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Sustainability in Action: Examining Consumer Motivations and Marketing Strategies in the Organic Food Sector

C.G. Accamma[1], Dr. Hemanth Kumar S[2]
[1]*Research Scholar and Asst. Professor, Center for Management Studies, Jain (deemed-tobe) University, Bangalore, India.*
[2]*Professor, CMS Business School, Jain (deemed-to-be) University, Bangalore, India*

Abstract: ***This research paper explores how sustainability influences consumer behavior and marketing strategies in the organic food sector. Using secondary data sourced from academic literature, industry reports, and government publications, this study identifies key consumer motivations such as health consciousness, environmental concerns, ethical values, and trust in organic labelling.***
Additionally, the paper investigates how companies leverage sustainability themes in their marketing strategies to build brand authenticity and customer loyalty. The findings highlight a growing demand for transparency, eco-certifications, and storytelling that aligns with consumers' values. The paper concludes with insights on best practices and future marketing directions in a rapidly evolving green marketplace.
Keywords: Organic food, Consumer motivation, Sustainable consumption, Green marketing, Purchase intention, Marketing strategies.

I. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the organic food sector has emerged as a key battleground in the global push toward sustainable consumption. Consumers, driven by increasing awareness of environmental degradation, food safety concerns, and ethical production practices, are turning to organic products as a tangible way to align their purchasing behavior with their values. This shift reflects a broader transformation—not merely in dietary preference, but in consumer identity itself.
A growing body of literature points to a constellation of motivations—health, environmental responsibility, altruism, and trust—that drive this change both in developed and emerging economies (Motivations to buy organic food in emerging markets, 2021; Organic Food Market in India, 2024).

A. Background: A Global Shift Toward Organic

Globally, the organic food market has experienced exponential growth. As of 2022, the global organic food market reached approximately USD 135 billion, with Asia and specifically India playing major roles in this surge (FiBL, 2023). India's organic market—a more nascent segment—achieved nearly USD 1.58 billion in 2023 and is projected to grow at a 21.19% compound annual rate through 2032 (Organic Food Market in India, 2024). This rapid expansion is fueled by heightened concerns about agrochemical use, soil depletion, and food safety—themes that resonate deeply within today's environmentally literate consumers.

1) Rationale and Need

Despite the growing market, ambiguity surrounds the nature and hierarchy of consumer motivations in this sector. Is health the dominant driver or do environmental and ethical concerns play a larger role? Are motivations internal (egoistic) or external (altruistic), and how do marketing strategies leverage them? Several studies in diverse geographies, such as China (Campos & Qi, 2024) and Ukraine (Frontiers, 2025), confirm the presence of multiple overlapping motivations, yet the precise relationships and their implications for marketing strategies remain underexplored.
Descriptive secondary research—examining existing studies, industry reports, and government data—can clarify these relationships. This approach enables researchers to piece together complex consumer value structures and marketing responses, identifying recurring themes and distinct patterns that characterize the organic food landscape.

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B. Consumer Motivations: Mapping Values and Behavior

1) Health and Food Safety

Health is consistently identified as the most salient motivator in organic consumption. Studies across markets—including China (Campos & Qi, 2024), Poland (MDPI, 2022), and India (ResearchGate, 2018)—show that consumers associate organic foods with reduced pesticide exposure, increased nutritional quality, and overall wellness. Although evidence on superior nutritional content is mixed, the perception itself drives purchasing (Frontiers, 2025; Time, 2016). In developing markets, this is further reinforced by high-profile food scares and contamination incidents.

2) Environmental and Ethical Values

Environmental concern—particularly fears of soil degradation, biodiversity loss, and climate instability—plays an important role alongside health motivations (Motivations to buy organic food in emerging markets, 2021). These altruistic motives, shared across Europe and Asia, gain strength when brands emphasize sustainable farming, carbon reduction, and ethical labor practices. The tension between egoistic and altruistic motivations is well documented: many consumers display egoistic (self-focused) motives while still professing concern for environmental welfare (MDPI, 2022; Campos & Qi, 2024).

3) Trust and Certification

In a market rife with skepticism, certifications such as USDA Organic and India Organic have become trust-signaling devices (Janssen & Hamm, 2012; Wikipedia: India Organic, 2022). Certification, traceability, and eco-labels help consumers overcome perceived risks and the "value–action gap" that often separates positive attitudes from actual purchase (Value-action gap, 2025). The situational reality in developing markets often includes gaps in enforcement and counterfeit risks, further intensifying the need for credible labelling (Campos & Qi, 2024).

4) Social Identity and Herd Behavior

Beyond individual benefits, organic food consumption is entwined with social identity, status, and herd behavior (PMC, 2023). Purchasing organic becomes a public statement of values—health, eco-consciousness, even social status. In urban markets especially, "herd mentality" amplifies the effect of initial health motives, pushing consumers further into sustained organic buying (PMC, 2023).

C. Marketing Strategies: Matching Consumer Motivations

Brands aiming to resonate with these motivations deploy a range of strategies:

1) Routing Through Certification and Labeling

Highlighting organic certification on-pack—and explaining what it means—helps reduce perceived risk and increase product legitimacy (India Organic, 2022; Janssen & Hamm, 2012). This is particularly essential in markets where regulatory capacity or oversight is limited.

2) Storytelling and Transparency

Narratives around farmers, farm practices, sustainable packaging, and supply chains resonate with emotionally driven consumers. Frontiers (2025) emphasizes that packaging itself can act as a signal—especially valued by those with altruistic motivations. QR-enabled traceability tools have also gained traction as brands seek to demonstrate transparency.

3) Digital Marketing and Influencer Engagement

Digital platforms—social media, blogs, and video content—are prime channels for storytelling. ResearchGate (2023) and IJRAR (2023) confirm the power of emotional and rational storytelling in creating visibility, engagement, and conversion. Brands often partner with health or eco-living influencers to amplify reach and embed authenticity.

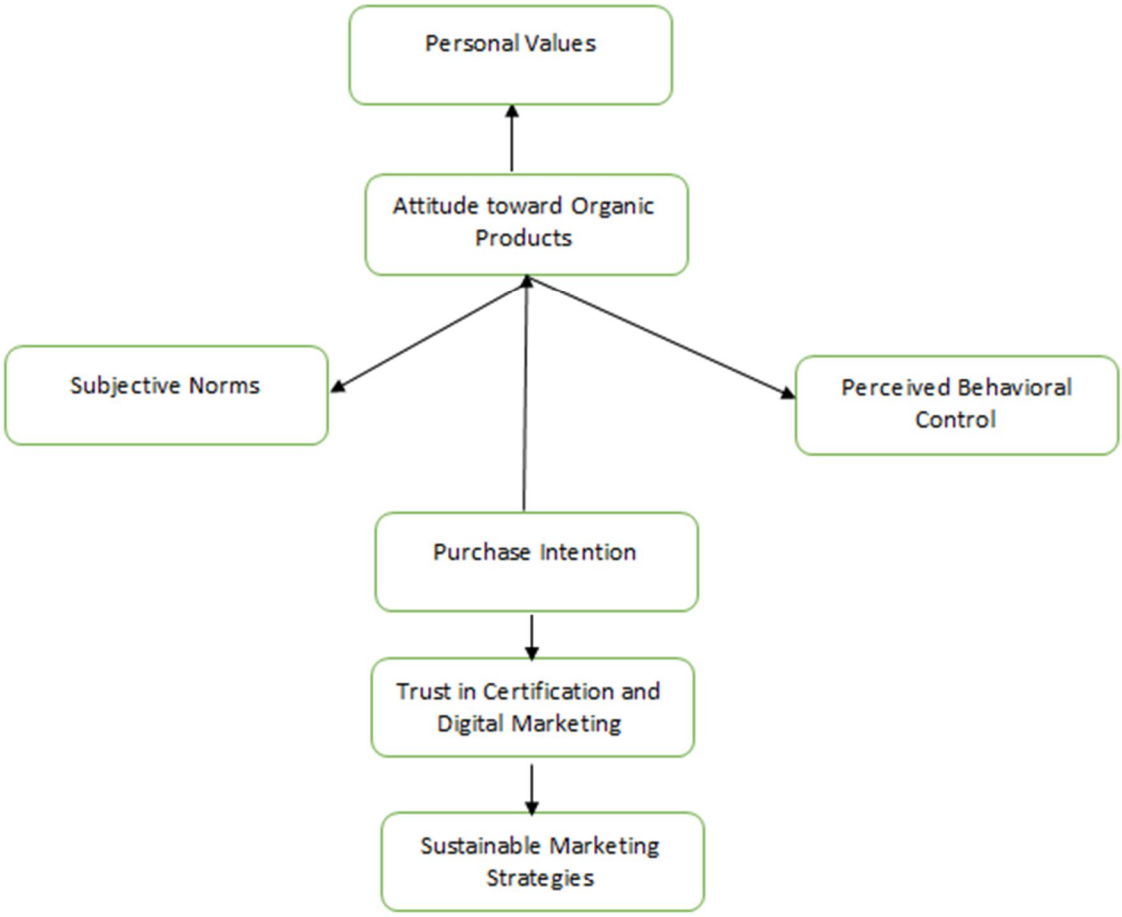
D. Promotional Tools: Offers and Accessibility

Price sensitivity remains a hallmark blocker for organic adoption. Digital marketing enables targeted offers, loyalty programs, and discounts. Ma et al. (2022) report that such initiatives can bridge the gap between the consumer's declared willingness to pay and their actual behavior. Other strategies—such as farmer engagement events, educational workshops, and scaled subsidies—further support market penetration (ResearchGate, 2018).

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Objectives:

- To describe key sustainability-related consumer motivations in the organic food sector.
- To examine the marketing strategies used to communicate sustainability.
- To evaluate the role of sustainability in shaping brand-consumer relationships.



Conceptual Model (Ajzen, 1991)

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature on organic food consumption and sustainability-driven marketing has grown substantially over the past two decades. Scholars, marketers, policymakers, and environmentalists have examined consumer behavior, motivations, market dynamics, and communication strategies in the context of the organic food sector. This review synthesizes findings from peer-reviewed journals, market reports, and institutional publications to understand (1) consumer motivations toward organic food, (2) the psychological and sociocultural foundations of those motivations, (3) trust and certification issues, and (4) sustainability-based marketing strategies employed by organic food businesses.

A. Consumer Motivations in the Organic Food Sector

Consumer motivation is central to understanding organic food behavior. Numerous studies have identified health, environmental concern**,** ethical values**,** food safety, and social identity as major drivers influencing organic food consumption (Hughner et al., 2007; Pino et al., 2012; Aschemann-Witzel et al., 2019). These motivations are often interrelated, though they may vary across demographic, cultural, and regional contexts.

B. Health Consciousness

Health is consistently cited as the most prominent motivation for organic food consumption. Consumers associate organic food with better nutrition, fewer synthetic additives, and reduced risk of diseases (Yadav & Pathak, 2016; Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2017). Although the scientific evidence comparing the nutritional superiority of organic food to conventional food is mixed (Smith-Spangler et al., 2012), perception plays a powerful role. According to Michaelidou and Hassan (2008), perceived health benefits outweigh price and availability concerns for many consumers.

Yadav and Pathak (2016) noted that urban Indian consumers are increasingly turning to organic food as a preventive health measure. Concerns over lifestyle diseases, such as diabetes and cardiovascular issues, have heightened sensitivity to food quality. This trend is more prevalent among middle and upper-income groups who can afford premium-priced organic goods.

C. Environmental Concerns

Environmental sustainability is another compelling motivator for organic food consumption. Organic agriculture promotes biodiversity, enhances soil health, reduces water pollution, and avoids synthetic pesticides and fertilizers (FAO, 2022; Reganold & Wachter, 2016). Consumers who are aware of environmental degradation often view organic consumption as a small but significant contribution to ecological sustainability (Lea & Worsley, 2005).

In a European context, Magnusson et al. (2003) found that consumers were more willing to purchase organic food when they understood its environmental impact. Similar findings were observed in developing countries such as India and Brazil, where environmental education campaigns have been instrumental in raising awareness (Sirieix et al., 2011).

D. Ethical and Social Responsibility

Ethical considerations also influence organic food choices. These include concerns about animal welfare, fair trade, labor rights, and support for local farmers (Aertsens et al., 2009). Ethical consumers believe that purchasing organic food supports small-scale producers, reduces exploitation, and fosters community development.

Zanoli and Naspetti (2002) argue that for some consumers, organic food purchasing becomes a moral act—a form of activism against industrial agriculture and globalized food chains. In India, brands such as Organic India and 24 Mantra have successfully positioned themselves as ethical brands by highlighting their work with rural farming communities and commitment to fair trade (ResearchGate, 2018).

E. Food Safety and Trust

Food safety concerns, particularly in countries with weaker food regulatory systems, drive consumers to seek organic alternatives. Incidents such as pesticide contamination, adulteration, and artificial ripening have increased distrust in conventional food supply chains (Yadav & Pathak, 2016; Chatterjee et al., 2020). Consumers perceive organic food as safer, more transparent, and free from chemical tampering.

In India, this concern is particularly acute. According to FSSAI (2023), over 25% of fruits and vegetables in India exceed recommended pesticide limits. Organic food, certified by credible agencies, offers an alternative that aligns with consumer desires for transparency and purity.

F. Social Identity and Lifestyle Alignment

Consumption in the organic food sector is also influenced by social identity and lifestyle alignment. For many, choosing organic is a form of symbolic consumption—projecting values such as sustainability, health, and ethical living (Vermeir & Verbeke, 2006). Research by Pino et al. (2012) suggests that organic food buyers tend to see themselves as more conscious, informed, and responsible.

Young, urban consumers often adopt organic lifestyles as part of a broader wellness movement that includes yoga, fitness, and eco-friendly living (Shafie & Rennie, 2012). Social media reinforces this behavior by showcasing influencers and peers engaging in sustainable consumption.

III. TRUST, CERTIFICATION, AND LABELLING

Trust plays a vital role in the organic food sector, where the attributes of the product—such as chemical-free farming—are credence-based and not easily verifiable by consumers. Certification and eco-labels bridge this trust gap (Janssen & Hamm, 2012).

A. Role of Certification

Certifications such as USDA Organic, India Organic, and Jaivik Bharat provide institutional assurance that a product meets organic standards. Studies show that consumers are more likely to purchase and pay premiums for certified products (Padel & Foster, 2005; IFOAM, 2023). However, trust in certification varies by country. In India, the proliferation of non-certified or self-claimed "natural" products has led to consumer confusion and skepticism (Mint, 2024).

B. Challenges in Labelling and Consumer Awareness

Although certification increases trust, not all consumers understand what labels mean. A study by Thøgersen et al. (2010) found that while eco-labels positively influence purchase intention, the lack of knowledge limits their effectiveness. In the Indian market, the coexistence of multiple certification systems creates ambiguity, which may deter new adopters. To counter this, government and private sectors have launched campaigns to educate consumers about labels and standards. Transparency tools such as QR codes and blockchain-based traceability systems are also gaining popularity (FAO, 2022).

C. Marketing Strategies in the Organic Food Sector

Marketing in the organic sector has evolved from product-based promotion to value-based storytelling. Companies no longer merely highlight product attributes but emphasize broader themes of sustainability, ethics, and community. This section explores key strategies such as eco-labeling, digital storytelling, influencer partnerships, and cause-related campaigns.

D. Eco-Labeling and Packaging

Eco-labeling is among the most common and effective strategies in organic marketing. Labels act as visual cues that signal quality and sustainability. According to a study by Lim et al. (2022), consumers in emerging markets strongly rely on labeling due to limited knowledge and information asymmetry. Packaging also plays a symbolic role. Minimalist, biodegradable, and reusable packaging enhances the brand's sustainability image (Reisch et al., 2013).

E. Sustainability Storytelling

Storytelling is a potent tool in value-driven marketing. Brands use narratives about their farmers, production practices, or social impact to build emotional connections. These stories serve to humanize the brand and create authenticity (Singh & Verma, 2017). For example, Conscious Food shares farmer stories on Instagram, creating a community around its values.

F. Digital Marketing and Influencer Engagement

With the rise of digital platforms, brands are increasingly engaging consumers through social media, blogs, and video content. Influencer marketing has become particularly important, especially among millennials and Gen Z. Influencers serve as lifestyle role models, and their endorsement enhances perceived authenticity and trust (Ma et al., 2022). A study by IMARC Group (2023) found that over 60% of Indian consumers discovered organic brands through digital channels. As a result, many brands allocate significant budgets to content creation, digital advertising, and partnerships with sustainability influencers.

G. Cause-Related and Community Marketing

Cause marketing, where purchases contribute to a social or environmental cause, is increasingly popular in the organic sector. Brands link purchases to tree-planting initiatives, school meals, or women empowerment programs. These strategies appeal to consumers who wish to make a difference through their buying decisions (Kotler & Lee, 2005).

Community marketing, including farmers' markets, workshops, and farm tours, strengthens consumer-brand relationships by providing direct interaction and transparency. Initiatives like Farmizen and Urban Kisaan have leveraged this model in Indian metros to build trust and loyalty.

IV. BARRIERS TO ORGANIC CONSUMPTION

Despite the positive motivations and strategic marketing, several barriers impede widespread organic food adoption. These include:

1) Price Premium: Organic products are often priced 20–40% higher than conventional ones, limiting accessibility (Smith & Paladino, 2010).
2) Availability and Convenience: Limited shelf space and distribution challenges affect market reach, particularly in Tier-2 and Tier-3 cities (Chatterjee et al., 2020).
3) Skepticism and Misinformation: Lack of regulatory enforcement and false claims reduce consumer trust (Yadav & Pathak, 2016).

V. SYNTHESIS AND GAPS IN LITERATURE

While substantial literature exists on consumer behavior and sustainability in the organic sector, several gaps remain. Many studies focus on developed countries, leaving emerging markets underrepresented. Furthermore, there is a lack of integrated models that link motivations, trust, and marketing strategy. Few studies adopt a multidisciplinary lens combining psychology, marketing, and environmental studies. The Indian market, in particular, presents a rich context for exploration due to its diversity, regulatory landscape, and socio-cultural complexities. Research grounded in this setting can offer globally relevant insights.

VI. DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

A. Research Design

This study adopts a descriptive research design using secondary data to examine the relationship between consumer motivations and marketing strategies in the organic food sector. Descriptive research is particularly suitable when the goal is to summarize, organize, and interpret existing knowledge without direct manipulation of variables (Kumar, 2019). It enables a structured analysis of trends, behavior, and strategic marketing interventions in the domain of sustainable food consumption.

B. Nature of the Study

The research follows a qualitative and exploratory design, focusing on the interpretation of existing academic and industry knowledge. However, it also integrates quantitative secondary data, such as market size, growth trends, and consumer segmentation statistics, to support key insights. This approach enables triangulation of findings from multiple sources to present a coherent understanding of the organic food market.

C. Sources of Secondary Data

Secondary data was collected from a range of reputable and scholarly sources:

- Academic Journals: Articles indexed in Scopus, ScienceDirect, and Springer.
- Government Agencies: Publications by FSSAI, APEDA, Ministry of Agriculture, and FAO.
- Industry Reports: Market insights from IMARC Group, Statista, and Euromonitor.
- Company Profiles and Case Studies: Data from brands such as Organic India, 24 Mantra, Conscious Food.
- NGO and Institutional Reports: Including IFOAM and sustainability-focused white papers.

Only peer-reviewed or institutionally published sources were considered to maintain data reliability and validity.

D. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

- Inclusion: English-language materials published between 2010 and 2025; topics relevant to organic food, sustainability, marketing, or consumer behavior in India and similar markets.
- Exclusion: Grey literature, blogs, and non-reviewed sources; content focusing solely on unrelated sectors or without strategic consumer focus.

E. Data Collection Process

A four-stage process was used:

1) Keyword-based search (e.g., "organic food motivation", "sustainable marketing India").
2) Relevance screening via abstracts, executive summaries, and titles.
3) Data extraction of key findings and statistics.
4) Categorization into thematic areas such as motivations, strategies, trust, and barriers.

F. Analytical Framework

The data was interpreted using thematic content analysis and descriptive summarization.

a) Thematic Analysis

Key themes identified:

- Health and safety motivations (Yadav & Pathak, 2016)
- Environmental and ethical concerns (Lea & Worsley, 2005; Hughner et al., 2007)
- Certification and trust mechanisms (Janssen & Hamm, 2012)
- Storytelling and branding strategies (Lim et al., 2022; Singh & Verma, 2017)

b) Descriptive Summarization

Industry reports provided statistics for:

- Market size and CAGR (IMARC Group, 2023)
- Digital marketing penetration
- Consumer awareness and trust levels

VII. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

A. *Motivations for Organic Food*

Health consciousness is the most cited motivator across nearly all reviewed studies (Yadav & Pathak, 2016; Aschemann-Witzel & Zielke, 2017). Organic products are perceived to be free of pesticides, chemical preservatives, and synthetic inputs.

Environmental concern ranks second. Organic farming is seen as a sustainable alternative that preserves biodiversity and soil health (FAO, 2022; Reganold & Wachter, 2016).

Ethical motivations are also gaining importance. Consumers often associate organic food with fairness to farmers, animal welfare, and local community empowerment (Hughner et al., 2007; Pino et al., 2012).

B. *Sustainability Marketing Strategies*

Organic brands use value-aligned communication such as:

- Certified eco-labels (Janssen & Hamm, 2012)
- Narrative-based storytelling (Singh & Verma, 2017)
- Influencer campaigns targeting urban youth (Ma et al., 2022)
- Sustainable packaging that reflects brand values (Reisch et al., 2013)

These strategies are more effective when combined with authenticity, transparency, and engagement.

C. *Trust and Certification*

Trust is a central determinant of purchase intention. Certification fills the information asymmetry gap between the brand and consumer. Labels like India Organic and Jaivik Bharat create assurance and legitimacy (IFOAM, 2023). However, awareness of certifications remains low in Tier-2 cities (Mint, 2024).

D. *Market Trends and Barriers*

Challenges identified in the literature include:

- High cost premiums (Smith & Paladino, 2010)
- Limited availability in smaller cities (Chatterjee et al., 2020)
- Ambiguity and greenwashing risks due to non-standard labeling

Despite this, Indian government initiatives such as Paramparagat Krishi Vikas Yojana (PKVY) and increased online availability are improving access.

E. *Key Consumer Motivations (Based on Reports)*

Motivation	Description	Source
Health	Preference for chemical-free, nutritious food	FSSAI Report (2023)
Environment	Reduced carbon footprint, biodiversity protection	FAO (2022)
Ethics and Transparency	Fair trade, animal welfare, local farming	Nielsen (2021), Mint (2024)
Trust in Certification	India Organic, USDA, EU Organic	IFOAM (2023), Economic Times

F. Marketing Practices Observed

Strategy Type	Description	Example
Eco-lbeling	Use of certified organic logos	24 Mantra, Organic Tattva
Digital sustainability content	Blogs, reels, and storytelling on organic practices	Conscious Food, Praakritik
Social responsibility campaigns	CSR aligned with environmental causes	Organic India's tree planting drive
Community engagement	Farmers markets, traceability tech, QR code transparency	Farmizen, BigBasket Organic

VIII. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study affirm that consumer behavior in the organic food sector is deeply rooted in multidimensional motivations, shaped by both internal values and external influences. Health consciousness emerges as a primary driver, consistent with earlier research (Yadav & Pathak, 2016), indicating that consumers view organic food as a pathway to disease prevention and overall well-being. Environmental concerns further reinforce consumption intent, particularly among educated and urban populations who perceive organic agriculture as a means to mitigate ecological degradation (FAO, 2022; Reganold & Wachter, 2016). The literature also reveals a growing emphasis on ethical consumption, with consumers seeking products aligned with fairness, transparency, and sustainability (Pino et al., 2012). However, the gap between positive attitudes and actual purchase behavior, often referred to as the "intention–behavior gap," persists due to factors such as high pricing, limited availability, and skepticism regarding product authenticity (Smith & Paladino, 2010).

From a strategic standpoint, brands that adopt sustainability-centered marketing—such as certified eco-labeling, digital storytelling, influencer engagement, and ethical packaging—are better positioned to resonate with their target audience (Lim et al., 2022). The integration of these strategies with digital platforms has increased consumer accessibility and emotional engagement, especially among younger consumers. Nonetheless, the success of these campaigns hinges on trust, which remains fragile in many developing markets like India. Certification programs such as India Organic and Jaivik Bharat have helped bridge this gap, but inconsistent enforcement and consumer awareness limit their full impact (Janssen & Hamm, 2012). Thus, building and maintaining consumer trust remains both a challenge and an opportunity for marketers. Overall, the alignment between consumer motivations and marketing practices enhances brand credibility and loyalty, but this alignment requires constant reinforcement through transparency, education, and consistency in sustainability claims.

IX. CONCLUSION

This descriptive study offers a comprehensive understanding of the complex interplay between consumer motivations and marketing strategies in the organic food sector, using secondary data drawn from academic literature, industry reports, and regulatory publications. It concludes that consumers are increasingly guided by a blend of health consciousness, environmental awareness, and ethical considerations when purchasing organic products. Effective marketing strategies must therefore address these motivations holistically, leveraging certification, storytelling, influencer authenticity, and value-driven communication to build trust and foster long-term relationships.

Despite the sector's rapid growth, barriers such as affordability, product accessibility, and misinformation continue to hinder broader adoption, particularly in emerging markets. To sustain and scale the organic movement, stakeholders—ranging from policymakers to brand strategists—must invest in consumer education, improve regulatory mechanisms, and develop inclusive strategies that make organic food accessible to a wider demographic. Future research could further validate the proposed conceptual model through empirical studies, offering actionable insights to bridge the attitude–behavior gap and promote sustainable consumption patterns globally.

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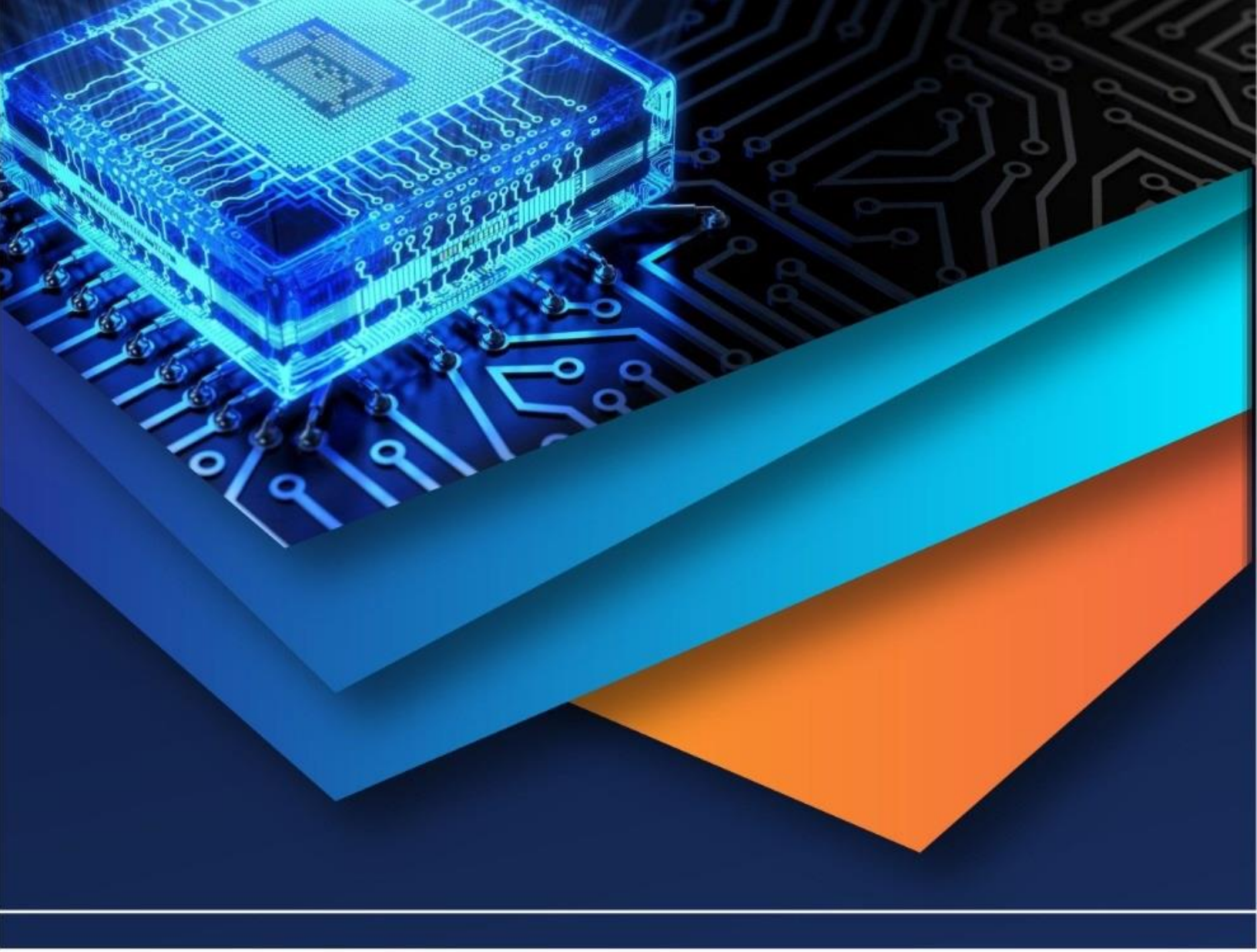
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