

"Digital Cultivation: Examining the Impact of Electronic Word of Mouth on the Marketing Dynamics of Organic Products in the Modern Era"

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ABSTRACT

The organic products market is witnessing a transformative shift in the digital era, where Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) plays a pivotal role in shaping consumer perceptions and influencing purchasing decisions. This research paper delves into the intricate relationship between eWOM and the marketing dynamics of organic products in the modern landscape. With a focus on the global trend towards healthier living and sustainable practices, the study aims to unravel how digital cultivation through eWOM channels impacts consumer behaviour, trust, and engagement within the organic products sector. The literature review provides a foundation by exploring the nexus of eWOM, organic products marketing, and the unique challenges and opportunities in this domain. Drawing from case studies and current trends, the paper examines successful eWOM campaigns, shedding light on effective strategies employed by marketers in promoting organic products. Key findings highlight the significant influence of eWOM on consumer perceptions of organic products authenticity, quality, and environmental sustainability. The analysis also uncovers challenges and limitations in leveraging eWOM, such as misinformation and managing online reputation. The role of social media platforms, online reviews, and influencers in disseminating eWOM within the organic products market is explored, providing practical implications for businesses seeking to enhance their digital marketing strategies.

Keywords: Organic products, Sustainable agriculture, Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM), Digital cultivation

INTRODUCTION

The term "organic" refers to the way agricultural products are grown and processed. While the regulations vary from country to country, in the U.S., organic crops must be grown without the use of synthetic herbicides, pesticides, and fertilizers, or bioengineered genes (GMOs). Organic livestock raised for meat, eggs, and dairy products must be raised in living conditions accommodating their natural behaviours (such as the ability to graze on pasture) and fed organic feed and forage (Kulmala et. al., 2013). They may not be given antibiotics, growth hormones, or any animal by-products. Studies comparing the nutrient content of organic and non-organic foods have had mixed results. This is most likely due to natural variation in food handling and production. However, evidence does suggest that foods grown organically may be more nutritious.

The demand for organic products has been significantly increasing every year, and these products have been traditionally sold via a traditional market. However, the widespread use of the Internet represents a new way of selling these products and has generated many new channels for advertising and marketing engagement (Kumar & Pandey, 2023).

Nevertheless, one of the primary challenges is to create positive electronic word-of-mouth (eWOM). Accordingly, this paper investigates the effect of relationship quality practices (customer satisfaction, customer trust, and customer commitment) on eWOM communication in terms of organic products purchases. It was found that both customer satisfaction and customer trust were related positively to positive eWOM communication. However, the literature did not support customer commitment to positive eWOM communication. Therefore, this means that a higher level of customer satisfaction and trust are instrumental in creating a higher level of positive eWOM communication.

Accordingly, this paper provides insights related to the roles of relationship quality practices in positive eWOM communication that could be useful for entrepreneurs in the market. The findings from this study may also be applicable to other emerging economies (such as those in Asia). Finally, there are other challenges inherent with eWOM communication, which primarily uses digital media to attract, engage, and convert virtual visitors to customers. Therefore, further research may explore these challenges.

Historical Background of Organic Farming in India

Historically, organic farming in India can be traced back to ancient agricultural practices deeply rooted in traditional wisdom and sustainable approaches. Before the advent of modern agricultural methods, Indian farmers relied on natural

and organic techniques, emphasizing the use of organic manure, crop rotation, and companion planting. The ancient texts such as the Vedas and traditional agricultural treatises like "Krishi Parashara" highlight the significance of ecological balance and harmony with nature in farming practices (Kulmala et. al., 2013). Over centuries, diverse agroecological systems evolved across different regions of India, reflecting the rich biodiversity and cultural diversity of the country.

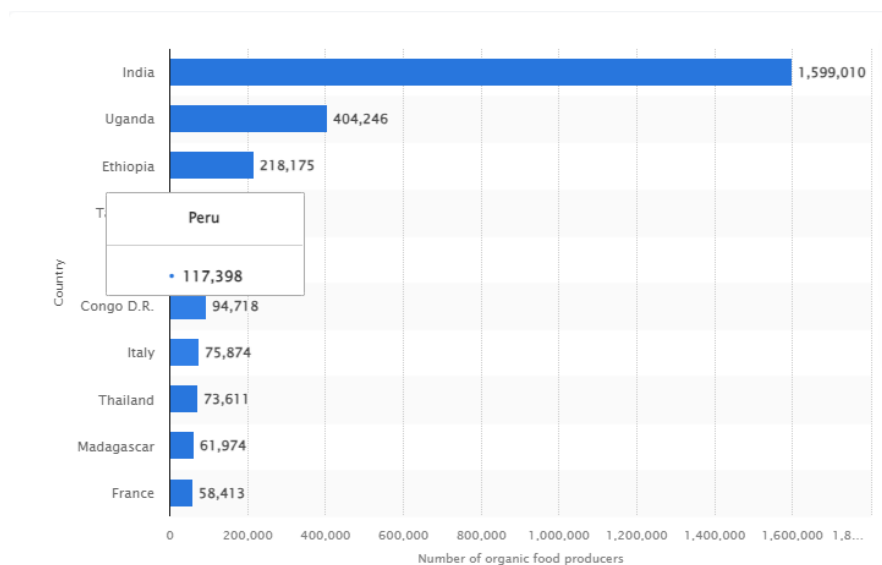
In the mid-20th century, as the Green Revolution swept through India, there was a notable shift towards intensive farming practices that heavily relied on chemical fertilizers and pesticides. While these methods initially led to increased yields, concerns about soil health, environmental degradation, and the long-term sustainability of agriculture started to emerge (Scuderi et. at., 2019). In response to these challenges, a resurgence of interest in organic farming gained momentum in the late 20th century and early 21st century.

The formalization of organic farming in India began with the establishment of organizations and initiatives promoting sustainable agriculture. The National Program for Organic Production (NPOP) was introduced in 2000 by the Government of India, providing a regulatory framework for the certification of organic products. This marked a pivotal moment in the history of organic farming, offering a structured approach to ensure the authenticity of organic products.

In recent decades, there has been a growing awareness and acceptance of organic farming principles among farmers, consumers, and policymakers in India. Government initiatives, subsidies, and certification programs have further encouraged the adoption of organic practices. Today, India stands as one of the leading countries in the world in terms of organic agricultural land, with a diverse range of organic products contributing to the global organic market. The historical journey of organic farming in India reflects a return to traditional, sustainable practices, with an increasing recognition of the importance of ecological balance and the long-term health of both the soil and the people.

India has a great deal of potential to produce all types of organic products, due to its diverse agro-climatic conditions.

India continues to have the most producers of organic food in the world followed by Tanzania and Ethiopia. The demand for organic food is increasing and is expanding quickly, ensuring significant profitability in the future. The consumption of organic food and drinks has increased in the past few years as a result of economic growth, higher purchasing power, and growing interest in the potential health and wellness benefits of organic food products (Sharma & Singla, 2019). As a result, the market size of organic food was estimated to be 64 billion Indian rupees in 2025. As per the Statista report in 2021 India was the leading organic food producing country in the world, measured by number of producers. In that year, India had almost 1.6 million organic food producers, which is more than the number of all organic food producers in the other nine leading countries in the world combined



Source: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/244522/leading-global-organic-food-producing-countries-by-number-of-producers/>

Organic Agriculture

Among the 187 nations that practice organic agriculture, India holds a special place. With 9.12 million acres, India is home to 30 percent of all organic producers globally. Likewise, the major Indian states with areas under organic cultivation are Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, and Maharashtra.

Foods cultivated organically are rich in antioxidant levels and micronutrients and devoid of toxic chemicals, fertilizers, and pesticides. Not only does the organically grown food taste better but also adds to a healthy environment and is ecologically balanced. Oil seeds and fibre are the most produced organic food products in India (Zayed et. al., 2022). Moreover, organic farming is one of the best ways to reduce toxic chemicals' usage while simultaneously ensuring food security and improving farmers' livelihoods. This will in turn lead to the promotion and improvement of the health of the agroecosystem in India.

Consumer Market Trends

Indian consumers' main concerns nowadays are food safety and quality. The COVID-19 pandemic has altered the public perception of organic food, emphasizing food safety and nutrition for a strong immune system.

For this reason, the primary reason for the purchase of organic food products among Indian consumers was that organic products are healthier and more nutritious. On the other hand, some consumers found the products to be too expensive.

While vegetables and fruits were the most preferred organic food products followed by milk and dairy products.

However, domestic organic food consumption is driven by a growing middle class with more disposable income, fast urbanization, increased food safety concerns, and a growing segment of consumers who embrace a healthy lifestyle.

Since organic food products are pricey and are therefore frequently marketed to the high-income urban population.

Objectives

1. To examine the factors influencing consumer trust in eWOM for organic products.
2. To Identify challenges associated with leveraging eWOM in the marketing of organic products.

Factors Influencing consumer trust in eWOM for Organic Products	Description
Credibility of the Source	Consumers are more likely to trust eWOM when it comes from credible sources. This includes reputable review websites, well-known influencers in the organic and sustainable living space, and testimonials from individuals with recognized expertise or authority in the field.
Authenticity of Online Reviews	The authenticity of online reviews significantly influences consumer trust. Genuine reviews, especially those with detailed and specific information, are perceived as more trustworthy. Consumers are often skeptical of overly positive or negative reviews that lack substance.
Consistency Across Platforms	Consistency of eWOM across various online platforms reinforces trust. If positive information about a product or brand is consistently echoed across multiple channels, consumers are more likely to perceive it as reliable and genuine.
Attitude	Attitudes are formed as a result of an individual's beliefs that a product has certain attributes. Thus, a consumer who receives positive information about a certain product or brand can develop favourable beliefs about it which will result in a change in attitude. These claims were also supported in the literature that examined the role of word of mouth in changing consumers' attitudes . We argue that consumers' who receive positive information about organic food on online platforms from others tend to develop positive attitudes towards organic food consumption.
Subjective Norms	Consumers' subjective norms refer to their belief that other consumers who are important to them will approve or support their consumption actions. consumers are exposed to a huge amount of

	information from others on online platforms and social media about their consumption and purchasing behaviours, which results in individual's knowledge about what others are consuming and what they are purchasing.
Perceived Behavioural Control	e-WOM play a critical role in enhancing consumers' environmental concern. Literature indicated that social media provides new opportunities for consumers to collect knowledge that is valuable for environmental sustainability. Media can provide an opportunity for the public to learn more about environmental issues. Another one of the strongest motives for organic food consumption is environmental protection.
Environmental Concern	The rapid penetration of social media and e-WOM has enhanced the awareness of consumers about healthy consumption behaviours. For instance, many articles in the marketing field have argued that the information that consumers are exposed to on social media has had a major impact on their desire to consume healthier food.
Health Consciousness	Consumers' consciousness about the health benefits of organic food can direct their purchase intention towards it. Health consciousness and food safety concerns are major drivers that direct the purchase intention of consumers towards organic food. Because organic food is seen by many consumers as healthier than inorganic food products, we argue that many consumers choose organic food because of its health benefits

(Source: Compiled by Researchers from Literature)

Challenges

Leveraging Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) in the marketing of organic products presents several challenges that marketers and businesses must navigate to effectively connect with consumers in the digital landscape. One primary challenge involves the potential for misinformation and lack of control over the narrative. In the age of social media and online reviews, negative information can spread rapidly, impacting the reputation of organic products. Another challenge stems from the diverse and evolving nature of digital platforms. Different social media channels and online review platforms require tailored strategies, and staying updated with the latest trends and algorithms is essential. Moreover, the credibility of eWOM sources can be a challenge, as distinguishing authentic reviews from biased or manipulated content becomes increasingly complex. The prevalence of fake reviews and paid endorsements can undermine the credibility of organic products marketing efforts. Additionally, the digital landscape is saturated with information, making it challenging for organic products messages to stand out amidst the noise. Marketers must find innovative ways to capture consumer attention and foster engagement. Furthermore, the lack of a standardized approach to eWOM in the organic products sector poses a challenge, as varying certification standards and labelling practices may confuse consumers and hinder the establishment of a cohesive industry image. Lastly, ensuring the privacy and security of consumer data in the digital realm is paramount, and any perceived misuse of personal information can erode trust. Navigating these challenges requires a strategic and adaptive approach to eWOM marketing in the organic products sector, addressing the nuances of the digital landscape while upholding the values of authenticity, transparency, and environmental responsibility.

Suggestion for marketing of organic products

In the realm of marketing organic products, effectively harnessing Electronic Word of Mouth (eWOM) offers a myriad of opportunities. A key strategy is to encourage and amplify positive customer experiences through various online platforms. Actively engaging with consumers on social media, review websites, and other digital channels not only fosters a sense of community but also allows for real-time responses to queries or concerns. Collaborating with influencers who align with the values of organic living and sustainability can extend the reach of eWOM, providing authentic endorsements that resonate with diverse audiences. Implementing customer testimonials on official websites and social media pages serves to build trust by showcasing firsthand experiences. Additionally, leveraging user-generated content, such as photos and videos of consumers enjoying organic products, creates an organic and relatable narrative. It's crucial to maintain transparency regarding farming practices, certifications, and product attributes to

enhance the credibility of eWOM. Emphasizing the health benefits, environmental impact, and ethical considerations associated with organic products can further enhance the persuasive power of eWOM in promoting organic products. Ultimately, a holistic and strategic approach to eWOM, coupled with a commitment to authenticity and consumer engagement, can significantly bolster the success of organic products marketing in the digital age.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this research contributes to the evolving discourse on the intersection of eWOM and organic products marketing, offering valuable insights for marketers, policymakers, and industry stakeholders. As the organic sector continues to evolve in the digital age, understanding the nuances of eWOM becomes imperative for building trust, fostering consumer engagement, and driving the sustainable growth of the organic products market. It was found that both customer satisfaction and customer trust were related positively to positive eWOM communication. However, the evidence did not support customer commitment to positive eWOM communication. Therefore, this means that a higher level of customer satisfaction and trust are instrumental in creating a higher level of positive eWOM communication.

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