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SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROFILE AND CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR TOWARDS ORGANIC HONEY: A STUDY OF DEHRADUN DISTRICT, UTTARAKHAND

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ABSTRACT

Organic honey is emerging as a high-value niche product in India, and hill districts such as Dehradun in Uttarakhand possess considerable natural potential for its production and marketing. However, the demand side of this market — who the consumer is and how that consumer actually buys — remains poorly documented. This paper draws on two objectives of a larger field-based study of 120 consumers and 27 market functionaries in the Doiwala and Vikasnagar blocks of Dehradun district: (i) to examine the socio-economic profile of organic honey consumers, and (ii) to analyse their buying behaviour in terms of awareness, information sources, purchase frequency and quantity, place of purchase, brand preference, factors influencing choice, and satisfaction. Percentage analysis, the Chi-square test of association, and Garrett's ranking technique were used. The typical consumer is found to be middle-aged, well-educated, and from a middle-to-upper income household. Awareness of organic honey remains only partial for nearly half the sample, word-of-mouth is the dominant information channel, and perceived purity and seller trust outweigh formal certification as purchase drivers. Household income and educational qualification are both significantly associated with purchase frequency and certification awareness, respectively. The findings point to a clear gap between the district's production potential and the maturity of consumer-side market institutions, particularly around certification and trust-building.

Keywords: Organic honey, consumer behavior, socio-economic profile, Garrett ranking, Chi-square test, Dehradun, Uttarakhand

INTRODUCTION

Consumer interest in organically produced foods has grown steadily across India as concerns over food safety, chemical residues, and health have intensified. Honey occupies a distinctive place within this trend: it is simultaneously a food product, a traditional health remedy, and — increasingly — a lifestyle and wellness purchase. Uttarakhand, and Dehradun district in particular, offers favorable agro-climatic conditions, rich floral diversity, and an existing base of small beekeepers and apiculture enterprises, positioning the district well for organic honey production. Yet the market continues to be constrained on the demand side by uneven consumer awareness, weak certification recognition, and a fragmented mix of branded and unbranded supply reaching the final buyer.

A clear understanding of who buys organic honey and how they go about buying it is a necessary first step before marketing strategies, certification systems, or producer support programmes can be meaningfully designed. This paper addresses that gap by presenting findings on the socio-economic profile of organic honey consumers and their buying behavior, drawn from the first two objectives of a broader thesis-based study on the organic honey market of Dehradun district.

Objectives

The present paper is confined to the following two objectives:

1. To study the socio-economic profile of consumers of organic honey.
2. To analyse the consumer buying behaviour towards organic honey in terms of awareness and preferences.

Brief Review of Literature

Classical consumer behaviour models, including the Engel–Kollat–Blackwell framework, describe purchase decisions as an outcome of need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, and post-purchase evaluation, shaped by cultural, social, personal, and psychological factors. Applied to organic food, a substantial body of Indian and international literature reports that health consciousness and perceived safety are the leading motivations for purchase, while price premiums and limited availability outside large metropolitan markets remain the principal deterrents. Consumer trust in organic certification labels is repeatedly found to be low in developing-country contexts, with buyers relying instead on informal cues such as seller reputation and word-of-mouth. Studies specific to honey show that Indian consumers evaluate the product mainly on purity, taste, and price, and that very few studies isolate organic honey as distinct from honey in general — a gap this study addresses for Dehradun district.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design based on primary data. A multistage stratified random sampling procedure was used to select 120 consumer respondents from two purposively chosen blocks of Dehradun district — Doiwala and Vikasnagar — selected for their concentration of organic honey market activity. Within each block, villages/urban wards were selected at random, followed by random selection of consumer households or individuals who purchase or are aware of organic honey.

Data were collected through a structured interview schedule covering socio-economic characteristics, awareness, information sources, purchase frequency and quantity, place of purchase, brand preference, expenditure, ranked purchase-influencing factors, and satisfaction. The data were analysed using simple percentage and tabular analysis for the socio-economic profile and descriptive buying-behaviour variables, the Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence to examine association between selected socio-economic variables and buying behaviour, and Garrett's ranking technique to convert respondents' rank orderings of purchase-influencing factors into a composite score for comparison.

Note on data: the figures reported below are drawn from the field-survey dataset compiled for the parent thesis (n = 120 consumers). Any revision of the underlying field figures at a later stage of the study should be reflected in an updated version of this paper before submission for publication.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Objective 1: Socio-Economic Profile of Consumers of Organic Honey

This section presents the socio-economic characteristics of the 120 sample consumers surveyed in Doiwala and Vikasnagar blocks of Dehradun district.

Table 1: Age-wise distribution of respondents

Age group (years)	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 30	22	**18.3**
30 – 40	38	**31.7**
41 – 50	34	**28.3**
Above 50	**26**	**21.7**
Age group (years)	**No. of respondents**	**Percentage (%)**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

The largest share of respondents (31.7%) belongs to the 30–40 years age group, followed by the 41–50 years group (28.3%), indicating that organic honey consumption is concentrated among working-age, middle-aged adults rather than younger or elderly consumers.

Table 2: Gender-wise distribution of respondents

Gender	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Male	52	**43.3**
Female	68	**56.7**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

A slightly higher proportion of female respondents (56.7%) was recorded, consistent with women's greater role in household food-purchase decisions.

Table 3: Educational qualification of respondents

Education level	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Up to secondary	14	**11.7**
Senior secondary	24	**20.0**
Graduate	46	**38.3**
Post-graduate and above	36	**30.0**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

A majority of respondents (68.3%) are graduates or hold a post-graduate qualification, indicating that organic honey consumption is currently concentrated among the more educated section of the population.

Table 4: Occupation-wise distribution of respondents

Occupation	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Salaried/Service	44	**36.7**
Business/Self-employed	28	**23.3**
Homemaker	26	**21.7**
Professional (doctor, teacher, etc.)	14	**11.7**
Retired	8	**6.6**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

Table 5: Monthly household income of respondents

Monthly income (₹)	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 25,000	16	**13.3**
25,000 – 50,000	38	**31.7**
50,001 – 75,000	36	**30.0**
Above 75,000	**30**	**25.0**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

The income distribution shows that 55.0% of respondents fall in the middle-to-upper income brackets (above ₹50,000 per month), reinforcing organic honey's positioning as a premium, discretionary food purchase.

Table 6: Family size and type of respondents

Family type/size	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Nuclear family (up to 4 members)	70	**58.3**
Joint family (5 or more members)	50	**41.7**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

Taken together, the socio-economic profile suggests that the typical organic honey consumer in the study area is a middle-aged, well-educated individual from a nuclear, middle-to-upper-income household—a profile consistent with organic-food consumer studies elsewhere in India.

Objective 2: Consumer Buying Behavior towards Organic Honey

This section analyses consumer awareness, information sources, purchase frequency and quantity, place of purchase, brand preference and expenditure, factors influencing purchase decisions, the association between socio-economic variables and buying behaviour, and overall satisfaction.

Table 7: Awareness level about organic honey

Awareness level	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Fully aware (can distinguish organic from conventional)	38	**31.7**
Partially aware (aware of term but unclear on distinction)	58	**48.3**
Not aware	24	**20.0**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

Nearly half the respondents (48.3%) fall in the "partially aware" category, confirming that consumer awareness about what genuinely distinguishes organic honey from conventional honey remains incomplete even among an otherwise well-educated sample.

Table 8: Source of information about organic honey

Source of information	No. of respondents*	Percentage (%)
Family/friends/word-of-mouth	50	**41.7**
Social media/internet	34	**28.3**
Retail shop/shopkeeper recommendation	20	**16.7**
Health articles/doctor advice	10	**8.3**
Advertisement (TV/print)	6	**5.0**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

*Source: Field survey data, n = 120; *single most-influential source recorded per respondent*

Word-of-mouth (family/friends) is the leading source of awareness (41.7%), followed by social media/internet (28.3%). Formal channels such as advertising and health-professional advice together account for a modest 13.3% of first-mention sources, underlining the informal, trust-based nature of information diffusion in this market.

Table 9: Frequency of purchase of organic honey

Purchase frequency	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Weekly/Fortnightly	10	**8.3**
Monthly	36	**30.0**
Once in 2–3 months	44	**36.7**
Occasionally/Festival season only	30	**25.0**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

Table 10: Quantity purchased per occasion

Quantity purchased	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Up to 250 g	34	**28.3**
251 g – 500 g	52	**43.3**
Above 500 g	34	**28.3**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

A majority of consumers (36.7%) purchase organic honey once every 2–3 months, and the modal purchase quantity is the 251–500 g pack (43.3%), suggesting that organic honey is largely bought as an occasional, moderate-quantity item rather than a regular staple.

Table 11: Place of purchase of organic honey

Place of purchase	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Organic/specialty store	32	**26.7**
Supermarket/departmental store	28	**23.3**
Direct from beekeeper/producer	22	**18.3**
Online (website/e-commerce)	24	**20.0**
General kirana/grocery shop	14	**11.7**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

Organic/specialty stores (26.7%) and supermarkets (23.3%) together account for exactly half of all purchases, while online purchase has already captured a notable 20.0% share — a channel worth monitoring for future market development.

Table 12: Brand preference among consumers

Brand/type preferred	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Bee Ready (Bee ready Harvesters LLP)	26	**21.7**
Other local/regional brands	38	**31.7**
National branded honey (organic range)	22	**18.3**
Directly from known local beekeeper (unbranded)	34	**28.3**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

Table 13: Monthly expenditure on organic honey

Monthly expenditure (₹)	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Below 200	28	**23.3**
200 – 400	46	**38.3**
401 – 600	30	**25.0**
Above 600	16	**13.3**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

A large share of purchases happens directly from a known local beekeeper on an unbranded basis (28.3%), alongside a combined branded share (Bee Ready plus other regional and national brands) of about 71.7%, showing that both informal producer-consumer trust relationships and organized branding coexist in this market.

Table 14: Garrett ranking of factors influencing purchase decision

Factor	Mean Garrett score	Garrett rank
Perceived purity/quality	71.4	**I**
Trust in seller/brand	64.8	**II**
Taste	58.2	**III**
Price	52.6	**IV**
Packaging and labelling	46.1	**V**
Availability/convenience	41.3	**VI**
Certification/organic label	**37.9**	**VII**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

Perceived purity/quality emerges as the most important purchase-influencing factor (mean Garrett score 71.4), followed by trust in the seller or brand (64.8) and taste (58.2). Notably, the formal certification/organic label ranks last (37.9), well below informal trust-based cues — a finding consistent with the broader literature on weak certification recognition in developing-country organic markets.

Table 15: Chi-square test between income level and frequency of purchase

Particulars	Value
Calculated χ^2 value	**21.86**
Degrees of freedom	**9**
Table value (5% level of significance)	**16.92**
Result	**Significant**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

Since the calculated χ^2 value (21.86) exceeds the table value (16.92) at 9 degrees of freedom and the 5% level of significance, monthly household income is found to be significantly associated with the frequency of organic honey purchase.

Table 16: Chi-square test between education level and awareness of certification

Particulars	Value
Calculated χ^2 value	**14.37**
Degrees of freedom	**6**
Particulars	**Value**
Table value (5% level of significance)	**12.59**
Result	**Significant**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

Similarly, the association between educational qualification and awareness of organic certification is found to be statistically significant, indicating that more educated consumers are more likely to recognize certification labels — even though, as noted above, certification ranks low as a purchase driver overall.

Table 17: Level of satisfaction of consumers

Satisfaction level	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Highly satisfied	22	**18.3**
Satisfied	48	**40.0**
Neutral	28	**23.3**
Dissatisfied	16	**13.3**
Highly dissatisfied	6	**5.1**
Total	**120**	**100.0**

Source: Field survey data, n = 120

A majority of respondents (58.3%) report being satisfied or highly satisfied with the organic honey they currently purchase, suggesting a reasonably favorable overall consumer experience despite the awareness and certification gaps identified above.

CONCLUSION

The socio-economic profile of organic honey consumers in Dehradun district points to a fairly well-defined market segment: middle-aged, well-educated individuals from nuclear, middle-to-upper income households. On the buying-behavior side, awareness remains only partial for nearly half the consumers, purchase is occasional rather than habitual, and the decision to buy rests far more on perceived purity and trust in the seller or brand than on formal organic certification, which ranks lowest among the factors considered.

Household income is significantly associated with purchase frequency, and educational qualification with certification awareness, indicating that future demand-side interventions — consumer education campaigns, visible and verifiable trust signals, and targeted certification outreach — should be designed with these socio-economic gradients in mind rather than treated as a uniform market.

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