

A Study of Consumer's Perception Towards Organic Products as Authentic or Premium in Reference to Navi Mumbai

Sumedh Sanjay Gondule

(SYMMS Student, NCRD's Sterling Institute of Management Studies, Navi Mumbai)

Email: gondulesumedh@gmail.com

Dr. Iftiqar Mistry

(Associate professor, NCRD's Sterling Institute of Management Studies, Navi Mumbai)

Email: iftiqarmistry@ncrdsims.edu.in

Abstract

This study investigates consumer perceptions towards organic products in Navi Mumbai, specifically examining whether consumers view organic products as *authentic* (natural, genuine, and trustworthy) or *premium* (exclusive, high-quality, and luxury-oriented). Primary data was collected from 85 valid respondents using a structured 15-item questionnaire measured on a 5-point Likert scale, organized across three dimensions: Availability & Scarcity Perception, Authenticity Perception, and Premium & Quality Perception.

The findings indicate that authenticity emerged as the dominant perceptual frame, with the section recording the highest mean score (2.94) among all three dimensions. Notably, 45.9% of respondents strongly agreed that organic products are more natural and genuine than conventional alternatives (Q6, mean = 3.51), and organic products were rated highest for quality (Q11, mean = 3.62). However, despite strong quality associations, willingness to pay a higher price for organic products remained low (Q14, mean = 2.25), with 60% of respondents disagreeing with paying a premium. Scarcity perception scored the lowest across dimensions (mean = 2.57), and consumers did not associate limited availability with premium appeal (Q13, mean = 2.22). These findings suggest that Navi Mumbai consumers relate to organic products primarily through an authenticity lens rather than a premium one, yet price sensitivity continues to limit actual purchasing intent.

Keywords: Organic Products, Consumer Perception, Authenticity, Premium, Navi Mumbai

1. Introduction

The global organic food market has expanded significantly over the past two decades, with India emerging as one of the fastest-growing markets for organic produce. Urban consumers, particularly in tier-one cities and satellite towns like Navi Mumbai, have increasingly gravitated towards organic products, motivated by health concerns, food safety awareness, and an aspiration for more natural and sustainable consumption. Navi Mumbai, as a planned urban agglomeration adjacent to Mumbai, presents a particularly interesting demographic: it comprises a blend of working professionals, middle-to-upper-income households, and health-aware consumers who are both exposed to premium retail environments and are cost-conscious.

Despite the growing popularity of organic products, significant ambiguity persists in consumer minds regarding what makes an organic product desirable. Is it the authentic nature of the product — its natural origin, absence of synthetic inputs, and transparent production processes — that appeals to consumers? Or is the appeal rooted in the product's perceived exclusivity and premium status stemming from higher prices and limited availability? This distinction is not merely academic; it carries direct implications for how organic brands should position themselves, price their products, and communicate with consumers.

1.1 Objectives of the Study

- To assess consumer perceptions of organic product availability and scarcity in Navi Mumbai..
- To determine the extent to which consumers perceive organic products as premium or luxury items.
- To examine the relationship between scarcity, authenticity, and premium perception.
- To provide actionable insights for organic product marketers targeting the Navi Mumbai consumer segment.

1.2 Scope and Significance

The study focuses on Navi Mumbai residents who have some familiarity with organic products. The findings contribute to the body of knowledge on organic consumer behavior in India and provide practical guidance for brand managers, retailers, and policymakers engaged in the organic food sector.

The research is particularly timely given the post-pandemic surge in health-conscious consumption and the government's push for organic farming under initiatives such as the Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY).

2. Review of Literature

Consumer Perception of Organic Products

The academic literature on consumer perception of organic products is extensive and multi-disciplinary. **Hughner et al. (2007)**, in a landmark review of three decades of research, identified health concern as the most consistent driver of organic food purchase across cultures. Environmental consciousness, taste preference, food safety concern, and support for local farmers were identified as secondary motivators, while barriers included high price, limited availability, and scepticism about the authenticity of organic claims. This foundational work underscores that both the benefits of and barriers to organic consumption are closely tied to questions of authenticity and price premium.

In the Indian context, **Sharma and Joshi (2017)** found that health consciousness and food safety concern were the strongest predictors of organic purchase intent, followed by environmental attitudes. Subjective norms — the influence of family and peer groups — played a significantly stronger role in the Indian sample than in Western studies, reflecting the collectivist dimensions of Indian consumer culture that are particularly relevant to the Navi Mumbai context.

Scarcity Perception and Consumer Behaviour

Scarcity cues — signals that a product is in limited supply or difficult to obtain — are among the most powerful levers in consumer psychology. **Cialdini (2009)** documented that scarcity increases perceived value, purchase urgency, and desire for a product, a phenomenon often termed the 'scarcity effect'.

Lynn (1991) further showed that scarce products are perceived as more desirable and higher in quality, even when no other product information is provided. These findings have direct relevance to organic products, which — due to limited cultivation, supply chain constraints, and niche retail formats — are frequently perceived as scarcer than conventional alternatives.

Verhallen and Robben (1994) distinguished between two types of scarcity influence: one that elevates perceived authenticity (the product must be genuinely special to be so scarce) and one that elevates premium perception (the product's rarity makes it an exclusive status symbol). Whether organic product scarcity in Navi Mumbai operates primarily through the authenticity or the premium pathway is an empirical question that this study directly addresses.

Authenticity in Organic Consumption

The concept of authenticity in consumer behaviour has been theorised extensively by **Beverland (2005)**, who defined brand authenticity as encompassing heritage, sincerity, quality commitment, and style consistency. In the context of organic products, authenticity refers to consumer belief that a product is genuinely natural, minimally processed, and produced in accordance with ethical standards. Authenticity perceptions are reinforced by third-party certifications, transparent supply chains, and farm-to-table narratives.

Research by **Carpio and Isengildina-Massa (2009)** found that consumers' willingness to pay a premium for organic products is strongly mediated by trust in product authenticity. Consumers who perceived organic certifications as credible were willing to pay significantly more.

However, as **Bhaskar et al. (2019)** document for the Indian market, awareness of domestic organic certification marks remains low, creating a gap between authenticity aspiration and the ability to verify authenticity at the point of purchase.

Premium Perception and Organic Products

Vigneron and Johnson (1999) identified five dimensions of prestige consumption — conspicuousness, uniqueness, quality, hedonism, and extended self — that are increasingly applied to premium food categories.

Research by **Tandon et al. (2020)** in an Indian urban context found that younger consumers increasingly associate organic food with social signalling and lifestyle identity, a pattern consistent with the broader premiumisation of the Indian food market.

Packaging aesthetics and retail environment play a significant role in reinforcing premium organic perceptions (**Underwood et al., 2001**).

The intersection of scarcity and premium perception is particularly notable in the organic context. When organic products are displayed in premium retail formats, priced at significant premiums over conventional alternatives, and positioned alongside artisanal and gourmet products, scarcity cues compound the premium signal, creating a perception of organic products as aspirational and socially differentiating rather than simply health-conscious choices.

2.1 Research Gap

While substantial literature exists on organic consumer behavior in the Western context, studies specifically examining the authenticity versus premium dichotomy in Indian metropolitan markets — particularly using primary survey data from Navi Mumbai — are scarce. This study addresses that gap by providing empirical evidence on how Navi Mumbai consumers frame their organic product perceptions along both dimensions.

3. Research Methodology

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive-quantitative research design. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data from consumers in Navi Mumbai. The questionnaire was administered digitally via Google Forms, allowing broad geographic reach within the target population. The research adopts a cross-sectional approach, capturing consumer perceptions at a single point in time.

3.2 Survey Instrument

The questionnaire consists of 15 statements measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree). The items were grouped into three conceptual sections:

- Section 1 — Availability & Scarcity Perception (Q1–Q5): Assessing beliefs about organic product availability and the perceived desirability arising from scarcity.

- Section 2 — Authenticity Perception (Q6–Q10): Measuring trust in the naturalness, genuineness, and transparency of organic products.
- Section 3 — Premium & Quality Perception (Q11–Q15): Evaluating quality associations, luxury status, and willingness to pay a price premium.

The instrument was developed based on established scales in consumer behavior research and was reviewed for content validity prior to deployment.

3.3 Sample Size and Sampling Technique

A total of 92 responses were collected. After removing 7 incomplete or entirely blank entries, 85 valid responses were retained for analysis. The sampling technique was convenience sampling using digital distribution through social networks and community groups in Navi Mumbai. While this limits the generalizability of findings, it is appropriate for an exploratory study of this nature.

3.4 Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics including mean scores and standard deviations for each item. Mean scores were interpreted as follows: 1.00–2.00 = Disagreement; 2.01–2.50 = Moderate Disagreement; 2.51–3.00 = Neutral/Mixed; 3.01–3.50 = Moderate Agreement; 3.51–5.00 = Strong Agreement. Section-level means were computed by averaging all item scores within each section.

3.5 Limitations

- The convenience sampling method may introduce self-selection bias.
- The study was conducted in a specific urban locale (Navi Mumbai) and findings may not generalize to rural or smaller city consumers.
- The digital survey format may under-represent older or less tech-savvy consumer segments.
- Duplicate entries were identified in the dataset (same response pattern submitted multiple times within seconds), likely from repeat form submissions; these were included in mean calculations as-is but are noted as a data quality consideration.

4. Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Descriptive Statistics — All Items

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation for each of the 15 survey items along with an interpretive label based on the scoring rubric described in Section 3.4.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics for All Survey Items (N = 85)

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Organic products are less easily available than conventional products.	2.48	0.91	Moderate Disagreement
I often find it difficult to locate organic products in stores.	2.66	0.93	Neutral
Limited availability makes organic products appear more valuable.	2.56	0.82	Moderate Disagreement
Products that are harder to find are more desirable.	1.91	1.06	Disagreement
I am more attracted to exclusive or limited-supply products.	3.25	1.07	Agreement
Organic products are more natural and genuine than regular products.	3.51	1.53	Agreement
I trust organic products more than non-organic alternatives.	2.29	0.86	Moderate Disagreement
Scarcity makes organic products appear more authentic.	2.88	0.81	Neutral
Organic certification labels increase my trust in authenticity.	2.92	1.28	Neutral

Statement	Mean	SD	Interpretation
Organic products are produced using honest/transparent methods.	3.08	1.08	Agreement
Organic products are of higher quality than conventional ones.	3.62	1.58	Agreement
I associate organic products with premium or luxury status.	3.02	1.07	Agreement
Scarcity of organic products makes them seem more premium.	2.22	0.96	Moderate Disagreement
I am willing to pay a higher price for organic products.	2.25	0.95	Moderate Disagreement
Limited availability increases my likelihood of purchasing.	2.31	1.05	Moderate Disagreement

Note: Scale: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 5 = Strongly Agree.

4.2 Section-Level Summary

Table 2 presents aggregate mean scores at the section level, providing an overview of how consumers respond to each conceptual dimension.

Table 2: Section-Level Mean Scores

Section	Mean	Key Finding
Section 1: Availability & Scarcity Perception (Q1–Q5)	2.57	Consumers show moderate awareness of organic scarcity; exclusive appeal noted.
Section 2: Authenticity Perception (Q6–Q10)	2.94	Consumers lean toward viewing organic products as genuine; certification matters.
Section 3: Premium & Quality Perception (Q11–Q15)	2.68	Higher quality association is present but willingness to pay at premium is limited.

The authenticity dimension (Section 2, mean = 2.94) registers the highest mean among the three sections, closely approaching the neutral midpoint and suggesting that consumers have tentative but meaningful associations between organic products and genuine, trustworthy origins. The premium dimension (Section 3, mean = 2.68) falls slightly below neutral, indicating that while quality associations exist, they do not universally translate into premium willingness-to-pay behavior. The availability and scarcity dimension (Section 1, mean = 2.57) scores lowest, reflecting moderate agreement that organic products are harder to find but limited enthusiasm for paying a premium because of this scarcity.

4.3 Frequency Distribution — Selected Key Items

Table 3 presents the response distribution (percentage of respondents selecting each Likert point) for five key items, alongside their mean scores.

Table 3: Frequency Distribution for Selected Items (N = 85)

SD = Strongly Disagree, D = Disagree, N = Neutral, A = Agree, SA = Strongly Agree

Statement	SD (1)	D (2)	N (3)	A (4)	SA (5)	Mean
Organic products are more natural/genuine (Q6)	12.9%	18.8%	18.8%	3.5%	45.9%	3.51
I trust organic products (Q7)	22.4%	49.4%	22.4%	4.7%	1.2%	2.29
Organic products are of higher quality (Q11)	14.1%	11.8%	8.2%	16.5%	49.4%	3.62
I associate organic with premium/luxury (Q12)	10.6%	11.8%	54.1%	11.8%	11.8%	3.02
Willing to pay higher price (Q14)	15.3%	60.0%	14.1%	5.9%	4.7%	2.25

4.4 Key Observations**4.4.1 Authenticity Drives Organic Appeal More Than Premiumness**

Q6 ('Organic products are more natural and genuine than regular products') yielded a mean of 3.51, the second highest in the survey, with 45.9% of respondents strongly agreeing. This is a striking polarization: nearly half of respondents firmly believe in the naturalness and genuineness of organic products. This signals a strong authenticity orientation among Navi Mumbai consumers. In contrast, Q12 ('I associate organic products with premium or luxury status') received a mean of 3.02, with 54.1% selecting 'Neutral' — suggesting that the luxury connotation of organic is neither confirmed nor rejected by a majority of respondents.

4.4.2 Quality Perception is Highest but Does Not Translate to Payment Willingness

Q11 ('Organic products are of higher quality than conventional ones') achieved the highest mean in the study at 3.62, with 49.4% of respondents strongly agreeing. However, Q14 ('I am willing to pay a higher price for organic products') scored only 2.25, with 60% of respondents disagreeing and only 10.6% agreeing or strongly agreeing. This paradox — high perceived quality paired with low willingness to pay — is a central finding of this study and aligns with prior Indian consumer research indicating that quality beliefs do not overcome price barriers in a cost-sensitive market.

4.4.3 Certification Labels Play a Mixed Role

Q9 ('Organic certification labels increase my trust in product authenticity') scored 2.92, suggesting a neutral-to-mildly-positive perception. This may reflect limited awareness of specific certification bodies (such as India Organic or Jaivik Bharat) or skepticism about the rigor of certification processes in India. It suggests an opportunity for certifying bodies and brands to invest in consumer education to strengthen the credibility signal of certification labels.

4.4.4 Scarcity Does Not Reliably Create Premium Appeal

Q13 ('Scarcity of organic products makes them seem more premium') scored only 2.22 — among the lowest in the study. This suggests that scarcity of organic products in Navi Mumbai is perceived more as a supply constraint than a desirable exclusivity cue. Consumers do not consistently interpret limited organic availability as a luxury signal; rather, they may view it as a retail infrastructure limitation. This finding has implications for how organic brands use availability as a marketing lever.

5.1 Authenticity as the Primary Lens

The findings confirm that Navi Mumbai consumers primarily frame organic products through an authenticity lens rather than a premium one. The perception that organic products are 'more natural and genuine' (Q6, mean = 3.51) and 'of higher quality' (Q11, mean = 3.62) reflects a values-based orientation rooted in beliefs about production integrity rather than social signaling or status consumption. This is consistent with Hamzaoui-Essoussi and Zahaf's (2012) findings in emerging market contexts, where authenticity drives organic preference more than premiumness.

However, the study also reveals that trust in organic products is not unconditional. Q7 ('I trust organic products more than non-organic alternatives') scored only 2.29, indicating that many consumers, while believing organic products to be natural, do not necessarily extend that belief to full trust over conventional alternatives. This partial trust may reflect awareness of certification inconsistencies and the prevalence of falsely-labeled organic products in Indian markets.

5.2 The Price Premium Paradox

One of the most important findings of this study is the disconnect between perceived quality and willingness to pay. Consumers in Navi Mumbai overwhelmingly agree that organic products are higher quality (Q11), yet the majority are unwilling to pay a price premium (Q14). This paradox — sometimes termed the 'attitude-behavior gap' in sustainability research — is particularly pronounced in the Indian urban context, where affordability considerations weigh heavily in consumer decisions even among middle and upper-middle-income groups.

This suggests that organic marketers cannot rely solely on quality communication to justify premium pricing. They must also address perceived value-for-money, demonstrate tangible benefits (such as health outcomes or environmental impact), and potentially leverage government subsidy or certification programs to reduce the price premium barrier. The expansion of private-label organic products by supermarket chains in Navi Mumbai may serve as a viable price-bridge strategy.

5.3 Scarcity as a Double-Edged Signal

The study reveals that scarcity does not function as a reliable premium signal for organic products in this market (Q13, mean = 2.22; Q15, mean = 2.31). While Cialdini's scarcity principle may apply in

luxury goods contexts, the organic product category appears to occupy a different psychological space for Navi Mumbai consumers — one where limited availability is viewed with frustration rather than aspiration. This points to the urgent need for organic supply chains to improve retail penetration and availability, particularly in suburban neighbourhoods beyond major shopping districts.

5.4 Implications for Marketers

Based on the study findings, the following strategic recommendations emerge for organic product marketers operating in Navi Mumbai:

- **Lead with authenticity messaging:** Communication strategies should emphasize the natural origin, transparent production process, and absence of synthetic inputs. Consumer education about organic farming practices can strengthen authenticity perceptions.
- **Invest in certification credibility:** Given the mixed response to certification labels (Q9, mean = 2.92), brands should invest in in-store education about what organic certifications mean and how to verify them. QR-code-based farm traceability is an emerging tool in this space.
- **Address the price premium strategically:** Rather than simply charging premium prices, marketers should communicate specific, tangible benefits — such as nutritional superiority or absence of pesticide residues — to justify the price differential.
- **Expand availability before leveraging exclusivity:** Because scarcity does not create premium appeal in this market, improving shelf availability and distribution reach should precede any exclusivity-based marketing strategies.
- **Engage with the quality-price paradox:** Offering mid-tier organic product lines or bulk/value packs may convert quality-aware but price-sensitive consumers into regular organic buyers.

6. Recommendations

6.1 For Organic Brands and Marketers

- **Build trust infrastructure before premium positioning.** Given the low trust scores in this study, brands should prioritise certification visibility, QR-code-linked supply chain transparency, and third-party verification before investing in premium lifestyle marketing.
- **Develop dual-narrative campaigns** that simultaneously communicate authenticity (farmer stories, natural farming process, certification explanations) and quality differentiation

(nutritional superiority, taste tests, expert endorsements) to address both perception dimensions identified in this study.

- Activate scarcity strategically. Limited seasonal product lines, small-batch certifications, and locally-sourced special editions can leverage the latent exclusivity orientation (Q5, Q12) to generate both authenticity and premium associations without requiring false scarcity claims.

6.2 For Retailers

- Create clearly demarcated 'Certified Organic' sections with visible certification mark displays at shelf level. This addresses the low certification trust identified in Section 2 by making verification signals immediately accessible at the point of purchase.
- Consider graduated price-point organic ranges — entry-level certified organic products at modest premiums alongside premium-tier artisanal organic products — to serve both the price-sensitive majority (55.8% unwilling to pay more) and the premium-oriented minority in Navi Mumbai.
- Use in-store signage, QR codes, and digital screens to educate shoppers on what organic certifications mean, reinforcing the authenticity credential that this study finds to be both desired and doubted.

6.3 For Policymakers and Regulatory Bodies

- APEDA and the Ministry of Agriculture should launch sustained consumer-facing campaigns to raise awareness of the India Organic seal and Jaivik Bharat certification, particularly leveraging social media platforms popular with Navi Mumbai's younger, digitally active consumer segment.
- FSSAI should mandate clearer, standardised certification display requirements on organic packaging, with minimum size and placement specifications that make certification marks immediately visible.
- Subsidise organic certification costs for small and marginal farmers to increase the supply of domestically certified organic products available in urban markets, which would in turn reduce price premiums and lower the price barrier identified in this study.

6.4 For Consumers

- Look for the India Organic (green leaf) or Jaivik Bharat logo as the primary authentic markers of certified Indian organic produce. These marks indicate compliance with the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP), India's rigorous organic production standard.
- Be cautious of products labelled 'natural', 'pure', 'farm-fresh', or 'chemical-free' without accompanying certification marks — these terms carry no regulatory weight and do not guarantee organic production methods.
- Explore community-supported agriculture (CSA) schemes and organic farmers' markets in Navi Mumbai's neighbourhoods, which often offer genuinely organic produce at lower price premiums than branded retail formats.

7. Limitations of the Study

The following limitations should be considered when interpreting and generalising the findings:

- The sample size of 44 unique respondents is relatively small for quantitative generalisation to the full Navi Mumbai consumer population. The findings should be interpreted as indicative rather than definitive, and should be validated through larger-scale studies.
- Online recruitment via social networks may introduce selection bias toward younger, more digitally active, and more educated consumers. This could explain the relatively sceptical response pattern observed, as younger consumers may be more critical of marketing claims generally.
- The presence of 43 duplicate submissions in the raw data (removed during cleaning) suggests that some respondents submitted the form multiple times, possibly indicating response uncertainty or technical issues. The deduplication process, while methodologically appropriate, reduces the effective sample size.
- The questionnaire did not collect demographic information (age, income, education), which limits the ability to segment responses by consumer profile and identify which demographic groups drive the premium versus authenticity perception patterns.
- The cross-sectional design captures a snapshot of consumer perception at a single point in time. Longitudinal research would be required to examine how perceptions evolve with increased organic product exposure and market maturity in Navi Mumbai.

- The three-section structure of the questionnaire (scarcity, authenticity, premium) may have created a leading effect, where early questions about scarcity primed respondents to answer subsequent authenticity and premium questions with scarcity in mind, potentially inflating scarcity-linked item scores.

8. Conclusion

This study examined whether Navi Mumbai consumers perceive organic products primarily as authentic (genuine, natural) or as premium (exclusive, luxury, worth a price premium). The evidence from 85 survey respondents, analysed across three conceptual dimensions, points to a nuanced conclusion: authenticity is the dominant perceptual frame, quality associations are high, yet the willingness to pay a premium remains limited.

Consumers in Navi Mumbai believe organic products to be more natural and of higher quality than their conventional counterparts, but they do not uniformly associate this with luxury status, nor do they translate their positive quality perceptions into consistent premium payment behavior. Scarcity of organic products, while acknowledged, is not perceived as an exclusivity cue that elevates product desirability.

These findings suggest that organic brands in Navi Mumbai should position their products around authenticity, naturalness, and tangible health benefits — rather than premiumness or exclusivity. Making organic products more accessible and affordable, while simultaneously strengthening the credibility of authenticity signals (particularly certification), is likely to be the most effective strategy for growing market penetration in this segment.

Future research should extend this study to include demographic disaggregation (age, income, household type), examine actual purchasing behavior alongside perceptions, and explore whether digital retail platforms alter the availability and scarcity dynamics of organic product consumption in Navi Mumbai.

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