

# Consumer Trust and E – Wom as Determinants of Organic Food Purchase Intention in Emerging Market

**Mrs. Harmandeep Kaur**, Research Scholar

Department of Applied Sciences and Humanities, SBSSU, Ferozpur

**Dr. Raminderpal Singh**, Professor

Department of School of Business and Commerce Studies, SBSSU, Ferozpur

**Dr. Kiranjeet Kaur**, Professor

Department of Applied Sciences and Humanities, SBSSU, Ferozpur



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## ABSTRACT

Growing interest in sustainable living and health-conscious habits has led consumers to increasingly favour organic foods. Online reviews, social media conversations, and recommendations from peers have sparked a rising trend in e-WOM and consumer trust, which significantly influence decisions about organic products, particularly among younger generation. This study, therefore, investigates how trust and e-WOM affect consumer intentions to purchase organic food items. The research involved a sample of 455 consumers, with data gathered through a standardized questionnaire. The analysis was conducted using the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). Findings from the study

reveal that both e-WOM and consumer trust positively and significantly influence purchase intentions. The results suggest that organic food brands should prioritize managing their online reputation to enhance positive consumer engagement through e-WOM. In order to promote organic foods in mainstream consumer markets, businesses need to better understand e-WOM and consumer trust. This will facilitate the development of strategies that enhance the marketing of organic products

and enhance the building of trust-based relationships with consumers.

**Key Words:** Organic food products, Purchase Intention, Consumer trust, e-WOM

## INTRODUCTION

Across the globe, people are becoming more worried about the safety, quality, and eco-friendliness of food, driven by incidents related to food safety and environmental issues (Teng et al., 2016). Consumers are becoming cognizant about presence of toxic residues in conventional foods, the usage of environmentally harmful insecticides, and manufacturing processes, all of which raise concerns about recent agriculture practices and drive demand for organic foods (Testa et al., 2019). Consumers' rising interest in organic products has resulted in significant advances and improvements in the organic food business (Pestek et al., 2018). In addition, this has been linked to a significant rise in the global sales of organic products (Rizzo et al., 2020). "Organic food" describes products cultivated by farmers who prioritize the utilising sustainable resources and protect the environment by refraining from employing antibiotics and growth hormones in their production

processes. (Rahman, 2016). It is evident that customers who are distressed about food quality have a high purchase intention towards organic food to safeguard their health (Mesnage et al., 2020).

Digital marketing strategies are evolving swiftly, leading to increased dependence on them by both consumers and businesses. A key component of digital marketing is e-WOM, which refers to the readiness of businesses (De Keyzer et al., 2021) or customers (Hartini et al., 2019) to disseminate information and share their knowledge through written content, images, videos, or even electronic applications (Şehirli, 2021) on online platforms. e-WOM platforms enable consumers to share their product experiences, thereby affecting the perceptions and purchasing decisions of potential buyers. As e-WOM communication becomes more prevalent, it provides consumers with a venue to express their opinions and experiences regarding branded products,

## LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Ayyub et al., (2018), consumer trust for retailers significantly influences consumers' intentions to purchase organic food products. Moreover, food-related personality traits may mediate this relationship, indicating a need for e-WOM strategies to improve consumer trust in organic food retailers.

According to Prakash et al. (2023), an empirical assessment of 234 participants' intention through the use of the SEM model indicated that consumer trust has a positive impact on purchase intention. Consumers' expectations are satisfiable when the marketplace is more trustworthy. The result will be an increase in perceived website usage. In order to increase the likelihood of a consumer buying organic food from an online platform, reducing the risks strengthens the relationships and provides reassuring information. However, the study by Zaman et al., (2024) has found consumer trust has negligible impact on purchase intentions, while e-WOM impacts trust but does not directly affect green purchase intentions unless it is accompanied by brand positioning. Thus, both factors may not be significant drivers of organic food purchases on their own.

A recent study by Duong et al., (2025) explore that trust positively enhances the purchase intention towards organic food items, as determined by blockchain-enabled traceability of organic food products. Moreover, positive

potentially boosting purchase intentions for organic products (Chatterjee et al., 2024).

The trust factor is essential in complex food markets, such as organic foods, where consumer decision-making can be influenced (Hamzaoui-Essoussi et al., 2013). It has been shown that greater trust in the system favours the decision to purchase organic food, while a lack of trust in the system negatively impacts the purchasing decision (Nuttavuthisit and Thogersen, 2019). Understanding consumer trust in organic food is crucial, not only because organic products are relatively new, but also because it can be difficult for buyers to confirm if the food they are purchasing is genuinely organic. Zhao et al., (2020) posit that "Trust is fundamental to good business, especially in online trade, since physical meetings do not take place." In addition to e-WOM, trust also increases the intentions of customers to purchase products (Erkan and Evans, 2016).

e-WOM promotes repurchase intentions, creating a synergistic effect on customer behaviour.

Majid et al. (2025) assert that consumer trust in organic products and e-WOM have a significant impact on purchase intentions. Their research reveals that word-of-mouth acts as a mediator between trust and actual purchasing behavior, underscoring its importance in boosting consumer confidence in organic food items.

According to Mouloudj et al. (2025), there is a high favourable correlation between trust, e-WOM, and the purchase intention through green agri-food delivery apps. This suggests that similar effects can be observed when these factors are incorporated into the TPB (Theory of Planned Behavior), substantially concerning the intention to organic food products.

Khan et al. (2025) explore the influence of online platforms on the intentions and behaviours of Indian consumers purchasing organic foods. The study identifies several influential factors, such as health benefits, e-WOM, food safety, environmental concerns and satisfaction, all of which significantly affect purchase intentions, with the exception of trust. To promote organic food purchases, marketers might consider incorporating social media into user-friendly websites. This research specifically investigates the role of online platforms in organic food consumption within the Indian market.

Building on these insights, the present study seeks to understand how consumer trust and e-WOM enhance the buying intention organic food products. By exploring variables like consumer trust and e-WOM in the organic food sector, businesses can craft effective strategies that harness digital influence to promote their products.

### NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

The increasing awareness among consumers about food safety, environmental sustainability, and health concerns is mirrored in the growing popularity of organic food items. As people search foods free from agrochemicals, synthetic pesticides, and insecticides, this shift in consumer behavior resulted to a global surge in demand for organic items. Nevertheless, the organic food market is extremely competitive and necessary potent promotional campaign to entice and retain customers. This study explores the influence of consumer trust and e-WOM on the consumer intention to purchase organic food products. The association of e-WOM and trust boosts the likelihood of consumers opting for organic foods, as it offers additional assurance of product quality and safety.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY:

The overall objective of the study focuses on consumer purchase intentions towards organic food products. The specific objectives are stated as:

1. To study the effect of trust on the consumer purchase intention towards organic food products.
2. To study the effect of e – WOM on the consumer purchase intention towards organic food products.

### PROBLEMS AND HYPOTHESIS

**Hypothesis 1 (H1):** Consumer trust significantly affects the consumer purchase intention towards organic food products.

**Hypothesis 2 (H2):** e – WOM significantly affects the consumer purchase intention towards organic food products.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### Sample of the study

The sample comprised 455 consumers. Convenience and snowball sampling methods were used to collect data.

### Measures

To test the proposed hypotheses, empirical data has been collected through a standardised questionnaire. Study has taken three constructs i.e. two are independent, and one is dependent. The items related to the construct of consumer trust were sourced from Yang et al., (2023), while those for the construct of e-WOM were derived from Zayed et al., (2022). The elements pertaining to consumer purchase intention were taken from Wee et al., (2014). A five-point Likert scale was employed to develop the questionnaire, where 1 represented strongly disagree and 5 indicated strongly agree.

### Data Analysis

The data was examined using Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) version 30 and multiple regression was used to evaluate quantitative data and the results derived from this analysis were subsequently discussed.

## RESULTS and DISCUSSIONS

### Description of the sample

Table 1 shows an overview of the analysis conducted on consumer demographics. The survey participants consisted of 44% men and 56% women. Regarding age distribution, five distinct categories were identified: 38.7% of respondents were aged 31 to 40, 27.9% fell within the 20 to 30 ages, 25.5% were between 41 and 50 years old, 7.5% belonged to the 51 to 60 age group, and a mere 0.4% were over 60 years old. The analysis also show that most of the respondents had an income in the ₹20,000 to ₹30,000 and the majority of the consumers 67.5% were postgraduates followed by graduates (22.4%) and MPhil/PhD (5.3%).

Table 1: The summary of the demographic profiles of the respondents.

Category	Type/Group	No. of Respondents	Percentage (%)
<b>Gender</b>	Male	200	44.0
	Female	255	56.0
<b>Age</b>	20-30	127	27.9
	31-40	176	38.7
	41-50	116	25.5
	51-60	34	7.5
	Above 60	2	0.4
<b>Highest academic qualification</b>	High school	8	1.8
	Secondary School	14	3.1
	Graduation	102	22.4
	Post Graduation	307	67.5
	MPhil/PhD	24	5.3
<b>Monthly Income</b>	Up to ₹20,000	207	45.5
	₹20,001 - ₹40,000	122	26.8
	₹40,001 - ₹60,000	41	9.0
	₹60,001 - ₹80,000	38	8.4
	Above ₹80,001	47	10.3
<b>Marital Status</b>	Married	340	75.0
	Unmarried	115	25.0
<b>Occupation</b>	Student	29	6.4
	Employee	326	71.6
	Professional	80	17.6
	Self-employed	20	4.4

**Table 2:** Multiple regression analysis predicting consumer purchase intention toward buying organic food

Coefficients						
Predictor	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	VIF
	Beta	Std. Error	$\beta$			
(Constant)	8.184	0.835		9.807	0.000	
CT	0.529	0.042	0.475**	12.459	0.000	1.236
E-WOM	0.270	0.032	0.326**	8.542	0.000	1.236
<b>F-Value = 198.625</b>			<b>R = 0.684</b>	<b>R<sup>2</sup> = 0.468</b>		

Note: \*\* p < 0.01

A multiple regression analysis was carried out to check the hypotheses. Based on the findings as shown in Table 2, these two factors (independent variables) account for 46% of explained variance for consumer purchase intention towards organic food items;  $F(5,851) = 198.625$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.468$ . Consumers purchase intentions towards organic food products were notably affected by both variables' consumer trust ( $\beta = 0.475$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ) and e-WOM ( $\beta = 0.326$ ,  $p = 0.001$ ). The result demonstrates that consumer trust and e-WOM have a major impact in influencing consumers' buying intentions towards organic food. These results align with previous studies that have demonstrated a substantial influence of consumer trust on the buying intention towards organic food products (Yang et al., 2022; Pandey et al., 2019; Bai et al., 2019), as well as the influence of e-WOM on the same (Zayed et al., 2022; Al-Swidi et al., 2014). Consequently, hypotheses H1 and H2 are supported.

## CONCLUSION

This study discovered that the impact of consumer trust and e-WOM on consumer buying intentions is significant. Consumer trust and e-WOM significantly enrich the marketing environment. At present, consumers possess high purchasing power, and their

reviews can directly influence other consumers' purchasing decisions. As digital advertising becomes more effective, e-WOM and trust may serve an important role. The development of e-WOM may allow consumers to advance their ability to communicate with each other and influence their purchase intentions online. It is necessary for businesses to focus on building trust with consumers while maintaining an efficient digital presence. To gain the trust of the customers, different marketing activities should be undertaken to substantiate the food's quality. Due to the fast growth of social media, marketing and advertising could become a very influential factor in the future, thereby enabling businesses to better convince potential consumers. Furthermore, it can assist businesses in connecting with potential buyers and assist consumers in influencing and controlling a buyer's trust.

## IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study provide in-depth insight regarding consumers' purchasing intentions from a managerial perspective, and the results can be applied to corporate marketing practices. It is imperative that businesses consider the feedback of their customers and develop promotional strategies and advertising initiatives tailored to their needs. Based on empirical evidence, this study indicates that marketers can prioritise e-WOM in order to maximise the sales percentage of a product and influence consumer

purchase intentions. Lastly, and most importantly, the government should strengthen laws and policies pertaining to certification and logos in order to prevent consumers from misunderstanding organic food labels.

### LIMITATIONS

The study's limitations should be taken into consideration when evaluating its findings, such as the following:

- Several factors were ignored in this analysis, despite their potential significance in shaping customers' views of organic foods. Future studies examining consumer intention to purchase for organic food items should account for other factors, including availability, advertising, government regulation, and distribution.
- It is also imperative to compare the intention of organic food consumers with those of non-consumers and users.
- Future research should examine the variations of e-WOM in relation to different demographics and cultures.

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