constraining market growth. Moreover, the government provides limited support

for organic farming, leaving farmers to bear the high costs of transitioning to organic practices without any subsidies or incentives (Haque, 2020). Existing research on organic food consumption in Bangladesh is limited and often focuses on generic consumer attitudes without delving into the underlying factors that influence behavior. Studies tend to overlook the socio-economic and regional variations in consumer perceptions and the role of digital platforms like social media in shaping consumer expectations. This lack of comprehensive research creates a knowledge gap that needs to be addressed to develop targeted strategies for market growth. This study addresses these gaps by examining the factors influencing consumer behavior, identifying the barriers to organic food consumption, and exploring potential solutions to enhance market accessibility and trust. The findings aim to provide a roadmap for stakeholders to overcome these challenges and promote the adoption of organic food in Bangladesh

1.3 Purpose of the Study The primary purpose of this study is to investigate the factors influencing consumer perceptions, expectations, and behaviors toward organic food in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It seeks to understand the motivations driving organic food consumption and the barriers preventing its widespread adoption. By exploring these dynamics, the study aims to provide actionable insights for stakeholders, including policymakers, producers, and marketers, to enhance consumer engagement and market growth. Specifically, the objectives of this study are:

1. To analyze the factors influencing consumer perceptions and expectations regarding organic food in Dhaka.
2. To identify the challenges and barriers faced by consumers, including affordability, accessibility, and trust issues related to certification.
3. To examine the role of socio-economic and cultural factors in shaping consumer behavior.
4. To explore the influence of digital platforms, particularly social media, on consumer awareness and perceptions of organic food.
5. To provide recommendations for improving consumer engagement, enhancing trust in organic products, and expanding the organic food market in Bangladesh. This study also aims to contribute to the existing body of literature on organic food consumption, particularly in the context of emerging markets. By focusing on Bangladesh, it provides insights into the unique challenges and opportunities in developing countries, offering a foundation for future research and policy interventions.

Research Gaps Although several studies have explored consumer behavior toward organic food globally, there is limited research focusing on the specific context of Bangladesh. Existing studies tend to provide generic insights into consumer attitudes without addressing the socio-economic and cultural nuances that influence behavior in emerging markets. For example, while studies highlight the role of health consciousness and environmental awareness in driving organic food consumption, they often fail to account for the barriers posed by affordability

and accessibility in low-income countries. Another significant gap in the literature is the lack of research on the role of digital platforms, particularly social media, in shaping consumer awareness and perceptions of organic food. In Bangladesh, where social media usage is rapidly increasing, these platforms have the potential to play a crucial role in educating consumers and promoting organic products. However, this aspect remains underexplored in existing studies. Additionally, there is limited research on the socio-economic and regional variations in consumer behavior. Most studies focus on urban populations, overlooking the differences in attitudes and preferences between rural and urban consumers. This creates a one-dimensional understanding of consumer behavior, which may not be representative of the entire population. Finally, while trust in certification systems is a critical factor influencing organic food consumption, there is little research on how the absence of robust certification frameworks impacts consumer perceptions in Bangladesh. This gap is particularly relevant given the widespread mistrust among Bangladeshi consumers about the authenticity of organic labels. By addressing these gaps, this study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing organic food consumption in Bangladesh, offering actionable insights for stakeholders to enhance market growth and consumer engagement.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The growing global trend toward organic food consumption is deeply rooted in the perception that organic

foods are healthier, safer, and more environmentally friendly compared to their conventional counterparts. These perceptions are driven by the absence of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and genetically modified organisms in organic farming practices. Studies, such as those by Reganold and Wachter (2016), emphasize that health-conscious consumers gravitate toward organic foods to minimize exposure to harmful chemicals, often associating them with reduced risks of long-term health issues. In Bangladesh, similar health-driven behavior is emerging, particularly among urban middle-income groups, as they navigate a food environment riddled with safety concerns and chemical adulteration. The perception of organic food extends beyond health benefits to encompass environmental and ethical dimensions. Organic farming is widely acknowledged for its potential to reduce environmental degradation, preserve biodiversity, and promote sustainable agricultural practices. Research by Crowder and Reganold (2015) highlights that organic farming systems contribute significantly to soil health, water conservation, and lower greenhouse gas emissions. These attributes align closely with the values of environmentally conscious consumers who view organic foods as a responsible choice. In Bangladesh, the increasing visibility of environmental challenges, such as soil degradation and water pollution, has heightened consumer awareness of the ecological impact of conventional farming practices. This awareness is particularly pronounced among younger urban populations, who are more likely to prioritize sustainability in their

purchasing decisions. Health and environmental concerns are complemented by ethical considerations, as organic farming often emphasizes animal welfare, fair labor practices, and community well-being. These values resonate with global trends in ethical consumerism, which demand greater transparency and accountability from food producers. However, in Bangladesh, the lack of robust regulatory frameworks undermines these ethical claims, creating skepticism among consumers about the authenticity of organic food products. This skepticism is further compounded by the absence of credible certification systems, which erode trust and limit consumer confidence in the organic food market. Despite these compelling drivers, significant barriers hinder the adoption of organic food, particularly in emerging markets like Bangladesh. Price sensitivity remains one of the most critical challenges, as organic foods are typically priced higher than their conventional counterparts. This price disparity is attributed to higher production costs, limited economies of scale, and inefficient supply chains. Research by Hossain et al. (2019) underscores that in Bangladesh, where income inequality is pronounced, the premium pricing of organic products makes them inaccessible to a large segment of the population. While middle- and upper-income groups may be willing to pay a premium for perceived health and environmental benefits, lower-income consumers are often excluded from the organic food market. Adding to the price barrier is the lack of consumer awareness and education about organic foods. Many consumers remain unfamiliar with the

concept of organic farming and its associated benefits, limiting their willingness to pay a premium for organic products. Kendall et al., 2019 emphasizes that effective educational campaigns are essential to bridge this knowledge gap and enhance consumer engagement. However, such initiatives remain limited in Bangladesh, leaving many potential consumers unaware of the advantages of organic foods over conventional options. The interplay of trust and certification further complicates the organic food market in Bangladesh. Unlike developed markets, where certification systems ensure the authenticity of organic products, Bangladesh lacks a standardized regulatory framework. This absence fosters mistrust among consumers, who are often uncertain whether products labeled as "organic" truly meet the required standards. Karim and Biswas (2016) note that the lack of certification not only undermines consumer confidence but also hampers the growth of the organic food market by discouraging producers from adopting organic practices. Socio-economic factors also play a significant role in shaping consumer behavior toward organic food. Income, education, and occupation influence both the ability and willingness to purchase organic products. Higher-income groups are more likely to afford organic foods, viewing them as a luxury good aligned with their health and lifestyle priorities. Conversely, lower-income groups, constrained by financial limitations, often prioritize affordability over quality. Education is another critical determinant, as it shapes awareness and attitudes toward organic foods. Educated consumers are more likely to

understand the health and environmental benefits of organic farming, translating this knowledge into informed purchasing decisions. In Bangladesh, the urban-rural divide further exacerbates these disparities, as rural populations often have limited access to organic food products and are less aware of their benefits. Digital platforms, particularly social media, are increasingly shaping consumer behavior toward organic food. Social media serves as a powerful tool for raising awareness, promoting organic lifestyles, and building trust through influencer campaigns. Smith and Thompson (2020) argue that digital platforms significantly impact consumer perceptions by providing accessible information and fostering community engagement. In Bangladesh, where social media usage is rapidly growing, these platforms offer a unique opportunity to reach diverse audiences and enhance consumer engagement. Kim et al. (2024) highlight that social media campaigns, coupled with endorsements from trusted influencers, can effectively address knowledge gaps and build trust in organic food products. However, the effectiveness of these campaigns depends on the accuracy and transparency of the information shared, as misinformation can undermine consumer confidence. While the existing literature provides valuable insights into the factors driving organic food consumption, several gaps remain. Much of the research is concentrated in developed markets, offering limited understanding of the unique challenges and opportunities in emerging economies like Bangladesh. For instance, studies often fail to account for the socio-economic and cultural nuances that shape consumer behavior

in low-income countries. Regional variations within countries are also overlooked, as most studies focus on urban populations and ignore rural consumer dynamics. Moreover, the role of digital platforms, particularly in emerging markets, remains underexplored despite their growing influence on consumer behavior. Trust and certification issues, critical in contexts with weak regulatory frameworks, also warrant deeper investigation to understand their impact on consumer perceptions and market development. In summary, the literature highlights the complex interplay of health consciousness, environmental awareness, ethical considerations, socio-economic factors, and digital influences in shaping consumer behavior toward organic food. While these factors present significant opportunities for market growth, barriers such as price sensitivity, lack of awareness, and trust issues must be addressed to unlock the full potential of the organic food market in Bangladesh. These insights provide a robust foundation for the development of the research hypotheses and underscore the need for targeted strategies to enhance consumer engagement and market accessibility. The gaps identified in the literature call for a more nuanced and context-specific exploration of the factors driving or hindering organic food consumption, which this study aims to address.

3. Hypothesis Development

3.1 Health Consciousness

Consumers often prioritize health benefits when making food choices, and organic foods are widely perceived to be healthier due to the absence of synthetic fertilizers, pesticides, and other chemical

additives. Studies, such as those by Rahman and Hossain (2021), suggest that healthconscious individuals show a higher tendency to purchase organic foods. This is especially pertinent in Dhaka, where concerns about food safety and chemical adulteration are prevalent. Thus, the first hypothesis is:

H1: Health consciousness significantly influences the consumers' purchase intention for organic foods.

3.2 Environmental Awareness

Environmental sustainability is a critical motivator for organic food consumption. Organic farming practices minimize soil degradation, water pollution, and biodiversity loss, resonating with environmentally conscious consumers. Crowder and Reganold (2015) emphasize that environmental awareness strongly influences organic food choices. In Bangladesh, where environmental degradation is a growing concern, this factor is expected to play a significant role. The second hypothesis is

H2: Environmental awareness positively impacts the consumers' preference for organic foods.

3.3 Price Sensitivity

Price is a major barrier to the adoption of organic foods, particularly in developing countries like Bangladesh. Organic products are generally more expensive due to higher production costs and limited economies of scale. Hossain et al. (2019) highlight that price sensitivity negatively affects consumer willingness to purchase organic foods. In the context of Dhaka, this issue is exacerbated by income disparities. The third hypothesis is:

H3: Price sensitivity negatively affects the consumers' decision to purchase organic foods.

3.4 Perceived Taste and Quality Taste and quality are vital factors in consumer food preferences. Organic foods are often perceived to have superior taste and quality compared to conventional alternatives, attributed to natural growth processes and the absence of synthetic additives (Koswatta et al., 2023). In Dhaka, these perceptions are expected to influence consumer behavior due to widespread concerns about food quality. Thus, the fourth hypothesis is:

H4: The perceived taste and quality of organic foods positively influence consumer purchasing behavior.

3.5 Nutritional Content

The belief that organic foods have higher nutritional content significantly impacts consumer preferences. Organic foods are often associated with increased levels of vitamins, minerals, and antioxidants (Yaseen et al., 2024). Although scientific evidence remains mixed, this perception drives purchasing decisions. In Dhaka, where nutritional awareness is rising, the fifth hypothesis is:

H5: Organic foods' higher nutritional content is a key driver of consumer preference.

3.6 Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status influences consumer behavior by determining affordability and access to organic foods. Higher-income groups are more likely to purchase organic foods due to their greater financial capacity, whereas lower-income groups may prioritize

cost over quality. Hossain et al. (2019) suggest that socio-economic factors moderate the relationship between price sensitivity and purchase decisions. The sixth hypothesis is:

H6: Socio-economic status significantly moderates the relationship between price sensitivity and purchase intention of organic foods.

3.7 Social Media Influence Social media platforms have become powerful tools for shaping consumer perceptions and behaviors. Influencers and digital campaigns play a pivotal role in raising awareness and promoting organic lifestyles (Smith et al., 2020). In Dhaka, where social media usage is rapidly increasing, this factor is expected to influence consumer expectations. The seventh hypothesis is:

H7: The influence of social media significantly impacts consumer expectations towards organic foods.

3.8 Awareness of Benefits Awareness about the benefits of organic food, including health, environmental, and quality aspects, is crucial for driving consumer engagement. A lack of awareness creates significant barriers to adoption, as noted by Pasqualotto and Menezes (2023). In Dhaka, where many consumers remain unaware of the advantages of organic foods, the eighth hypothesis is:

H8: The lack of awareness about the benefits of organic foods negatively impacts consumer expectations.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is designed to illustrate the relationships between the key factors influencing consumer behavior toward organic

food in Dhaka, Bangladesh. It identifies the independent variables, including health consciousness, environmental awareness, price sensitivity, perceived taste and quality, nutritional content, socio-economic status, social media influence, and awareness of benefits, which are hypothesized to impact the dependent variable, the frequency of organic food purchases. The framework incorporates the moderating role of socio-economic status, emphasizing how it influences the relationship between price sensitivity and purchase intention. It also integrates the influence of social media as a critical driver shaping consumer perceptions and expectations. By structuring these variables into a cohesive model, the framework provides a roadmap for testing the hypotheses and exploring the dynamic interplay of factors shaping consumer behavior.

5. Methodology

5.1 Research Design The study employs a quantitative, cross-sectional research design to examine the relationships between various factors influencing consumer behavior toward organic food. A cross-sectional approach was selected because it allows for data collection from a large sample at a single point in time, providing a snapshot of consumer perceptions and behaviors. This method is particularly effective in exploring causal relationships and identifying trends in consumer preferences, barriers, and expectations.

5.2 Population and Sampling

The target population for this study comprises urban residents of Dhaka, Bangladesh, who are potential or

existing consumers of organic food. Dhaka was chosen as the study area due to its diverse socio-economic profile and the growing availability of organic food products in urban markets. The population included individuals across various age groups, educational levels, income brackets, and occupational categories to ensure a comprehensive understanding of consumer behavior. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to minimize bias and ensure that the sample accurately represents the target population. The population was divided into strata based on demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education, and income. Within each stratum, respondents were selected randomly to ensure proportional representation. This approach improves the accuracy and generalizability of the findings by capturing variations within subgroups. The sample size was determined using Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) sample size determination table, which suggests an appropriate sample size of 150 for a target population with a confidence level of 95% and a margin of error of 5%. To account for potential non-responses, 150 participants were targeted, and complete responses were obtained from all.

5.3 Data Collection Methods Data collection was conducted using a structured questionnaire, designed to capture detailed information on the variables of interest. The questionnaire was developed based on insights from the literature review and aligned with the study's conceptual framework. It consisted of three main sections: demographic information, consumer perceptions and behaviors, and factors influencing organic food consumption.

The questionnaire was pre-tested with a pilot group of 33 participants to ensure clarity, reliability, and validity. Feedback from the pilot study was used to refine the questions, ensuring they were easy to understand and addressed the research objectives comprehensively. A mixed-mode data collection approach was used to maximize reach and response rates. The questionnaire was disseminated online through email and social media platforms for respondents with internet access. For participants in areas with limited connectivity or a preference for inperson interaction, face-to-face surveys were conducted. The combination of online and offline methods ensured inclusivity and reduced the risk of biased responses. Data collection was completed over a three-week period, ensuring adequate time to gather responses from all targeted strata.

5.4 Variables and Measurements

The study examined both independent and dependent variables. Independent variables included health consciousness, environmental awareness, price sensitivity, perceived taste and quality, nutritional content, socio-economic status, social media influence, and awareness of benefits. The dependent variable was the frequency of organic food purchases. A seven-point Likert scale was used to measure respondents' attitudes and perceptions, with responses ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree." This scale was chosen for its ability to capture nuanced variations in attitudes and behaviors.

5.5 Data Analysis Techniques

Data analysis was conducted using SPSS

(Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) to perform both descriptive and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics were used to summarize demographic information and provide an overview of respondents' characteristics. Regression analysis was employed to test the hypotheses and determine the relationships between independent variables and the dependent variable. The statistical significance of the results was assessed using p-values, with a significance threshold set at 0.05. The analysis also included an evaluation of the reliability and validity of the questionnaire using Cronbach's alpha. This ensured the internal consistency of the scale items, confirming that the measurement tools were robust and appropriate for the study objectives.

6. Data Analysis

6.1 Demographic Analysis The demographic characteristics of the respondents provide critical insights into the socioeconomic and demographic profile of the study participants. Below are detailed tables presenting the demographic breakdown:

Table 6.1: Age Distribution

Age Group (Years)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
18–24	53	35.3
25–34	47	31.3
35–44	34	22.7
45–54	12	8.0
55 and above	4	2.7
Total	150	100.0

The majority of respondents fall into the 18–34 age group, comprising 66.6% of the total sample. This indicates that young adults dominate organic food consumption patterns in Dhaka.

Table 6.2: Gender Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	84	56.0
Female	66	44.0
Total	150	100.0

The gender distribution reflects a slightly higher participation of male respondents (56%) compared to females (44%).

Table 6.3: Education Level

Education Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
High school or below	8	5.3
Undergraduate	58	38.7
Graduate	56	37.3
Postgraduate	28	18.7
Total	150	100.0

Respondents with undergraduate (38.7%) and graduate (37.3%) degrees formed the largest proportion, indicating that organic food consumers are predominantly well-educated.

Table 6.4: Occupation Distribution

Occupation	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Student	58	38.7
Employed	40	26.7
Self-employed	33	22.0
Unemployed	19	12.7
Total	150	100.0

Students constitute the largest occupational group (38.7%), followed by employed individuals (26.7%) and self-employed respondents (22%).

Table 6.5: Location

Location	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Dhaka	104	69.3
Outside Dhaka	46	30.7
Total	150	100.0

Most respondents are urban residents of Dhaka (69.3%), reflecting the city's concentration of organic food awareness and availability.

6.2 Regression Analysis

To examine the hypotheses, regression analysis was conducted. The dependent variable was the frequency of purchasing organic food, while the independent variables included health consciousness, environmental awareness, price sensitivity, taste and quality, nutritional content, socio-economic status, social media influence, and awareness of benefits.

Table 6.6: Regression Analysis Summary

Hypothesis	Beta Coefficient (β)	p-value	Significance
H1: Health consciousness significantly influences purchase intention.	0.45	< 0.001	Supported
H2: Environmental awareness positively impacts consumer preference.	0.38	< 0.001	Supported
H3: Price sensitivity negatively affects purchase decisions.	-0.42	< 0.001	Supported
H4: Perceived taste and quality positively influence purchasing behavior.	0.35	< 0.001	Supported
H5: Nutritional content is a key driver of consumer preference.	0.40	< 0.001	Supported
H6: Socio-economic status moderates the relationship between price sensitivity.	0.30	< 0.005	Supported
H7: Social media significantly impacts consumer expectations.	0.33	< 0.001	Supported
H8: Lack of awareness negatively affects purchasing decisions.	-0.37	< 0.001	Supported

The regression analysis confirms that all hypotheses are statistically significant, indicating a robust relationship between the independent variables and the frequency of organic food purchase.

6.3 Hypothesis-Specific Analysis

Regression analysis reveals that multiple factors significantly influence consumer behavior toward organic food. Health consciousness strongly drives purchase intention ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.001$), as health-conscious individuals prefer organic options, aligning with Rahman and Hossain (2021). Environmental awareness also plays a crucial role ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$), reflecting global trends where sustainability concerns encourage organic consumption (Crowder & Reganold, 2015). However, price sensitivity negatively impacts decisions ($\beta = -0.42, p < 0.001$), as higher costs deter many consumers, consistent with Hossain et al. (2019). Perceived taste and quality ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.001$) and nutritional content ($\beta = 0.40, p < 0.001$) further enhance preference, as organic foods are often seen as tastier and more nutritious (Hemmerling et al., 2016; Ahmed & Ali, 2021). Socio-economic status moderately influences choices ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.005$), with higher-income groups showing greater inclination toward organic products. Social media ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$) significantly shapes consumer expectations, promoting organic lifestyles (Smith et al., 2020). Lastly, lack of awareness ($\beta = -0.37, p < 0.001$) hinders purchases, emphasizing the need for educational campaigns to bridge the information gap and enhance engagement.

6.4 Interpretation of Results The regression analysis highlights the

complex interplay of factors influencing organic food consumption in Bangladesh. Health and environmental concerns are strong positive drivers, while affordability and lack of awareness are significant barriers. Social media emerges as a powerful tool for shaping consumer behavior, emphasizing the need for digital engagement strategies. These findings underscore the need for targeted marketing, pricing interventions, and educational campaigns to address barriers and enhance market growth. The data-driven insights provide a foundation for actionable strategies to promote organic food consumption in Dhaka and beyond.

Discussion

The findings of this study reveal the multifaceted factors influencing consumer perceptions and behaviors toward organic food in Dhaka, Bangladesh. These factors, shaped by individual health consciousness, environmental awareness, price sensitivity, product attributes, and socioeconomic status, align with global trends but also exhibit unique local dynamics.

Health Consciousness

Health consciousness emerged as a significant driver of organic food consumption, with regression results ($\beta = 0.45, p < 0.001$) supporting the hypothesis that consumers who prioritize their health are more inclined to purchase organic foods. This finding aligns with global research by Abdul Rahman and Hossain (2021), which highlights the role of perceived health benefits in influencing consumer behavior. In Dhaka, as in many urban

centers worldwide, growing concerns about the long-term effects of chemical residues in conventional farming have heightened the demand for organic products. Consumers in the study viewed organic food as a healthier alternative, with 78% citing health as a major purchasing motivator. This suggests that health campaigns emphasizing the nutritional and safety advantages of organic food could further enhance market engagement.

Environmental Awareness

Environmental awareness also significantly influenced consumer preferences, as indicated by the positive regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.38, p < 0.001$). The study confirms that sustainability concerns, particularly the environmental impact of conventional farming practices, are a key factor driving demand for organic products. This finding is consistent with Crowder and Reganold's (2015) assertion that organic farming appeals to environmentally conscious consumers due to its lower reliance on synthetic inputs and its role in promoting biodiversity. In Bangladesh, the rising visibility of environmental degradation has likely contributed to these concerns, particularly among younger consumers. Approximately 71% of respondents associated organic food with environmental benefits, suggesting an opportunity for marketers to position organic products as environmentally responsible choices.

Price Sensitivity

Price sensitivity was identified as a major barrier to organic food consumption, with a negative regression coefficient ($\beta = -0.42, p < 0.001$). High costs associated with organic products

deterred many consumers, particularly those from lower-income brackets. This finding aligns with studies by Hossain et al. (2019), which emphasize affordability as a key constraint in emerging markets. In the context of Dhaka, where organic food is often perceived as a luxury item, addressing price barriers is critical to expanding market reach. The results indicate that while health and environmental benefits are valued, affordability remains a decisive factor. Strategic interventions, such as pricing subsidies, discounts, and loyalty programs, could help mitigate this barrier and make organic food more accessible to a broader demographic.

Taste and Quality

Taste and quality were found to positively influence purchasing behavior, with regression results ($\beta = 0.35, p < 0.001$) confirming the importance of product attributes. Respondents overwhelmingly perceived organic food as superior in taste and quality, with 80% citing these factors as significant motivators. This finding supports prior research by Lee and Chan (2019), which highlights the sensory and qualitative appeal of organic products as a key determinant of consumer preference. In Dhaka, where food quality is a growing concern due to frequent reports of adulteration, the perceived authenticity of organic food is a strong selling point. This suggests that emphasizing quality assurance and transparency in production practices could further bolster consumer trust and engagement.

Nutritional Content

The perception of higher nutritional content was another strong driver, with

a positive regression coefficient ($\beta = 0.40, p < 0.001$). Respondents widely believed that organic foods were more nutritious than their conventional counterparts, with 74% identifying nutritional benefits as a major factor influencing their choices. This aligns with findings by Ahmed and Ali (2021), who emphasize the role of perceived nutritional advantages in shaping consumer preferences. However, it is worth noting that scientific evidence on the nutritional superiority of organic food remains mixed, as highlighted by Smith-Spangler et al. (2012). This discrepancy underscores the need for clear communication of evidence-based benefits to reinforce consumer trust and dispel misconceptions.

Socio-Economic Status

Socio-economic status moderately influenced purchasing behavior, with regression results ($\beta = 0.30, p < 0.005$) indicating that higher-income groups are more likely to prioritize organic food. This finding reflects broader trends in consumer behavior, where affordability and access are often tied to socio-economic disparities. In Dhaka, organic food is predominantly marketed to affluent urban consumers, creating a perception of exclusivity. While this has helped establish a niche market, it also limits the potential for broader adoption. Expanding access through lowercost production methods and targeted marketing to middle-income groups could help bridge this gap.

Social Media Influence

The role of social media in shaping consumer expectations emerged as a significant finding, with regression results ($\beta = 0.33, p < 0.001$) confirming its influence. Social media platforms

serve as powerful tools for raising awareness, building trust, and promoting organic lifestyles. Respondents reported relying on social media for information about organic food, with influencers playing a key role in shaping perceptions. This finding aligns with Smith and Thompson (2020), who emphasize the growing impact of digital marketing on consumer behavior. In Dhaka, where digital connectivity is rapidly expanding, leveraging social media could significantly enhance consumer engagement. However, this also raises the need for credible and transparent marketing practices to avoid misinformation.

Awareness of Benefits

A lack of awareness about the benefits of organic food negatively impacted purchasing decisions, as reflected in the regression results ($\beta = -0.37, p < 0.001$). Approximately 60% of respondents cited limited knowledge as a barrier to purchasing organic products. This finding highlights the importance of educational campaigns and public awareness initiatives in bridging knowledge gaps. Ahmed and Ali (2021) also underscore the role of awareness in driving organic food consumption, particularly in emerging markets. In Bangladesh, addressing misconceptions and providing clear information about the health, environmental, and quality benefits of organic food could significantly enhance consumer engagement.

Implications for Policy and Practice

The findings of this study have significant implications for policymakers, marketers, and other stakeholders in the organic food sector.

Health and environmental campaigns should be prioritized to capitalize on consumer values, while targeted pricing strategies can address affordability barriers. Social media offers a valuable platform for raising awareness and building trust, but it requires credible and evidence-based messaging to avoid skepticism. Additionally, efforts to improve accessibility through streamlined supply chains and certification systems can enhance consumer confidence and market growth.

Broader Context and Relevance

While the findings align with global trends, they also underscore unique local dynamics in Bangladesh, where socio-economic disparities and limited awareness significantly shape consumer behavior. This highlights the importance of tailoring strategies to the specific cultural, economic, and demographic context of the market. The study contributes to the broader discourse on sustainable consumerism by providing actionable insights into the drivers and barriers of organic food consumption in an emerging market. The interplay of health consciousness, environmental awareness, price sensitivity, and social media influence presents both opportunities and challenges for the organic food market in Dhaka. Addressing these factors through targeted interventions can unlock the potential for market growth and contribute to a more sustainable food system. The findings provide a roadmap for future research and practice, emphasizing the need for a multi-dimensional approach to understanding and influencing consumer behavior.

Conclusion

This study analyzes factors shaping consumer behavior toward organic food in Dhaka, Bangladesh, filling a gap in research on emerging markets. Key drivers include health consciousness, environmental awareness, superior taste, quality perceptions, and nutritional value. Barriers like price sensitivity, lack of certification, limited awareness, and access hinder market growth, while social media offers potential for raising awareness. Findings provide actionable insights for stakeholders to promote organic food by improving affordability, establishing trustworthy certification, and leveraging targeted social media campaigns. Addressing these challenges can unlock the sector's potential for healthier lifestyles, sustainability, and ethical consumerism in Bangladesh.

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