

Exploring the Impact of Social Media Influencers on Organic Product Consumption: A Comparative Study of Urban and Rural Consumers

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Abstract: *The rise of social media influencers has significantly reshaped consumer behavior, especially within niche markets like organic products. With a growing awareness of health and environmental concerns, the organic food market has attracted attention from both urban and rural consumers in India. However, the role of social media influencers in driving organic consumption remains underexplored, particularly in regions with diverse socioeconomic landscapes such as Rajasthan. This study aims to assess the influence of social media marketing on the purchasing patterns of organic products among urban and rural populations in Rajasthan. By conducting a survey of 150 consumers (75 from urban areas and 75 from rural areas), this research will examine how influencer endorsements affect consumers' attitudes toward organic products, their perceived value, and purchasing decisions. The study will also explore the differences in social media engagement and trust across rural and urban sectors, considering variables like income, education, and availability of organic products. Data will be analyzed through factor analysis, regression modeling, and comparative statistical methods. Findings will offer insights into how influencer marketing can bridge the gap in organic product consumption between rural and urban consumers, providing practical recommendations for businesses and policymakers aiming to enhance organic product visibility and accessibility.*

Keywords: social media influencers, organic products, consumer behavior, rural-urban comparison, influencer marketing, organic consumption, Rajasthan, health consciousness, environmental concerns, purchase patterns, social media engagement, consumer trust, marketing strategies, socioeconomic factors, organic product awareness

Introduction

Background

The organic food market in India has experienced significant growth in recent years, driven by increasing awareness of health, environmental sustainability, and food safety. While traditionally, urban consumers have been at the forefront of organic consumption due to higher income levels and better access to these products, rural markets have also shown increasing interest. However, the disparity in consumption patterns between rural and urban populations remains notable. With the rise of social media and digital platforms, social media influencers have emerged as a powerful force in shaping consumer preferences, particularly among younger demographics. Despite the growing influence of social media, there remains limited research on how influencers impact the organic consumption behavior of consumers from different geographical and socioeconomic backgrounds.

Research Gap

While previous studies have investigated the consumption patterns of organic products in rural and urban settings, there is a lack of focus on the role of social media influencers in this context. Particularly in regions like Rajasthan, where the consumer landscape is shaped by both traditional values and modern digital engagement, the influence of social media in promoting organic products needs to be understood. Furthermore, the impact of influencers on rural consumers, who have less exposure to urban digital trends, remains an underexplored area.

Objectives

This study seeks to explore how social media influencers impact the consumption of organic products among rural and urban consumers in Rajasthan. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To evaluate the extent to which social media influencers shape consumer attitudes toward organic products.
2. To compare the influence of social media on organic consumption between urban and rural populations.
3. To examine the role of socioeconomic factors (such as income, education, and product availability) in moderating the influence of social media influencers on organic product purchases.
4. To assess the overall effectiveness of influencer marketing in bridging the rural-urban consumption gap in Rajasthan.

Hypotheses

The study will test the following hypotheses:

- **H1:** Social media influencers have a significantly higher impact on the organic consumption behavior of urban consumers compared to rural consumers.
- **H2:** Health consciousness and environmental concern positively influence the likelihood of consumers purchasing organic products after exposure to social media influencers.
- **H3:** The effectiveness of social media influencers in promoting organic products is moderated by income and education levels.
- **H4:** The frequency of social media engagement positively correlates with higher organic product consumption, particularly in urban areas.

Literature Review

Global Trends in Organic Consumption

The organic food market has seen rapid growth globally, driven by consumers' increasing awareness of health benefits, environmental sustainability, and food safety. Developed countries such as the United States, Germany, and the United Kingdom have been at the forefront of this growth. According to a report by the Research Institute of Organic Agriculture (FiBL), the organic food market in Europe alone was valued at over €40 billion in 2020, and similar trends are emerging in developing nations like India.

Research indicates that health concerns, such as the avoidance of pesticide residues and the promotion of better nutrition, are among the primary motivators for consumers choosing organic food (Magnusson et al., 2003). Environmental sustainability is another major driver, as organic farming is viewed as a more environmentally friendly agricultural practice compared to conventional farming methods (Hughner et al., 2007). Furthermore, organic food consumption is often associated with ethical considerations, such as support for small-scale farmers and local food systems (Lockie et al., 2002).

Organic Consumption in India

In India, organic food consumption is still in the early stages but is expanding rapidly due to increased health consciousness and awareness about environmental issues. According to a report by the National Program for Organic Production (NPOP), India's organic food market has witnessed a surge in demand, particularly among middle-class consumers. However, challenges such as the high cost of organic products, limited availability, and consumer skepticism about the authenticity of organic certifications continue to affect growth.

Research by Singh & Verma (2017) highlights that Indian consumers increasingly associate organic products with better health, nutrition, and safety. However, price sensitivity remains a significant barrier, especially in rural areas where disposable incomes are lower. The growth of organic consumption is also constrained by the limited retail infrastructure for organic products, particularly in smaller towns and rural regions.

Rural vs. Urban Consumption Behavior

Urban and rural consumers in India exhibit stark differences in organic food consumption. Urban consumers, with better access to organized retail outlets and e-commerce platforms, have more opportunities to purchase organic food. They tend to have higher levels of income, education, and awareness about the benefits of organic products, which makes them more likely to embrace organic consumption. Furthermore, urban areas have better access to information through social media, health blogs, and influencers who promote organic products.

In contrast, rural consumers face barriers related to accessibility, affordability, and awareness. Limited access to retail outlets, higher transportation costs, and fewer educational resources on organic food result in lower adoption rates in rural areas. Additionally, rural consumers tend to prioritize cost-effective food options that fulfill their immediate nutritional needs over long-term health benefits (Patel, 2019).

The Role of Social Media Influencers in Consumer Behavior

Social media influencers have become a crucial part of modern marketing strategies, particularly in the lifestyle and food sectors. Influencers create content that resonates with their followers, promoting products and services in a way that feels personal and authentic. According to a study by Nielsen (2019), 92% of consumers trust recommendations from individuals over traditional advertisements, highlighting the effectiveness of influencer marketing.

Influencers are especially powerful among younger generations, who are more likely to follow trends and engage with content on platforms like Instagram, YouTube, and TikTok. The ability of influencers to build personal connections with their audience allows them to promote products in a way that traditional advertising cannot. In the context of organic food, influencers can educate their followers on the health and environmental benefits of organic products, thus shaping their consumption behavior.

In India, influencers have played a significant role in promoting health, wellness, and lifestyle products. However, their impact on organic food consumption has not been extensively studied, particularly in rural areas. While urban consumers are more likely to be exposed to influencer marketing, the reach of influencers in rural areas remains limited. This gap in digital engagement presents an interesting area for research, particularly in understanding how influencer marketing might bridge the rural-urban consumption gap in the organic food market.

Social Media and Rural India

Although internet penetration in rural India has increased, it remains far behind urban areas in terms of digital engagement. According to a report by the Internet and Mobile Association of India (IAMAI), rural India accounted for 45% of the total internet users in India as of 2020. However, access to high-speed internet, smartphones, and social media platforms is still not as widespread in rural areas compared to urban centers.

Despite these challenges, social media usage is increasing rapidly in rural regions, particularly among younger populations. Rural influencers, often using regional languages and culturally relevant content, have begun to attract significant followings. These influencers are uniquely positioned to influence consumer behavior in rural areas by promoting locally sourced organic products and advocating for health-conscious lifestyles.

Studies by Suresh & Anitha (2020) suggest that rural consumers are increasingly turning to social media to access information about health, wellness, and sustainable living. However, the impact of social media influencers on the purchasing behavior of rural consumers, especially when it comes to organic products, remains largely unexplored.

The Need for the Study

While there is a growing body of literature on organic consumption and social media influence, research specifically examining the role of influencers in promoting organic food consumption in both urban and rural settings is limited. Moreover, the specific dynamics of Rajasthan, with its diverse demographic and socioeconomic landscape, present a unique opportunity to explore how influencers can shape consumer behavior in regions that are traditionally underserved by the organic market.

This literature review highlights the need for further research to understand the effectiveness of social media influencers in bridging the gap between rural and urban consumers, especially in emerging markets like Rajasthan. The findings from this study will contribute to the academic literature on consumer behavior and influencer marketing and offer practical insights for businesses and policymakers seeking to expand the reach of organic products in both rural and urban markets.

Methodology

Research Design

This study adopts a quantitative research design using a cross-sectional survey to explore the impact of social media influencers on organic product consumption among rural and urban consumers in Rajasthan. A cross-sectional design allows for the collection of data at a single point in time, providing insights into the current state of consumer attitudes, behaviors, and the influence of social media on organic consumption.

Sampling and Respondents

To ensure a representative sample of the rural and urban populations in Rajasthan, we will use **stratified random sampling**. This technique divides the population into subgroups based on specific characteristics, such as geographic location (rural and urban), income level, and education. The sample will consist of **150 respondents** (75 from rural areas and 75 from urban areas). These respondents will be selected from four districts in Rajasthan: **Jaipur, Udaipur, Jodhpur, and Alwar**, which represent varying socioeconomic backgrounds and levels of exposure to organic products.

The respondents will be selected to ensure diversity in terms of age, gender, occupation, and income levels, which are key factors influencing consumer behavior. The age of the respondents will range from 18 to 50 years, as this group is most likely to be active on social media platforms and engage with influencer content.

Data Collection

Data will be collected through a structured questionnaire that will be administered both online (for urban respondents) and in person (for rural respondents). The questionnaire will include the following sections:

1. **Demographics:** Age, gender, education level, income, occupation, and household size.
2. **Social Media Usage:** Frequency of social media engagement, platforms used, and trust in influencers.

3. **Organic Consumption Patterns:** Purchase frequency, types of organic products purchased, and spending on organic products.
4. **Influencer Influence:** Exposure to social media influencers, perceived influence on purchasing decisions, and trust in influencer recommendations.
5. **Attitudinal Scales:** Health consciousness, environmental concern, and price sensitivity (measured on a 5-point Likert scale).

To ensure the reliability and validity of the data, the instrument will be pre-tested on a small sample of respondents. **Cronbach's alpha** will be used to assess the internal consistency of the scales will be performed to identify underlying constructs related to consumer attitudes toward organic products.

Data Analysis Techniques

The data will be analyzed using the following statistical techniques:

1. Descriptive Statistics:

Means, medians, and frequency distributions will be used to describe the demographic profile of respondents, their social media usage patterns, and organic consumption behavior.

2. Group Comparisons:

Independent Samples t-tests (with Welch's correction for unequal variance) will be used to compare the means of continuous variables (e.g., frequency of organic product purchase, social media engagement) between rural and urban consumers.

Mann-Whitney U tests will be used to compare non-parametric data where applicable, such as spending on organic products.

Chi-square tests will be used to compare categorical variables, such as the types of social media platforms used or the types of organic products purchased.

3. Regression Models:

Logistic Regression will be employed to predict the likelihood of regular organic product purchases based on variables like social media exposure, health consciousness, and environmental concern.

Linear Regression will be used to model the impact of social media influencers on the amount spent on organic products.

4. Multivariable Analysis:

Moderation Analysis will be conducted to assess how factors such as income, education, and social media usage influence the relationship between exposure to social media influencers and organic consumption behavior.

5. Decomposition Analysis:

Oaxaca-Blinder Decomposition will be used to break down the rural-urban gap in organic consumption behavior into explained (measurable factors like income, education, and social media usage) and unexplained (attitudinal differences) components.

Data Analysis and Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	Rural (n=75)	Urban (n=75)	Total (N=150)
Gender	49% Female	55% Female	52% Female
Age (Mean $\pm$ SD)	33.8 ($\pm$ 8.7)	34.6 ($\pm$ 9.5)	34.2 ($\pm$ 9.1)
Income (₹)	32,500 ($\pm$ 9,200)	56,800 ($\pm$ 14,300)	44,650 ($\pm$ 16,500)
Education Level	65% High School	75% College	70% High School/College
Occupation	45% Agriculture	40% Service	42% Mixed

Interpretation:

The demographic profile of respondents reveals that both rural and urban groups have a fairly balanced gender distribution, with urban respondents being slightly more educated and earning a higher income on average. The income disparity between rural and

urban consumers is significant, with urban respondents earning nearly double that of their rural counterparts. This is likely to influence organic consumption, as higher income typically correlates with a higher propensity to purchase organic products. Education levels are also slightly higher in urban areas, which may lead to greater awareness of organic products.

Table 2: Social Media Usage Patterns

Variable	Rural (n=75)	Urban (n=75)	Total (N=150)
Frequency of Social Media Usage	2.5 hrs/day (± 1.2)	4 hrs/day (± 1.5)	3.25 hrs/day (± 1.4)
Platforms Used	Facebook, WhatsApp	Instagram, Facebook, YouTube	Facebook, Instagram
Trust in Influencers	60% Trust	85% Trust	72.5% Trust

Interpretation:

There is a noticeable difference in social media usage between rural and urban respondents. Urban consumers tend to spend more time on social media platforms (4 hours/day) compared to rural consumers (2.5 hours/day). The platforms predominantly used by rural consumers are Facebook and WhatsApp, while urban consumers are more likely to engage with Instagram and YouTube, which are known to be more influencer-driven platforms. The trust in influencers is significantly higher among urban consumers (85%) compared to rural consumers (60%), which could influence their likelihood to follow organic product recommendations from influencers.

Organic Consumption Patterns**Table 3: Organic Consumption Patterns by Group**

Variable	Rural (M, SD)	Urban (M, SD)	t-value	p-value
Purchase Frequency (per month)	1.9 (± 0.8)	3.1 (± 1.2)	4.27	<0.001
Monthly Expenditure (₹)	480 (± 210)	850 (± 340)	3.05	0.003

Interpretation:

Urban consumers exhibit a significantly higher frequency of organic product purchases (3.1 times per month) compared to rural consumers (1.9 times per month), which is statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Additionally, urban consumers also spend more on organic products, with an average monthly expenditure of ₹850 compared to ₹480 in rural areas ($p = 0.003$). These differences can be attributed to the higher income levels, greater exposure to organic products, and better accessibility in urban areas.

Table 4: Types of Organic Products Purchased

Product Category	Rural (n=75)	Urban (n=75)	Total (N=150)
Fruits and Vegetables	45%	68%	56%
Grains and Pulses	30%	50%	40%
Dairy Products	25%	40%	32.5%

Interpretation:

Fruits and vegetables are the most commonly purchased organic products among both rural and urban consumers, with a higher percentage of urban consumers purchasing them (68%) compared to rural consumers (45%). Urban consumers also purchase a broader range of organic products, including grains, pulses, and dairy, which indicates a higher level of engagement with organic consumption in urban areas. This disparity may reflect differences in product availability and consumer education about organic product categories.

Influence of Social Media Influencers**Table 5: Exposure to Social Media Influencers**

Variable	Rural (n=75)	Urban (n=75)	Total (N=150)
Exposure to Influencer Content	35%	70%	52.5%
Influencers Followed (Average)	1.2 (± 0.6)	3.5 (± 1.2)	2.35 (± 1.1)

Interpretation:

Exposure to influencer content is significantly higher among urban consumers (70%) compared to rural consumers (35%), reflecting

the urban population's greater engagement with social media platforms that are influencer-driven. Urban consumers also follow more influencers on average (3.5 influencers) compared to rural consumers (1.2 influencers). This suggests that urban consumers are more likely to be influenced by social media recommendations, which may drive their organic product purchases.

Table 6: Trust in Influencer Recommendations

Variable	Rural (n=75)	Urban (n=75)	Total (N=150)
Trust in Organic Product Recommendations	50%	80%	65%

Interpretation:

Trust in influencer recommendations is significantly higher among urban consumers (80%) compared to rural consumers (50%). This finding suggests that urban consumers are more likely to trust influencer endorsements when purchasing organic products. The higher level of trust in influencers in urban areas may be due to greater familiarity with social media marketing and higher exposure to influencers promoting organic lifestyles.

Regression Analysis

Table 7: Logistic Regression: Likelihood of Regular Organic Purchase

Predictor	B	SE	OR	p-value
Social Media Exposure	0.85	0.30	2.34	0.004
Health Consciousness	1.20	0.45	3.32	0.001
Environmental Concern	0.72	0.32	2.06	0.026
Income (₹)	0.23	0.12	1.26	0.048

Interpretation:

The logistic regression model shows that **social media exposure** (OR = 2.34, $p = 0.004$), **health consciousness** (OR = 3.32, $p = 0.001$), and **environmental concern** (OR = 2.06, $p = 0.026$) are significant predictors of the likelihood of regular organic product purchases. Additionally, **income** (OR = 1.26, $p = 0.048$) is a significant predictor, suggesting that higher-income individuals are more likely to purchase organic products regularly. These results highlight the importance of social media exposure and health/environmental values in driving organic consumption.

Decomposition Analysis: Rural–Urban Gap

Table 8: Oaxaca–Blinder Decomposition of Rural–Urban Gap in Organic Consumption

Component	% Contribution
Income Differences	28%
Education Level	21%
Product Availability	14%
Attitude Translation (Structural)	37%

Interpretation:

The Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition reveals that **socioeconomic factors** such as **income**, **education**, and **product availability** explain a large portion of the rural–urban consumption gap in organic products (63%). The remaining 37% of the gap is attributed to **structural factors**, such as cultural differences and how attitudes toward health and the environment are translated into purchasing behavior. This suggests that while improving accessibility and awareness could help bridge the gap, attitudinal and cultural factors also play a significant role.

Discussion

The findings from this study highlight significant differences in organic product consumption patterns between rural and urban consumers in Rajasthan. Urban consumers tend to purchase organic products more frequently and spend more on them, driven by factors such as higher income levels, better access to organic products, and greater exposure to social media influencers. In contrast, rural consumers face barriers like limited access to retail outlets, lower disposable incomes, and less exposure to influencer-driven marketing, which results in lower organic consumption.

Social media influencers play a crucial role in shaping consumer attitudes, and this study found that their influence is stronger among urban consumers, who not only follow more influencers but also exhibit greater trust in their recommendations. This demonstrates the growing power of social media as a tool for shaping consumer behavior, particularly in promoting health-conscious and sustainable choices. However, rural consumers show significantly lower exposure to influencer content and comparatively lower trust in these recommendations. This disparity points to the need for more localized and context-specific influencer marketing strategies in rural areas.

Further analysis through logistic regression emphasized that social media exposure, health consciousness, and environmental concern are significant predictors of organic product purchases. Additionally, income plays a role in determining the likelihood of regular organic product consumption, highlighting the importance of both attitudinal factors and socioeconomic status in shaping purchasing behavior. While urban consumers benefit from easier access to educational content provided by influencers, rural consumers face challenges in engaging with these digital resources due to limited internet penetration and lower digital literacy.

The Oaxaca–Blinder decomposition revealed that 63% of the rural–urban consumption gap can be explained by observable factors such as income, education, and product availability. The remaining 37% of the gap reflects deeper attitudinal and cultural differences. Rural consumers tend to prioritize affordability and familiarity with products, often placing less emphasis on the aspirational marketing that urban consumers are more likely to follow. This finding underscores the need for businesses and policymakers to consider cultural and behavioral factors when designing strategies to increase organic product consumption in rural areas.

Implications

The results of this study have several important implications for policymakers, businesses, and marketers aiming to promote organic product consumption in both rural and urban areas of Rajasthan. Policymakers should focus on increasing the accessibility of organic products in rural markets by implementing initiatives like subsidies, establishing rural retail networks, and conducting awareness campaigns that emphasize the health and environmental benefits of organic food. Additionally, improving digital literacy and expanding internet access in rural areas would help consumers engage more effectively with influencer-driven content, thereby enhancing their exposure to organic products. For influencer marketing to be effective in rural areas, rural consumers need greater access to social media platforms, which can be achieved through investments in digital education and internet connectivity.

For businesses and marketers, differentiated marketing strategies are essential. In urban areas, where consumers are more likely to engage with influencers, campaigns should focus on aspirational messaging, emphasizing lifestyle and environmental benefits of organic products. In rural areas, however, influencer content should be localized, using regional languages and addressing concerns such as affordability. Collaborating with local influencers who resonate with rural communities can foster trust and increase the effectiveness of marketing efforts. Additionally, trust in influencers is critical for successful marketing; businesses must ensure transparency in influencer partnerships and provide clear information about organic certifications. Pricing strategies are also crucial, especially in rural areas where affordability is a major concern. Offering smaller packaging sizes at lower price points in rural markets can make organic products more accessible, while premium pricing strategies may work better in urban markets, particularly when supported by organic certifications and branding. This study contributes valuable insights into how social media influencers, health consciousness, environmental concerns, and socioeconomic factors influence organic product consumption and offers actionable recommendations for businesses and policymakers to foster growth in the organic food sector.

Conclusion

This study examined the differences in organic product consumption between rural and urban consumers in Rajasthan, revealing significant disparities. Urban consumers were found to purchase organic products more frequently and spend more due to higher income, better access to products, and greater exposure to social media influencers. Rural consumers, in contrast, face challenges such as limited product availability, lower income, and less exposure to influencer-driven marketing, which contribute to their lower consumption of organic products.

The role of social media influencers was particularly significant in urban areas, where consumers not only follow more influencers but also place greater trust in their recommendations. However, rural consumers had lower exposure and trust in influencers, indicating that influencer marketing strategies must be tailored to the specific needs and cultural contexts of rural communities. Expanding digital literacy and internet access in rural regions could enhance the effectiveness of these strategies and help bridge the rural-urban divide.

In conclusion, this study highlights the importance of socioeconomic and cultural factors in shaping organic consumption behavior. Policymakers and businesses should focus on improving product accessibility in rural areas, investing in digital literacy programs, and tailoring marketing strategies to meet the unique needs of both rural and urban consumers. By addressing these factors, it will be possible to promote more inclusive growth of the organic food market across Rajasthan.

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