

Extended Abstract | *The 1st Research Innovations in Sustainable Marketing: A Global Virtual Symposium*

Unraveling the Urban-Rural Gap in Sustainable Behavior: A Study of Organic Purchase Intention among Indian Consumers

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Extended Abstract: Significant divergence between emerging and developed markets can be observed on socio-economic, behavioral, and cultural aspects. Given these disparities, the untapped potential for sustainable consumption in emerging markets has garnered considerable attention from researchers. India is a prominent organic product producer and exporter among emerging economies; however, the domestic organic market remains in a nascent stage. Nevertheless, India's vast consumer economy presents considerable potential for organic products. Presently, organic demand is concentrated in India's metropolitan areas, which have been the primary focus of research in this field. However, rural areas are home to the majority (around 64%) of India's population, and overlooking latent demand in rural markets would be a significant oversight in capturing the essence of any emerging market. Despite the reduction in the urban-rural divide due to digitalization, increased rural consumer income, and an affinity for improved living standards, it cannot be assumed that consumer behavior influencing factors are similar for both rural and urban consumers. Consequently, an undifferentiated approach may not effectively exploit latent opportunities in rural markets. This necessitates examining unknown aspects such as the viability of a blanket strategy to target rural and urban organic consumers.

Based on the Theory of Planned Behavior, this study aimed to identify the underlying differences between rural and urban consumers regarding the antecedents of organic purchase intention. Data was collected through purposive sampling using self-administered questionnaires from a total of 453 respondents, including 231 urban and 222 rural consumers. Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) was utilized to analyze the data. The results indicate that perceived price significantly influenced organic purchase intention, whereas health consciousness and environmental concern significantly influenced organic purchase attitude. Moreover, organic purchase attitude partially mediated the relationship between antecedents and organic purchase intention.

To examine the differences in the hypothesized relationships between rural and urban consumers, moderation analysis was conducted by dividing the sample based on location. The preceived price to attitude relationship was found to be significantly stronger for urban consumers. Environmental concern was found to be a crucial determinant of organic purchase attitude among urban consumers, while health consciousness was more influential among rural consumers. This may be due to their higher environmental consciousness resulting from the visible consequences of environmental degradation in urban areas. Therefore, the sustain-

able aspects of organic farming could play a vital role in developing positive organic attitudes among urban consumers. In contrast, rural consumers, comprising small-holder farmers, are well-versed in both organic and conventional agricultural practices, and are more aware of the harmful health effects of conventional farming due to direct exposure to modern agricultural inputs. Additionally, rural consumers are more likely to justify the higher prices of organic products in comparison to urban counterparts, given their familiarity with the costs associated with organic farming. Thus, the significantly weaker relationship between perceived price and attitude among rural consumers can be explained.

The present study's findings contribute to the existing body of literature by introducing the moderating effect of location on consumers' organic purchase intention, particularly in the emerging markets. These results provide a valuable resource for policymakers and marketers of organic products seeking to tap into the unexplored and expanding emerging markets. In addition to focusing on sustainability, marketers may also emphasize the health benefits associated with organic products in urban markets by designing awareness campaigns. Furthermore, policymakers can design awareness campaigns targeted at improving the knowledge of urban consumers about the costs associated with organic agriculture and the resulting health and environmental benefits. Conversely, to

capitalize on the vast untapped rural markets, organic products should be made readily accessible to rural consumers, as organic price perceptions have a lesser impact on their attitudes compared to their urban counterparts. This may be achieved by establishing more specialty stores and organizing organic farmers' markets in rural areas, which can help to develop the rural organic market. Such measures would not only promote sustainable consumption but also benefit local small-holder organic farmers, who may lack the resources to sell their produce at distant urban markets.

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Conflict of interest

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