

Branding, Trust, and Consumer Behaviour in the Indian Organic Food Market: A Study of Young Urban Consumer

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of branding and consumer trust on the buying behaviour of young urban Indian consumers in the organic food sector. As the organic food industry in India continues to grow at a significant pace, understanding the psychological and emotional drivers behind consumer choices has become crucial for marketers and policymakers. The thesis explores the role of brand identity, packaging, digital marketing, and trust signals, such as certifications, influencer endorsements, and corporate transparency, in shaping consumer decisions. Moreover, consumer trust especially youth population, built through transparency, authentic storytelling, and third-party certification, emerges as a key determinant in repeat purchase and brand loyalty. The research contributes to the growing literature on sustainable consumption and consumer psychology in emerging economies. It offers strategic branding recommendations for organic food companies aiming to deepen market penetration among India's youth. By providing actionable insights grounded in empirical evidence, the thesis bridges the gap between theoretical branding models and real-world consumer behaviour in India's evolving organic marketplace.

Keywords: Urban youth, Organic food market

I. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In the 21st century, consumer preferences are evolving rapidly, especially in urban India, where increasing income, globalization, education, and digital exposure are shaping purchasing decisions. Among these changes, one of the most profound shifts has been the growing demand for organic food products. Organic food—grown without the use of synthetic pesticides, genetically modified organisms (GMOs), artificial fertilizers, or hormones—has gained considerable traction among young Indian consumers who are increasingly concerned with health, sustainability, and ethical consumption.

The Indian organic food market is projected to grow from USD 1.5 billion in 2023 to nearly USD 9 billion by 2032, with an expected compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 21% (IMARC Group, 2024). A significant contributor to this growth is the demographic of urban youth aged 18–30, who are more informed,

brand-conscious, and value-driven than previous generations. This segment is highly influenced by social media, online reviews, and digital brand presence, making branding and trust crucial determinants of purchase behaviour in this market.

Branding in the organic sector is multifaceted. It not only involves visual identity and packaging but also encompasses brand values such as health consciousness, environmental stewardship, and transparency. Trust in branding arises through certifications (e.g., India Organic, USDA Organic), influencer endorsements, consistent product quality, and ethical sourcing practices.

In a market saturated with misleading health claims and greenwashing, establishing brand credibility is pivotal for building consumer trust and driving repeat purchases. This research focuses on understanding how branding and trust influence the purchasing behaviour of young Indian consumers in the organic food industry. By exploring the interaction between brand elements and consumer perceptions, the study provides strategic

insights for businesses aiming to capture and retain the attention of this influential demographic.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Frameworks

A strong theoretical foundation is essential to frame the research questions and interpret consumer behavior in a structured manner. Several theories are relevant to this study:

Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) – Ajzen (1991)

The TPB posits that an individual's behavior is determined by intention, which is influenced by attitude, subjective norms, and perceived behavioural control. In the context of organic food consumption, attitudes (e.g., health and environmental benefits), societal norms (e.g., peer or influencer endorsements), and perceived ease (e.g., price or availability) play a crucial role.

Brand Equity Theory – Keller (1993)

According to Keller's model, brand equity arises from consumer perceptions about brand knowledge, which includes brand awareness and brand image. Higher brand equity leads to increased consumer trust, loyalty, and willingness to pay a premium. For organic products, strong branding can mitigate scepticism and build long-term customer relationships.

Trust Theory – Rousseau et al. (1998)

Trust is the willingness of a consumer to rely on a brand based on the belief in its reliability, integrity, and competence. In organic markets, trust is influenced by certifications, product consistency, transparency in sourcing, and ethical branding narratives.

Branding in Organic Food: A Global and Indian View

Branding is one of the most powerful tools in influencing consumer choice. In the organic sector, it is especially critical due to the intangible nature of product quality and trust.

Role of Packaging and Visual Branding

Packaging plays a pivotal role in building trust and visibility. Studies show that clean design, informative labelling, and sustainable packaging increase perceived value and credibility (Aertsens et al., 2011).

Role of Social Media

Instagram, YouTube, and other platforms serve as primary discovery tools for organic food brands. Influencer marketing helps brands reach younger audiences more authentically (Kapoor et al., 2021). Posts that show transparency, recipes, reviews, and lifestyle integration improve engagement.

Impact of Digital Communities

Online health communities, blogs, and peer discussion forums also affect consumer perceptions. A study by Sinha & Khandelwal (2022) found that millennials often turn to fitness communities before trying new health-related products.

Role of Education and Exposure

College-educated youth are more likely to be aware of organic farming, sustainability issues, and brand ethics. Exposure to documentaries, health blogs, and international brands also shapes expectations and scepticism (Sen & Roy, 2020).

Youth as Trendsetters

Urban youth act as early adopters and influencers in families. Their preferences often trickle up to older generations, affecting long-term consumption trends (Nielsen, 2022).

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Overview

This chapter elucidates the research methodology adopted for investigating the influence of branding on consumer buying behavior in the Indian organic food sector, with particular emphasis on young urban consumers. It delineates the research design, data collection procedures, sampling strategies, research instruments, and data analysis techniques employed. The methodological framework is constructed to ensure the validity, reliability, and ethical integrity of the study, thereby facilitating the generation of robust and generalizable findings (Creswell, 2014).

Research Problem

Despite the promising growth of the Indian organic food market, many brands struggle to convert first-time buyers into loyal consumers. This is partly due to inconsistent branding, lack of transparency, high prices, and scepticism regarding the authenticity of organic claims.

Young consumers, although willing to experiment with organic food, are often confused or mistrustful of the marketing narratives due to unstandardized labelling and a flood of unverified “natural” or “healthy” alternatives in the market.

In an age where consumers rely heavily on digital communication, the traditional branding playbook no longer suffices. Brands that fail to build an authentic identity or establish credibility risk losing relevance among youth who seek more than just product functionality, they seek alignment with values and trust in the source.

Although prior research acknowledges the role of branding in food marketing, few studies have specifically examined how branding and trust jointly affect consumer behaviour in India’s organic food space. Moreover, the role of influencers, packaging, and e-commerce branding strategies in shaping perceptions among urban youth remains underexplored.

Hence, this research aims to address the following core problem:

What is the role of branding and consumer trust in influencing purchase behaviour among young Indian urban consumers in the organic food market?.

Research Objectives

The primary objective of this study is to analyse how branding and trust influence the consumer behaviour of young urban Indians with respect to organic food products.

The specific objectives are:

- To evaluate the role of consumer trust in determining brand loyalty, satisfaction, and advocacy.
- To assess the influence of digital marketing, influencers, and e-commerce branding on organic food perception.

Research Design

Given the complex and multifaceted nature of consumer behavior in the organic food market, a mixed-method research design was employed, integrating both quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

This study adopts an exploratory-descriptive research design (Saunders, Lewis, & Thornhill, 2019), as it seeks not only to describe existing consumer behaviours and perceptions but also to explore new insights into the branding dynamics within the organic food market in India. The integration of both exploratory and descriptive elements ensures a balanced approach conducive to both theory building and practical implications.

Data Collection Methods

Primary Data Collection

- **Surveys:** Data collection was primarily conducted via both online and offline surveys. Online surveys were disseminated through targeted social media advertising, email campaigns, and online consumer panels, allowing broad geographic reach and cost efficiency.
- **Focus Groups:** Conducted in rented venues within metropolitan cities, focus groups were facilitated by trained moderators using a semi-structured guide.
- **In-Depth Interviews:** Selected respondents from the survey sample participated in one-on-one interviews to provide detailed, personalized insights into branding perceptions and buying motivations.

Secondary Data Collection

Secondary data was gathered from authoritative sources including market research reports (e.g., Euromonitor, Nielsen), government publications (e.g., Ministry of Agriculture reports), academic journals, and industry white papers. This secondary information provided contextual background and corroborated primary data findings.

Sample Size

A total of 600 respondents were targeted for the quantitative survey to ensure sufficient statistical power for multivariate analyses, including factor and regression analyses.

For the qualitative component, six focus groups comprising 8–10 participants each, and fifteen in-depth interviews were conducted. These numbers were deemed adequate to reach data saturation, where no new themes emerge.

Limitations

- Potential response bias due to self-report measures.
- Urban-centric sampling may limit generalizability to rural populations.

- Cross-sectional design restricts inference of causality.
- Language and cultural nuances may influence interpretation of survey items.

IV. IMPLEMENTATION

The study presents a comprehensive analysis of the data collected through surveys, interviews, and focus group discussions to understand the impact of branding on the buying behavior of young urban consumers in the Indian organic food market. The chapter systematically explores demographic profiles, descriptive statistics, factor analyses, hypothesis testing, and qualitative themes. It aims to validate the conceptual framework and provide empirical evidence supporting the research objectives.

Response Rate and Data Screening

A total of 600 questionnaires were distributed, with 558 completed and usable responses received, resulting in a response rate of 93%. Data screening involved checking for missing values, outliers, and normality. Less than 2% of data points had missing values, handled by mean imputation. Multivariate normality was assessed through skewness and kurtosis tests, with values within acceptable ranges (skewness $< |2|$, kurtosis $< |7|$) (West, Finch, & Curran, 1995), justifying the use of parametric tests.

Demographic Profile of Respondents

The sample comprised urban Indian consumers aged between 18 and 35 years.

Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Gender		
Male	278	49.8
Female	280	50.2
Age Group		
18-22	150	26.9
23-27	200	35.9
28-32	130	23.3
33-35	78	14.0
Demographic Variable	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Education		
Undergraduate	180	32.3
Postgraduate	300	53.8
Others	78	14.0

Monthly Income

< INR 20,000	120	21.5
INR 20,001–50,000	250	44.8
> INR 50,000	188	33.7

Table 4.1: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents

The gender distribution is nearly equal, and the majority hold postgraduate degrees, reflecting the targeted urban educated demographic. Income levels indicate a diverse economic profile, critical for understanding purchasing power.

Descriptive Statistics of Key Variables

The study measured multiple constructs: Brand Awareness (BA), Brand Trust (BT), Perceived Quality (PQ), Brand Loyalty (BL), and Purchase Intention (PI). Table 4.2 presents the means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's alpha reliability scores.

Variable	Mean	SD	Cronbach's α	
Brand Awareness	4.12	0.68	0.83	
Brand Trust	3.85	0.74	0.87	
Perceived Quality	3.96	0.70	0.85	
Brand Loyalty	3.78	0.75	0.81	
Purchase Intention	3.90	0.69	0.89	

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics and Reliability

All scales demonstrate good internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha > 0.8$), confirming reliability of measurement.

Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA)

EFA was performed to identify underlying dimensions among branding-related items. Using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation, Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy was 0.89, and Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant ($\chi^2 = 2387.45$, $p < .001$), indicating suitability for factor analysis.

Five factors emerged with eigenvalues > 1 , explaining 72.3% of the total variance:

1. Brand Awareness
2. Brand Trust
3. Perceived Quality
4. Brand Loyalty
5. Purchase Intention

Factor loadings ranged between 0.62 and 0.87, confirming construct validity.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA validated the measurement model. The fit indices indicated good model fit: $\chi^2/df = 2.05$, CFI = 0.95, TLI = 0.94, RMSEA = 0.049 (Hu & Bentler, 1999). All factor loadings were significant ($p < 0.001$), ranging from 0.65 to 0.88, confirming convergent validity.

V. RECOMMENDATIONS

Research Findings

In light of the findings and discussions presented in the previous chapters, this section outlines strategic, actionable recommendations for businesses operating in the Indian organic food sector. These guidelines aim to translate empirical insights into practice-oriented strategies that address the current consumer expectations and market dynamics.

- Develop a core brand story that highlights the brand's origin, sourcing philosophy, and community impact. For instance, showcasing the journey from organic farms to table.
- Ensure consistency of messaging across all consumer touchpoints—including packaging, social media, websites, and point-of-sale materials.
- Include certifications and ingredient transparency prominently.
- Implement QR codes for traceability, allowing consumers to view the source of ingredients, farming practices, and even farmer profiles
- Use educational formats—e.g., “3 reasons to switch to organic” or “Why our brand uses QR code traceability”.
- Incorporate trending sounds and visual effects to improve reach while maintaining brand identity

Mental health remains a critical safety issue in aviation. Industry efforts combined with societal acceptance of mental health will better support professionals in seeking help.

VI. CONCLUSION

The Indian organic food market is undergoing a profound transformation driven by shifting consumer values, digital penetration, and a rising demand for sustainable and ethical products. The strategic

recommendations outlined above are not one-size-fits-all checklists but guiding frameworks that businesses can adapt based on their scale, market positioning, and consumer segments.

To succeed, brands must think beyond the transactional and focus on relational branding—building meaningful, values-driven connections with consumers. This requires a harmonious blend of authenticity, digital fluency, innovation, and operational excellence. In doing so, organic food businesses can not only capture market share but also contribute to the broader goals of public health, environmental sustainability, and conscious consumption.

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