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**THE ROLE OF SUSTAINABILITY IN CONSUMER
BEHAVIOR IN THE FOOD SECTOR OF BANGLADESH**

Master's thesis

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ABSTRACT

Organic foods are slowly becoming popular in Bangladesh. However, the existing research problem is that little research is available that explores the role of sustainability in consumer behavior regarding such products. Hence, this thesis has made a contribution in this regard. Important aspects like the consumer's perception of sustainability, their awareness levels, and factors that affect purchasing decision of such goods have been scrutinized.

In terms of data collection, the thesis employed interviews with a semi-structured questionnaire. Thematic analysis was used to unearth the themes and patterns within the answers. The results have revealed that interviewees consume a variety of organic foods and that their consumption frequency is slowly increasing. In terms of awareness, consumers rely on multiple platforms like social media, peer influence, and product reviews. Additionally, factors like the absence of preservatives, health benefits, and following trends were deemed to be the biggest motivations towards organic food consumption. To sum up, interviewees exhibited a decent level of satisfaction in terms of consuming organic food products. However, there were some barriers that were brought to light such as high prices and low availability of organic foods. Consequently, many suggestions were made to improve the scenario of the organic food market in Bangladesh. Government interventions and increased promotion of such goods were highly recommended by the sample.

All in all, there is decent potential for the organic food market in Bangladesh to grow even further. Slowly but surely, organic food products are gaining momentum in Bangladesh as proven by the results of this thesis. Future research studies can further investigate this phenomenon and unearth more interesting results.

Keywords: organic, sustainability, consumer behavior, green marketing, Bangladesh

INTRODUCTION

In this study, we are analyzing the context of Bangladesh because there is very limited research in this particular area to understand the condition of sustainable consumer behavior. With a population of 160 million, Bangladesh has obtained the status of a lower-middle-income country. The GDP of Bangladesh is \$209 billion and is enjoying a growth rate of around 6.0% for the past decade (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics... 2016). On the other hand, according to the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) in 2014, Bangladesh has been categorized as a high-risk nation from climate change due to erratic climate events and this will result in threaten the food and livelihood security of the economy (Hara and Hijioka, 2016, 34). Businesses in Bangladesh have begun to adapt their sustainable behavior in an attempt to address society's new concerns (Shamsuddoha, 2005, 1-2). Hence, it is vital to understand the role of sustainability in consumer behavior in Bangladesh.

The **research problem** is that very limited information is available to gauge the current state of affairs in Bangladesh regarding sustainable food consumption. Hence, it can be assumed that the adaptation here has been a lot slower in comparison to the developed countries in the world. Most of the previous researches regarding green consumerism has been conducted in developed nations whereas, in the context of a developing country, the number is significantly low (Hoque, 2020; Siddique and Hossain 2018; Taufique, 2017; Iqbal, 2015). It is quite clear that there is a large research gap in terms of conceptually recognizing those areas of consumers' perception impacting the consumption of sustainable products. Thus, this thesis will make an attempt to find out the role of sustainability in consumer behavior in the food sector of Bangladesh.

The **purpose** of this study is to investigate the role of sustainability in consumer behavior in the food sector in Bangladesh. To be more specific, the first research question will be regarding the perception of sustainability and consumption patterns of organic foods. The second research question will be regarding the sources of awareness, motivational factors, and barriers linked to organic food consumption. Moreover, the master's thesis has been conducted as qualitative exploratory research, using the method of thematic analysis to uncover knowledge about this

topic. Qualitative methods used to collect the data are semi-structured interviews with consumers of sustainable products in Bangladesh.

The thesis comprises three chapters starting with the literature review derived from existing research material. The paper examined sources like international peer-reviewed articles, journals, and books. In the literature review, the author explores the contemporary theories, research gaps, and justifications behind examining sustainable consumer behavior in Bangladesh.

Subsequently, the second chapter of this thesis will focus on the existing market scenario of organic products in Bangladesh. Aspects like the emergence of organic foods, their opportunities, and challenges along with current policy interventions to boost future potential will be discussed.

The third chapter will have a twofold agenda. Firstly, it will outline the methodology used in this paper and state the research questions and objectives derived from the literature. The chapter will explain the data collection methods as well as the method used to analyze said data. Secondly, the said chapter will present the findings and discussions associated with the data obtained from the study. This will include key insights provided by the participants in relation to sustainable consumer behavior in Bangladesh. Plus, the areas for future study and limitations of this research will also be determined.

The final section of this master's thesis will provide the conclusion of the role of sustainability in consumer behavior in Bangladesh and highlight the summary of this entire study.

The author would like to acknowledge all the interviewees who contributed to this research by agreeing to participate and provide valuable data and insight into the topic. The data received from the interviews made the whole research possible by offering insights and explanations for the research questions.

1. LITERATURE REVIEW ON SUSTAINABILITY AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR REGARDING FOOD PRODUCTS

The objective of a literature review is to make a foundation of the previous literature on the thesis topic. Undertaking a literature review is beneficial to the research author in many ways. Firstly, the review of literature allows the author to recognize research gaps in the existing knowledge base of the topic. Secondly, crafting a review of the literature provides the researcher and the reader with the most effective means of conducting the aforementioned research effort. Such information is vital, given that it improves the consistency of the research undertaken and ensures reliable results (Wisker, 2008, 172). This specific literature review has been done to identify the existing research gaps thus, necessitating the need for the current research. Moreover, multiple reliable literature sources have been analyzed to offer an understanding of the topic being addressed in this master's thesis.

The main objective is to analyze the existing research that is available on the role of sustainability in consumer behavior. The main focus will be to uncover literature on the elements that influence the awareness level of sustainable products, factors that affect purchasing decisions of such products, and the level of sustainable product consumption across different demographics around the world. It must be noted that the aim is to include peer-reviewed sources and books from reputed experts in this field. This will enhance the overall reliability and authenticity of the aforementioned master's thesis. As mentioned earlier, sustainable consumer behavior in Bangladesh is a topic that has been examined in a limited capacity and warrants further research.

The literature review comprises many sub-chapters that deal with the existing theories and concepts linked to sustainable consumer behavior. Previous authors have employed different approaches to studying sustainable consumer behavior, which will be examined. Overall, research gaps will emerge from analyzing the existing literature which will give rise to the subsequent research gaps and objectives for this thesis.

1.1. Theoretical background on sustainability and consumer behaviour

Many previous pieces of research undertaken on sustainable consumer behavior considered the framework of Ajzen and Fishbein's theory of reasoned action or theory of planned behavior (Ajzen, 1985). The focus of these models is to gain factual knowledge about the object which is a precondition of forming an attitude towards that said object (Kaiser *et al.*, 1999). Therefore, TRA and TPB insist that behavior emerges from intention, which results as a function of subjective norm and attitude (Taufique *et al.*, 2017, 9). Although, Davies *et al.* (2002) opposed that the relationship between intention and behavior may not be as strong as it is suggested in the theory. Polonksy *et al.* (2012) and Rokka and Uusitalo (2008) supported the argument and recommended the integration of self-reported actual behavior into models since the real concern is behavior rather than attitude. Plus, despite the massive amount of awareness and understanding of green marketing, the market share of sustainable products is still considerably small; only a mere 4% of consumers buy some sustainable products whereas, 40% of consumers say that they have intentions of buying such products (Bartels and Hoogendam, 2011). Additionally, another research indicates that while customers articulate their concern towards the environment, this does not necessarily translate into the purchase of environmentally-friendly products (Young *et al.*, 2009). This argument is also supported by Hughner *et al.* (2007) who narrates that even though customers have an encouraging attitude towards sustainable purchases; it does not guarantee the purchase of environmentally friendly products. Henceforth, there is a gap between consumers' attitudes and behavior, which is known as the attitude-behavior gap.

Due to the existence of the attitude-behavior gap, marketers face the daunting task of making segmentation and targeting strategies for sustainable products (D'Souza, 2004, 13). As a result, it is vital to examine the aspects that influence consumers' selection and decision-making process, such as the attitudes that alter behavior (Pickett-Baker and Ozaki, 2008, 4-5). In another study on an attitude-behavior relationship that combined both bit of knowledge on the environment and eco-labeling, found that such knowledge positively impacts consumer attitudes towards the environment in driving ecologically conscious buying behavior in Malaysia (Taufique *et al.*, 2016). However, expressing interest and acting on it are two separate things. The BBC climate change survey showed that not a lot of people were actually doing something to transform their traditional lifestyle into a sustainable one. Said survey was conducted on a global scale covering 18,453 interviewees throughout 22 countries including the United States and the United Kingdom to China, Japan, India, Russia, Denmark, and Brazil. There was, however, a sharp rise

in both consumption behavior changes and environmental concerns in responses compared to the previous year. Surprisingly, among customers expressing concern about climate change, the people who could recall buying an explicitly sustainable product were highest in China at 76%, which is much higher than the global average of 54%. Results from traditionally concerned countries like Denmark, Germany, and Norway were centered around 68% (Peattie, 2010, 16-18). It is evident that there is a need to convert the attitude or intention of buying sustainable products into actual behavior more efficiently.

It is based on subjective norms, attitude towards the behavior, and perceived behavioral control, which is assumed to be an immediate precursor of behavior. The behavior is an individual's observable reaction in a given situation with respect to a given target (Ajzen, 1991). Furthermore, it is believed that individuals are looking for out sustainable products since they perceive them to be organic and healthy, of higher quality, and help protect the environment (Govender and Govender, 2016). However, consumers do not always pursue their buying decisions based on their attitudes towards the environment (Moisander, 2007). Nonetheless, it seems that the more closely involved consumers are with the environment, the more likely they are to buy green products (Schuhwerk and Lefkoff-Hagius, 1995). In general, sustainable retailing is a broader concept, one that can be applied to industrial goods and consumer goods and services and not just in terms of the material it is made of or marketing of products with environmental characteristics (Polonsky, 1994) In another study, the researcher suggested that marketing communication is The readiness of a person to accomplish a certain action is known as behavioral intention necessary to teach the consumer about eco-labeling information (Taufique *et al.*, 2016). Companies should market the product in a way that will be easily identifiable by customer and information should be properly displayed in a way so that the customer can easily identify and companies should market sustainable products in such a way so the customer will notice it and make people aware of environmental responsibility, the companies can use the green process to make products or can make green products it's self (Sheikh *et al.*, 2014). Thus, information about green products is believed to positively affect consumers' decision to purchase sustainable products.

There is a growing demand to shift over to sustainable products and services by both consumers and marketers. While the move to green is costly for both parties, it will most certainly pay off in the long term. Consumers are price sensitive towards green products and the price will affect consumers buying decisions of said products (Anderson and Hansen, 2004, 20). In a survey of

1,000 consumers in Europe and the USA, it was found that many will pay more but only up to a point for sustainability. 70% of consumers surveyed about purchases in the electronics, automotive, furniture, building, and packaging categories said they would pay an additional 5% for a green product if it met the same performance standards as a non-green alternative. However, the willingness to pay a premium decreases. One exception is the case of packaging, where consumers were willing to pay a 25% premium to purchase their preferred organic food products (Miremadi *et al.*, 2012). In another research, 32% of consumers would not mind paying a premium for green products. In this case, the findings on consumers seem to be consistent with the studies conducted by Accenture Global Auto Consumer Survey (2010), where consumers are ready to pay the premium (Abdul-Muhmin, 2007). While on other hand, most consumers were not willing to pay anything extra for sustainable products. This revelation was supported by the research undertaken by Sheila *et al.* (2008) as well. In order to satisfy environmentally friendly consumers, a sustainable product must also be priced competitively with alternatives (Miller and Layton, 2001). Thus, price is believed to negatively affect consumers' decision to purchase sustainable products.

Overall, the existing literature forms a foundation of the results that are expected to be found in this thesis. Even though there is a significant amount of awareness about the benefits of organic foods, it does not always translate to actual purchases (Polonksy *et al.*, 2012). Hence, it is expected that similar results will also be found in this research. Moreover, the existence of this attitude-behavior gap makes it challenging to influence customers into buying organic foods. Developed countries tend to end up buying green products more than their developing counterparts (Peattie, 2010, 16). Hence, it will be important to determine which organic food items customers are buying in a developing setting and why they buy them. Taufique *et al.* (2016) mention that eco-labeling information is an important motivator for influencing buyers in this regard. Finally, the existing literature points to the fact that customers are generally discouraged by the premium they have to pay for organic products (Miremadi *et al.*, 2012). Although, in some cases, consumers did not mind paying extra for organic products (Abdul-Muhmin, 2007). Therefore, it will be crucial to identify which group the results of this thesis fit into; the ones that are willing to pay a premium for organic food items or the ones that are not.

1.2. The essence of ‘sustainable’ products

The phrase ‘sustainable product’ or ‘green product’ indicates that the product can be recycled or conserved and will not deplete natural resources and pollute the earth in any way (Prem *et al.*, 1993, 2). Many studies on sustainable consumption have revealed that green products are considered as figurative resources in the formation of consumer identities (Connolly and Prothero, 2008). A sustainable product comes with a guarantee that by ensuring sustainable consumption it can solve the environmental problems that the earth is facing at the moment. The study by Rahbar and Abdul-Wahid (2011) uncovered that customer’s trust in eco-label and eco-brands and their perception of eco brands show a positive relationship with actual purchasing behavior. As for new product development and environmental strategy, there is a willingness to pay slightly more for environmentally-friendly products (Straughan and Roberts, 1999, 6). Green products are part of green retailing which is presented to the consumers as specifically eco-labeled and eco branded (Taufique *et al.*, 2016, 8). Overall, the availability of eco-labeled products in a store impacts a consumer’s purchase intention (Rahman *et al.*, 2017, 36). This is because green purchases will not occur without the easy availability of green products (Joshi and Rahman, 2015, 4). Consumers usually prefer products that are easily accessible and do not like to spend time searching for green products (Tanner and Wölfling Kast, 2003, 28). Thus, the availability of green products is believed to positively affect consumers’ decision to buy them.

Sustainable consumer behavior is one of the areas which are still studied extensively to understand sustainability (Kumar and Polonsky, 2017, 14). The term is by its very nature implicitly multi-disciplinary, covering psychology, marketing, and environmental issues. Consumers have now an increased concern about the impact of their consumption on the environment and led to a change in their attitudes towards a green lifestyle. This increased consciousness has resulted in an expanded list of issues that fall within the domain of environmental responsibility. The retail environment is also feeling the heat of this wave. Many businesses right from private entities such as Wal-Mart trying to push the concept of organic food to the people (Cherian and Jacob, 2012, 19). Sustainable purchase behavior consists of a complex form of decision-making behavior where the green consumer ‘takes into account the public consequences of his and her private consumption and attempts to use their purchasing power to promote social change (Moisander, 2007).

Consumers from the developed country as the USA and Western Europe were found to be more mindful about the environment (Curlo, 1999, 3). Research in the last decade has indicated that consumers are aware and willing to pay more to promote sustainability. Another survey conducted by McKinsey on 7,000 people in Brazil, Canada, China, Germany, France, India, the UK, and the USA, which shows that majority of consumers are deeply concerned about the environmental impacts of the good that they buy on a daily basis. But when it comes to buying green goods, no more than 33% of the consumers are ready to buy them. So there is a gap between attitude toward the green purchase and actual behavior for it. According to this survey, to increase sales of environmentally sustainable products, companies must remove barriers like lack of awareness, high prices, negative perceptions, distrust, and low availability. In a developing country like Bangladesh, the marketing scenario is much more challenging because of some problems facing marketing in emerging economies, such as low marketing knowledge, preferences for foreign goods, and low patronage for non-essential goods, high cost of production, and inadequate infrastructures (Ewah and Ekeng, 2009, 54).

Despite these barriers, developing countries are also getting concerned about the environment and their attitude toward sustainable products. Sheikh *et al.* (2014), in his research in Pakistan, found that the customer's intention for buying green products was linked to their level of awareness and information about said goods. Plus, another study on South Africa shows a strong relationship between price and consumer's attitudes toward green products (Anvar, 2014). Beyond these, research on Chinese consumers highlighted the significant influence of cultural values, ecological effect, and ecological knowledge on attitudes toward sustainable purchases (Chan, 2001).

1.3. Research gaps in the existing literature

The following research gaps were identified in the context of Bangladesh. For instance, Siddique and Hossain (2018) stressed that there might be other variables that influence green product awareness, apart from the ones they found like peer groups and green product promotion. Plus, green marketing plays a vital role in creating sustainable product awareness and its impact needs further investigation (Rahman *et al.*, 2017, 12). Hence, the elements that affect the awareness level of green products will be examined in this study.

Hoque (2020) also found that consumers are willing to pay a premium for green-farmed fish if they are grown sustainably. Moreover, Jahanshahi and Jia (2018) found that the need for uniqueness was a strong factor that motivated customers to buy green products. Both studies warranted further research into this issue. Thus, factors affecting purchasing decision of sustainable products will be uncovered in this study.

Besides, Jahanshahi and Jia (2018) stated that it is worth knowing how individuals in high, middle, and low-level income classes perceive consumption of green products. Future studies should include more diverse populations in order to get more representative results. Therefore, we will look at the different levels of the sustainable product consumption across different demographics.

It must be noted that where the high price of organic foods has been mentioned as a barrier to consumers' adoption by some studies, this is contradicted by other authors as well. Therefore, this contradiction can be tested further under the Bangladeshi context. In addition, availability has been mentioned by most authors as a barrier to consumers' adoption of organic foods. Therefore, further investigation is warranted to infer on this issue (Rahman, 2016, 7).

The study conducted by Iqbal (2015) followed an exploratory approach in identifying salient features of consumer behavior in the organic food market in Bangladesh. The author identified the strengths that the country has in this sector, as well as the bottlenecks in consumers' adoption of organic foods. In line with other studies under the Bangladesh context, the author mentioned that availability, price, and lack of knowledge could act as barriers to widespread adoption of organic foods. Said author also suggested further research be undertaken in order to fully understand these factors.

It may be evident that green products hold bright promises for Bangladesh, just like for any other country. Sustainable foods are generally known for their environmental friendliness, safety, nutrition content, and healthiness. However, the low adoption rate in developing countries, including Bangladesh, has been a common phenomenon. Therefore, investigating various aspects of green goods would provide immense insight to practitioners and policymakers in this sector. According to Rahman (2016), considering the multiple social and economic benefits of organic foods, researchers may directly address the future research agenda and vastly contribute to the economy and society.

1.4. Development of research methods for assessing the sustainability and consumer behaviour regarding food products.

It is important to take into account the valuable suggestions made by past researchers and develop the research design for this thesis accordingly. Focusing on past shortcomings and filling those gaps in terms of data collection and questionnaire design is also vital. First of all, Buerke *et al.* (2016) recommended investigating how people cope with personally responsible consumption when it comes to organic products. Moreover, contextual factors like peer influence and purchasing patterns also need examination. Hence, questions have been developed accordingly to answer these queries which are available in Appendix 1. Subsequently, O' Rourke and Ringer (2016) highlighted the importance of finding out how sustainability information impacts the purchasing patterns of organic products. Additionally, another avenue needs analyzing; factors that influence people to change their regular purchasing patterns to adopt a more sustainable approach. Moving on, Sheth *et al.* (2011) urged future research to focus on the overall experience and customer satisfaction linked to sustainable products. Mindful consumption and being aware of the environment are paramount to healthy and sustainable consumer behavior. As for barriers that impede sustainable consumption, it is another aspect that needs to be examined further. Rahman and Noor (2016) stress that price and availability are two major barriers to organic food consumption in Bangladesh. Although these hindrances have been contradicted by other authors, more investigation is required to unearth these barriers. Such impedance can disrupt the consumer adoption process of organic foods. Finally, Line *et al.* (2016) advised that future studies should explore the extent to which demographic characteristics, such as income and age affect sustainable consumption. Overall, the answers to these prescribed questions have been sought in the questionnaire developed in Appendix 1.

With regards to the research design, many previous authors have recommended using different approaches to study this phenomenon. For instance, Ciasullo *et al.* (2017) found limitations while following a quantitative approach towards understanding consumer's sustainable purchasing behaviour. It was suggested that other research techniques be applied to obtain answers that contain greater depth. Hence, a qualitative approach will be taken in this thesis to get insightful answers through interviews (Wisker, 2008, 70). Consequently, Osbaldiston and Schott (2011) also suggested that observing qualitative scales and subsequent data is also important to understand this phenomenon. It is evident that there is a need to adopt a qualitative methodology. Some of the past studies have been found that have employed such a system.

Interestingly, Gruber and Schlegelmilch (2014) adopted a qualitative methodology for examining sustainable consumer behaviour and found commendable results. Furthermore, it was advised that ‘more concrete purchase-related factors such as price, availability of information, etc., and other aspects related to an individual’s life context which also influences the subsequent consumer behavior, need to be taken into account. In addition to that, Rohm *et al.* (2017) used a mixed-methods approach to negate some of the limitations of quantitative research while studying consumer behavior to encourage food waste reduction. While this approach is praiseworthy, the time limitations of this thesis allow for a mono-method approach. Altogether, very limited studies were found to have utilized the qualitative approach towards understanding the role of sustainability in consumer behavior in the organic food sector. Therefore, this thesis aims to look at the other side of the coin and deliver results that differ from traditional quantitative methods.

2. CURRENT SITUATION OF THE ORGANIC FOOD MARKET IN BANGLADESH

2.1. The emergence of organic food products in Bangladesh

The origins of organic food production can be traced back to the early 1990s. During this phase, organic farming made its debut on a small scale. Many NGOs (Non-Government Organizations) can be accredited for this initiative. These NGOs were responsible for organizing interested farmers, provide training, technical advice, financial support, and helping market organic products. Organic farmers make associations among themselves to co-operate with each other towards a sustainable farming system. As many as 75 NGOs are currently working towards fostering organic farming in the country (Rahman, 2021, 3).

Speaking of the NGOs, 47 of them are focused on the production of organic food while the rest are geared towards increasing awareness. Some of the prominent NGOs include UBINIG (Unnayan Bikalper Nitinirdharoni Gobeshona), Proshika, BARCIK (Bangladesh Resource Center for Indigenous Knowledge), and RIB (Research Initiatives, Bangladesh). But, that's not all; many of the renowned private firms are also setting their sights on organic farming investment like Shams Enterprise, Kazi and Kazi Ltd and Shabajpur Tea Estate Ltd. Said firms have already begun exporting various kinds of organic products to foreign countries Alam *et al.* (2020).

According to the National Organic Agricultural Policy (2016), at present, there are a variety of organic products that are being produced in Bangladesh with an aim for both domestic and international consumption. Said products include cotton, aromatic rice, organic shrimp, horticultural crops, and many more. Moreover, many of the established supermarket brands in the country are selling such products as Meenabazar, Agora, Shwapno, Lavender, etc. However, it remains to be seen whether or not farmers are paid fair prices for producing such goods since supermarkets are always focused on procuring from the cheapest sources. On a positive note, BARI (Bangladesh Agricultural Research Institute) took a big initiative of conducting primary

research on organic farming by establishing an organic block in their farming fields in Joydebpur, Gazipur, Bangladesh. It is safe to say that Bangladesh has responded to the rapidly rising demand for organic foods by implementing the new policy to foster the growth of this potential market (National Organic Agricultural Policy..... 2016).

2.2. Opportunities for growth and subsequent challenges

Alam *et al.* (2020) have identified that the Chittagong hill tracts in Bangladesh are ideal for producing organic food products. This particular region makes up about 10% of the total land area in Bangladesh and can fulfill the buffer zone requirements for such production. One of the key aspects of fostering organic farming is sustaining a buffer zone, which can be done in this area. Moreover, the indigenous knowledge of the local tribes is an asset in this region for introducing organic agriculture. They are not accustomed to using chemicals for agriculture and only rely on traditional farming methods. Hence, the combination of modern farming methods like integrated soil nutrient management and bio-control mechanism with the existing traditional systems can promote large-scale organic farming in the Chittagong hill tracts.

Moving on, (Rahman, 2020) has revealed many of the existing key opportunities that can be taken advantage of in Bangladesh. For instance, the Sundarbans, the largest mangrove forest in the world, are abundant in pure and natural foods like honey, crabs, and a variety of fishes. The wild honey found in this forest is known as lotus honey, which is renowned for its overall taste and nutrient composition. In addition, it must be pointed out that organic farming requires a lot of labor input when it comes to producing a substantial output. Bangladesh happens to be densely populated and it has a lot of cheap labor on offer. Hence, the availability of cheap labor can be taken advantage of to meet the production needs of organic farming. This will ensure that the local needs for organic products are met and global export demands are also met to earn more foreign currency. Overall, it is evident that organic farming can introduce a new pathway for farmers and entrepreneurs to earn more from new business opportunities.

However, with every innovation, the subsequent challenges also need discussion. According to Rahman and Neena (2018), producers are not familiar with the modern farming practices that can lead to organic food production. Moreover, many of the consumers lack the proper awareness about the benefits of organic food products. They seem to exhibit a low level of

environmental and ecological consciousness. Most customers are suspicious about the authenticity and originality of the organic products and do not seem to trust the subsequent promotional campaigns. The lack of trusted organic certification is another big challenge as it presents an effective quality control mechanism of the products in the market. Such an absence makes it difficult to distinguish conventional products from organic ones and the consumers must accept whatever the producer or seller claims on the packaging. The reality is that the institutional and regulatory framework for certifying organic products is non-existent. That's not all; other issues like the lack of vacuum packing units, cold storage, and processing units are not developed yet. Overall, there are lackings in terms of effective management strategies when it comes to taking advantage of organic food production. Currently, the agricultural market chain is not strong enough. A number of wholesale intermediaries known as Aratdar, Faria, and Bepari are taking incentives away from the farmers (Alam *et al.*, 2020). There are many challenges to overcome but it is not impossible with the support of the government and other stakeholders.

2.3. Government policy interventions

In most countries, either private organizations or NGOs have taken up the initiative to introduce organic farming in their respective regions. In order to promote the growth of this potential market, government interventions are a must to ensure that said growth happens smoothly. Bangladesh is no different in this regard and it is high time to promote the concept of organic farming by enforcing a robust policy that supports the production of organic foods (National Organic Agriculture Policy... 2016). The success of this policy depends on a number of factors like the speed of implementation. There is an urgency to develop standards that meet global organic requirements such as those of IFOAM (International Federation of Organic Agriculture Movements) and other established bodies. Moreover, the ingredients and substances that are eligible for organic food production must be finalized in order to boost the concept of organic culture. In addition to that, the farmers and entrepreneurs of organic farming need a tight-knit association so that their national and regional demands are met.

Rahman and Akter (2020) have narrated that the establishment of VSOs (village-based organizations) was effective in helping the farmers unite and secure their demands in this regard. Furthermore, the basic skills of the processors and producers were greatly enhancing through a series of sessions that gave them information and training on organic farming. This revelation

was also supported by Rahman *et al.* (2020) who found that attitudes towards sustainability were greatly improved by appropriate training and transfer of knowledge. The educational institutions can make a contribution in this regard by integrating the concepts of organic farming into their syllabus so that future farmers can get a basic understanding of the idea. Dissemination of knowledge is paramount to ensuring the development of organic farming and the production of green foods. The farmers that produce the best quality of bio-pesticides, bio-fertilizers, organic manure, etc. should be incentivized so that they are encouraged to follow the right path. Overall, there is a lack of knowledge and motivation for farmers to take up organic farming. The government of Bangladesh needs to play a pivotal role in reducing the said gap.

As for the global success of organic food exports, such products originating from organic agriculture should be given the most priority in export promotion policies. A designated area known as an ‘agro-village’ should be assigned in each region to foster the concept of organic farming and organic food production. This way the proactive farmers and progressive entrepreneurs will be motivated to continue production. There is more to be done in this regard like encouraging the participation of farmers in international and national organic trade fair shows. Moreover, the concept of contract farming is also ideal for organic food production. However, it must be highlighted again that the overall agricultural market chain is weak and fragile, with a number of intermediaries that deny farmers fair returns. In this regard, the DAE (Department of Agriculture Extension) needs to work hand in hand with the TCB (Trading Corporation of Bangladesh) to free the market of such middlemen. Only by removing such barriers can the production of organic food be encouraged. It is important to adopt measures to ensure the good functioning of organic food markets (Alam *et al.*, 2020; Rahman *et al.*, 2020; Rahman and Neena 2018).

2.4. Future potential of organic foods in Bangladesh

In a world where the average consumer has become health-conscious, organic food is steadily rising in terms of demand and overall consumption around the globe. At present, the high-income groups of society are mainly focused on consuming such products since money is not an issue (Meludu *et al.*, 2011). It will take time for the other economic and age groups to catch up to this trend but it will happen soon. That’s not all; another factor that is pivotal to the consumption of organic foods is the education level of the consumers. Sharon and Jonathon (2011) and

Javanmardi *et al.* (2011) have illustrated that a higher level of education rapidly increased both awareness and knowledge of such products. Most of the consumers surveyed exhibited a fairly basic understanding of the concept of sustainability and organic foods. Therefore, the organic food market in Bangladesh also has a hope to grow.

It must be noted that the overall customer demand for organic food items is gradually increasing throughout Bangladesh. If other countries are considered, then the trend has been to formulate a national organic farming program after slowly and surely shifting to organic farming from the more traditional methods. Even though there are many challenges, Bangladesh is catching up with other countries and ramping up organic food production at a healthy rate (Rahman, 2021, 5). There is great potential for the country to capitalize on its resources and become a global and local producer of such goods. If some of the key aspects are sorted like organic product legislation, proper certification, standardization, and overall infrastructure, then many of the challenges will be mitigated. Popularizing organic food consumption has to come from robust policies that foster its growth. Although it is challenging for Bangladeshi farmers to address these issues on their own, the National Organic Agriculture Policy (2016) and National Agriculture Policy (2018) will give them hope. The success of the organic food markets depends on how fast the agriculture policies above are implemented and enacted.

Rahman and Noor (2016) have made it clear that, at the consumer level, organic food products have multiple health benefits that will foster mass production and adoption. Bangladesh has been slowly producing organic foods since the 1980s and many of the existing retail and supermarket chains are already selling such items. However, the consumer response is still lukewarm in terms of mass adoption. Even though the benefits of the organic food items were apparent, the domestic market for such goods was reported to be limited in the country of Bangladesh (Sarker & Itohara, 2008). However, there is no doubt that there is potential for this market to grow in Bangladesh. Adoption of new products is always slow but the pace eventually picks up as the market develops. Hence, there is hope for the organic food market in Bangladesh to grow and become well established in the coming years in the foreseeable future.

3. RESEARCH METHODS AND RESULTS

3.1. Research design

This qualitative research has been conducted in order to analyze and determine the role of sustainability in consumer behavior in Bangladesh. In order to conduct the research, qualitative methods are taken to gather more understanding of the topic. More precisely, the research is conducted as qualitative exploratory research using thematic analysis to interpret the data gathered through semi-structured interviews. The data analysis will be divided based on preset themes, derived from the themes of the literature review and research questions. The preset themes will be categorized into topics, and the collected data from semi-structured interviews will be analyzed under each preset-themed topic. This method enables the author to answer the research questions in a more clear and thorough way.

This methodical approach has been taken as it has become apparent that there is a clear lack of data available regarding sustainable consumer behavior in Bangladesh. More precisely, to gain an understanding of a topic that lacks depth. Exploratory research is used when new knowledge is sought to be gained, or types of behavior causes, actions, symptoms, or events need to be discovered (Wisker, 2008, 45). Moreover, most of the researches in the past employed a quantitative approach and suggested a qualitative approach for future studies (Hoque, 2020; Siddique and Hossain 2018; Taufique, 2017; Iqbal, 2015). Hence, this thesis acted upon said suggestions and delivered a qualitative study to fill in the current literature gap.

The **questionnaire** has been developed by taking into account the valuable suggestions made by researchers in the past. First of all, Buerke *et al.* (2016) recommended investigating how people cope with personally responsible consumption when it comes to organic products. Moreover, contextual factors like peer influence and purchasing patterns also need examination. Hence, questions have been developed accordingly to answer these queries which are available in *Appendix I*. Subsequently, O' Rourke and Ringer (2016) highlighted the importance of finding out how sustainability information impacts the purchasing patterns of organic products.

Additionally, another avenue needs analyzing; factors that influence people to change their regular purchasing patterns to adopt a more sustainable approach. Moving on, Sheth *et al.* (2011) urged future research to focus on the overall experience and customer satisfaction linked to sustainable products. Mindful consumption and being aware of the environment are paramount to healthy and sustainable consumer behavior. As for barriers that impede sustainable consumption, it is another aspect that needs to be examined further. Rahman and Noor (2016) stress that price and availability are two major barriers to organic food consumption in Bangladesh. Although these hindrances have been contradicted by other authors, more investigation is required to unearth these barriers. Such impedance can disrupt the consumer adoption process of organic foods. Finally, Line *et al.* (2016) advised that future studies should explore the extent to which demographic characteristics, such as income and age affect sustainable consumption. Overall, the answers to these prescribed questions have been sought in the questionnaire developed in *Appendix 1*.

3.2. Research sample

3.2.1. Sampling technique

Purposive sampling was used in finding the participants. Also known as judgment sampling, is the intentional choice of a participant due to the traits he/she possesses. It is a non-probability technique that does not require any set number of interviewees (Trobia and Lavrakas, 2008, 28). Quite simply, the researcher decides what has to be known and finds people who are willing and able to provide the information by virtue of knowledge or experience. It is commonly used in qualitative research to ensure that individuals with the most relevant information are selected and analyzed. (Etikan, 2016, 1). Moreover, previous studies were all based in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh (Hoque, 2020; Siddique and Hossain 2018; Taufique, 2017; Iqbal, 2015). However, this research has taken insights from consumers residing in other cities of Bangladesh like Chittagong, Sylhet, and Khulna in addition to Dhaka. Subsequently, the selected consumers for this study came from various backgrounds in terms of age, gender, income group, and profession. This produced more representative results since it presented the insights of a varied consumer base as opposed to the studies mentioned above.

With regards to sustainability, this sampling technique has been used by researchers in the past. For example, Tanjung and Wahyudi (2019) used purposive sampling to study the effects of

sustainability reporting on the value of a company. Moreover, Doktoralina *et al.* (2018) studied the importance of sustainability reporting among non-financial companies by using a purposive sample. Finally, Teh and Corbitt (2015) also used the technique of purposive sampling while investigating the sustainable strategy development of various businesses. Hence, this sampling technique is indeed relevant while researching sustainability.

3.2.2. Sample structure

Below are the demographic profiles of each of the 10 interviewees that were interviewed for this qualitative study. To maintain confidentiality, interviewees have been assigned code names such as I1, I2, etc. Further ethical guidelines were followed such as taking prior consent before conducting the interviews and ensuring that data is collected in an unbiased manner. All the rules of the interview were presented to the participants which they agreed upon beforehand.

According to the World Health Organization (2020), there are 4 income groups; high, upper-middle, lower-middle, and low. This classification was introduced by the World Health Organization in the late 1970s and has been updated regularly to adjust for economic factors like inflation. For this thesis, the updated classifications released in 2020 have been used. Hence, the interviewees have been grouped as per this system developed by the WHO. During the interview, the interviewees categorized themselves in each group according to the best of their knowledge.

Table 1. Demographics of sample

| Respondent No. | Gender | Age range | Location | Profession | Income group |
|----------------|--------|-----------|------------|-----------------------------|--------------|
| I1 | man | 35 – 40 | Chittagong | Small shop owner | low |
| I2 | woman | 25 – 30 | Dhaka | Administrative employee | high |
| I3 | man | 25 – 30 | Sylhet | Logistics manager | upper-middle |
| I4 | woman | 30 – 35 | Khulna | Call centre executive | lower-middle |
| I5 | man | 40 – 45 | Comilla | IT personnel | low |
| I6 | man | 30 – 35 | Dinajpur | Online clothes entrepreneur | upper-middle |
| I7 | man | 20 – 25 | Dhaka | Freelancer | lower-middle |
| I8 | woman | 35 – 40 | Khulna | Senior teacher | upper-middle |
| I9 | woman | 40 – 45 | Chittagong | Bank manager | high |
| I10 | woman | 20 – 25 | Sylhet | Government employee | lower-middle |

Source: Interviews by author

Table 1 demonstrates the various characteristics of each interviewee like gender, age, location, etc. From Table 1, it is apparent that half of the interviewees were men while the other half were women. Furthermore, the ages ranged from 20 to 45 years and the interviewees were based in multiple locations of Bangladesh like Dhaka, Chittagong, Khulna, etc. Professionally, the sample was also quite diverse and consisted of executives, entrepreneurs, and government employees. Moreover, as per the World Health Organization (2020), the sample was grouped into income groups like upper-middle and lower-middle.

3.3. Data collection and analysis method

In order to answer the research questions and to gather data, the author conducted semi-structured interviews over Skype with consumers of organic foods in Dhaka, Bangladesh. Framework for these interviews and questions are presented in *Appendix 1* while transcriptions of the interviews can be found in *Appendix 2*. Data from the interviews will be investigated in chapter 3.4, where subsequent results will be presented and interpreted.

Speaking of interpretation, thematic analysis was used in this regard. Thematic analysis is one of the most popular forms of interpreting data in qualitative research. It involves identifying patterns with the data and systematically organizing it in a meaningful way (Trobia and Lavrakas, 2008, 34). This method of analysis is indeed well-known in the field of sustainable research. For instance, Baum *et al.* (2016) investigated sustainability in the workforce of the tourism sector using thematic analysis. This was useful in uncovering the opinions of employees working in this sector and how sustainable tourism affected their lives. That's not all; Lakshmi and Corbett (2020) also made use of thematic analysis to examine how 'artificial intelligence (AI) improves agricultural productivity and sustainability'. Obtaining insights from AI developers through this method was particularly useful in this regard. Moreover, it was also observed that Ahmad *et al.* (2021) made use of thematic analysis while interviewing SME owners in Pakistan to uncover how they incorporated sustainability into their business operations. Hence, it is evident that thematic analysis is a popular and well-utilized method of analysis in the field of sustainability.

3.4. Research results

The research results have been grouped into certain key themes as per the research objectives of this thesis. Many sub-themes have emerged from the answers presented by interviewees, which will be discussed in the following chapters. Many of their verbatim answers have been quoted here to offer perspective into their insights.

3.4.1. Interviewee's perception of sustainability

The following themes emerged from the subsequent answers given by interviewees:

The first aspect that came up is regarding the natural resources and the surrounding environment
'I2: When I hear the word 'sustainability', the first thing that comes to my mind is the idea of sustaining. I believe the concept is related to preserving current resources without harming the environment and compromising the future. That is my understanding of the concept.'

'I10: My understanding is that it has to do with caring for the natural environment around us. Respecting and carefully using the resources nature has given us. As human beings, we often overuse these resources and put the Earth in danger. It is our duty to protect nature and everything in it. Yeah, that is what I think about the concept. Saving and protecting the environment for a better tomorrow.'

Next, ensuring sustainability for people was narrated as follows:

'I1: Yes, well sustainability actually goes beyond just saving resources of the environment. Socially safeguarding people is also part of that. As you know there was a garments factory collapse here in Bangladesh a few years back. The international fashion brands did not ensure the safety and security of the workers here. Now, those companies are making sure that workers are in safe working environments. I guess you can say that this is a form of social sustainability. So, this is my idea of the concept.'

'I7: Personally, I believe sustainability has to do with doing business in such a way that it benefits employees and workers. There shouldn't be any negative impacts on workers like making them work long hours without overtime pay. Businesses need to have a responsibility to ensure that employees and the surrounding society are impacted in a positive manner. Only then, we can achieve sustainability for people and the society.'

Finally, concerns about the sustainability of the economy were discussed

'I4: I have seen some examples of sustainability like many houses these days are installing solar panels on their roofs to get renewable energy. As you know, there are some parts of the country with a shortage of electricity so people want to increase self-dependence. Then, there are also some charity organizations that work towards recycling plastic and making useful products out of them. Also, there are some other initiatives where rainwater is collected and used in rural areas where there is water shortage. I believe such activities that support the country economically is what sustainability is all about.'

The sample base was asked regarding their understanding of the concept known as 'sustainability'. Their responses yielded 3 key themes. They primarily expressed concerns about conserving natural resources since they are limited. Moreover, developing sustainable work environments was also narrated along with developing sustainable economies through activities like recycling. Overall, the sample had a decent understanding of the concept and expressed a variety of thoughts regarding the idea.

The key themes that emerged from the interviews were vital in answering the first research question regarding the perception of sustainability among consumers. The insights indicate that natural resources, people, and the economy are the main concerns of consumers. Sheikh *et al.* (2014) also found similar concerns about the environment in their research about organic food in Pakistan. Hence, the results of this thesis are similar to previous studies.

3.4.2. Types of organic food consumption

The following themes emerged from the subsequent answers given by interviewees:

Firstly, organic fruits and vegetables were among the consumed products

'I9: I am trying to focus on organic fruits and vegetables now. Mushrooms, lettuce, bananas, and stuff like that I have eaten so far. There are some more in this category but I can't recall at the moment. Mainly, it is organic fruits and vegetables that I have consumed.'

Moreover, organic tea was also another favorite among the sample

'I3: Well, there are a few organic foods that I have had so far. Firstly, I have consumed organic gold tea and lychee flower honey. I enjoy tea and honey so the organic options attracted my attention. These are the ones I have mainly had.'

'I8: Organic tea is the main thing that I have. I like to try various flavors of organic tea like ginger and jasmine. Some of the tea is branded in a unique way like 'super calm' and 'relaxation' which I also like to have from time to time. So, yes organic tea is something that I have and I enjoy it.'

Next, organic fishes and shrimps were also found among the consumed products

'I2: There are a variety of organic foods that I have consumed myself. For example, I have had organic dry fishes like Rupchada and Koral.....'

'I1: When I think about it, I have had the experience of eating organic foods a few times. I remember eating some freshwater shrimps that were organic.....'

Finally, the last product to be mentioned was organic eggs

'I10: Among the sustainable foods that I have had, organic eggs and meat are the main items. I prefer having meat that is processed from organic farms and eggs that are packaged and labeled as organic. I mainly look for organic beef and chicken in terms of meat.'

'I4: Recently, I have been seeing a lot of organic eggs and milk being sold in the shops near my house. I have tried those products.....'

Interviewees revealed a variety of organic food products they consumed. Some of the main products have been illustrated below. Said products include vegetables, eggs, tea, and fishes. Many of the interviewees narrated that they are slowly shifting to organic food products. But, the change has been rather challenging. More on this will have conversed in the following chapters.

These themes that have emerged help in answering the first research question regarding the types of organic food customers consume. Mainly, it was found that consumers have vegetables, eggs, tea, and fishes that are produced sustainably. Most consumers in the past were found to have

used sustainable electronics and automotive rather than food (Miremadi *et al.*, 2012). Thus, the results of this research differ from the existing literature.

3.4.3. Frequency of organic food usage

The following themes emerged from the subsequent answers given by interviewees:

First of all, some interviewees mentioned that they consume organic food products every day

'I8: Pretty regularly. Previously only I used to have organic tea but now I am trying to make my husband have it as well. We usually have it once a day. So you can guess how many times that are in a month. We haven't been able to fully replace the regular tea yet. But, slowly I believe we will fully shift to organic tea soon.'

'I10: I and my husband have organic eggs for breakfast almost every day. We have it pretty regularly. In the case of organic chicken or beef, the usage is a bit variable. We have it a few times each week. Not that regular like eggs but we have it a fair amount.....'

Next, the consumption of organic food around 2 to 4 times a week was narrated

'I5: At this age, having regular tea is a habit of mine like many others. Sometimes, I try to have organic tea besides the regular one. I try to make sure that I have it at least a few times every week. Organic tea feels lighter and better at times.'

'I6:As for pasta, that is bought in intervals. Perhaps 2 to 3 times a week they have it. We have a pretty high usage of sustainable food at home.'

'I9: Slowly, I am focusing on increasing the usage of such products. As a family, I try to ensure that my other family members have organic fruits and vegetables at least 3-4 times a week. I myself also follow this schedule. Previously, my usage was lower but now it has increased.'

On the contrary, there was one interviewee who consumed it once a week

'I4: I have them around once a week since I prefer organic foods that aren't contaminated by any harmful chemicals. So, I would say that 4 to 5 times a month I consume organic foods like the ones I mentioned earlier. Earlier, I didn't bother with having them but now since they are becoming more available I am giving it a shot.'

Similarly, there were some interviewees who had it occasionally

'I1: I really don't use them on a regular basis. It is very occasional. I guess around a few times in a month. Sometimes there is a gap where I don't have them. But every now and then I end up having some of the organic foods that I talked about before.'

'I3: In terms of frequency, I would say I use them a few times in a month. It isn't something that I use regularly. I prefer them as special items that I like to use occasionally. When I feel that I need a change of taste from regular tea and honey, I use the organic options.'

As for the frequency of usage, very few interviewees were found to consume organic foods occasionally. Rather, most of them have talked about eating organic food products on a regular basis. There are even some interviewees who are having it on a daily basis. One person highlighted that his/her frequency of usage rose with the increased availability of organic products in the market.

The first research question is answered from the themes found here. Consumption of organic foods was found to be on a regular basis in this thesis. Previous research also indicates that the consumption of organic foods is slowly rising despite the barriers that exist (Miremadi *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, it can be concluded that the findings of this study are consistent with the literature.

3.4.4. Sources of awareness for organic food

The following themes emerged from the subsequent answers given by interviewees:

Firstly, friends and family members were highlighted as a source of awareness for organic foods

'I1: To be honest, I don't use social media much so I don't know about that. My main source of awareness is my friends and close relatives. I got to know about organic foods from them. Sometimes they supply me with such products if I need them. Overall, peer influence is my primary source of information for sustainable foods.'

'I10: Hearing about some of these products from my friends and colleagues influenced me. I heard about the benefits of having organic food so I decided to try it out. My husband also heard from his acquaintances about them.'

Moving on, social media was talked about as well

'I2: Actually, social media is the best place for me to keep updated about such products. I come across a lot of Facebook pages that sell organic food so that is my primary source of information.....'

'I4:I also see advertisements of various organic product pages on Facebook and Instagram that influence me to visit them.'

Next, online organic foods stores were also a source of awareness for one interviewee

'I6: I have a habit of checking various online stores to see if there is any discount. Therefore, most of the online stores are my primary way of knowing about such products. I look to save money on buying them so I check everywhere before ordering organic food.'

An interesting source of awareness that came up was SMS marketing

'I9:Some of the online grocery shops do SMS marketing and I notice some organic products in those messages on my phone. After you make an account at certain online shops, they send you an SMS from time to time. That is another way of knowing about the current prices of such products.'

Finally, the promotion of organic foods by convenient stores were mentioned

'I5:I have also noticed some convenience stores advertising such products on their shelves so that is another way of knowing about sustainable products.'

'I3: Mainly, I come to know about organic products from the convenience stores near my house. When I shop for regular items, new arrivals in the organic section catch my eye. Sometimes I do see advertisements about such products on social media. But, mainly I keep updated by going to the shops nearby.'

The sample base narrated a number of different sources when it came to know about various kinds of organic food. The sources mentioned below gives a clearer picture in this regard. Many

people from the sample relied on knowing information about organic food from their family members and friends. Moving on, social media websites like Instagram and Facebook, were also sources of awareness about organic food products. One interesting source that came up was SMS marketing.

According to a respondent, online organic food stores send SMSs to customers after they sign up on their website. Finally, the traditional methods of promoting organic food in convenience stores were also discussed. It is evident that the sources of awareness regarding organic food products are aplenty among the sample.

The answers to the second research question have been revealed through these emerging themes. Mainly, social media and peer influence were found to be the key sources of awareness regarding organic food products. Furthermore, Siddique and Hossain (2018) had advised that, in addition to social media and peer influence, there might be more sources that play a part in the awareness of organic foods. This was indeed the case as sources like SMS marketing and promotion by convenience stores were found in this thesis.

3.4.5. Factors that promote organic food purchase

The following themes emerged from the subsequent answers given by interviewees:

First of all, product ingredients were a main motivational factor for purchasing organic food

'18: The main thing that influences me to buy such products is the materials they are made with. Like organic tea doesn't have any added chemicals or stuff like that so it motivates me a lot.....'

'19: If the listed ingredients sound good, then I am motivated to buy them.....'

Next packaging was also mentioned as a key motivational factor

'11: Some of the packaging also mentions how the food has been sustainably produced so that also motivates me. Like in the case of organic shrimp, the packaging mentions how they are farmed in an ethical and sustainable way. If I am convinced that the product is organic, I buy it.....'

Moving on, another factor was the production technology adopted to manufacture the products
'110: Production technology is a big issue for me. I want to make sure that the organic food that I am having has been made in a sustainable way from start to finish. I am not ready to compromise on that. Only products that fulfill these criteria attract my attention.'

'14:Production technology is also another factor. Like organic eggs are specially produced and packed in nice containers, unlike regular eggs.'

Organic labeling was also highlighted as a factor that promoted organic food purchase

'18:Being labeled 'organic' is also another point. Seeing the logo that a product is organic gives me a sense of relief and influences me to buy it.'

'12: What I feel is that marketing a product as 'organic' motivates me to buy them. For example, most of the sustainable products I bought had the word 'organic' written on the packaging. Their appearance was also primarily green which indicates sustainability.....'

An interesting factor that came up was following the trends among friends

'17: It has to be keeping up with the trend among my friends. I get influenced seeing the lifestyle and food choices they make and try to follow that. If I see them having a certain organic product, I also look forward to having it. So, the branding and packaging are all secondary to me. I believe they make the right choices and I naturally follow them to get a taste of this lifestyle.'

Peer reviews were another influential factor that was talked about

'16: Good reviews about organic children's food influences me to buy certain products. Quite often I get to hear from other fathers and mothers about some of the organic baby food they use. If I hear good reviews, I consider buying them.....'

Finally, the brand itself was a main motivational factor for organic food purchase

'15:Moreover, having products from a trusted brand like Kazi & Kazi Tea is also satisfying since they have a good reputation. I know that their products are authentic which motivates me to have them.'

'I3: The brand is most important to me. For example, I depend on Parmeeda for my organic food products. They are a brand with both physical and online shops here in the country. Along with regular items, they mainly focus on selling chemical-free organic products. So I believe I can trust them for my sustainable needs and get quality goods.'

'I9:Reliable brands producing organic food are also another important aspect. Anyone can write 'organic' on the label but only trusted brands will ensure authentic products.'

In terms of factors that influence them to buy organic food items, interviewees highlighted a number of them, which presents a clear idea of said factors. Purchasing products from reliable brands like Kazi & Kazi Tea and Parmeeda were discussed since they are likely to offer authentic organic food products. Some of the common factors that promote purchase were also found like labeling, packaging, and production technology.

One interesting factor that came up was the influence of friends. Having organic food as a part of 'following the trend' of friend groups was narrated by one of the interviewees. Additionally, hearing good reviews about certain organic foods also motivated another respondent. Altogether, a variety of influential factors motivated the sample to buy organic products.

Factors that promote the purchase of organic food were the main query of the second research question. From the findings, it is evident that reliable brands and the influence of friends played a major part in motivating the purchase of organic food. Joshi and Rahman (2015) found that high availability of organic products were the main motivators of purchasing said products since consumer do not like spending much time searching for them. Henceforth, the results of this thesis are slightly varied in comparison to the literature.

3.4.6. General perception towards organic food

The following themes emerged from the subsequent answers given by interviewees:

First of all, the **advantages** highlighted by the interviewees have been presented.

The general health benefits of organic foods were discussed by the interviewees

'I3: One of the positives of consuming organic foods is that I know it is healthy and doesn't contain any harmful chemicals.'

'I8:I have a positive perception of organic products. They are healthier than regular products. These days, many products in Bangladesh have harmful chemicals in them which I naturally want to avoid. Having organic products definitely makes me feel safer.'

'I10:..... Having healthy food that is produced naturally without any harmful fertilizers feels like a blessing.'

Moreover, organic foods were deemed as environmentally friendly

'I2: The biggest advantage is my peace of mind. When I consume a portion of organic food, I feel satisfied knowing that I am doing my part in saving the environment.....'

'I3: Plus, natural resources are also being saved.....'

The overall quality of such products was also a big positive

'I7: In terms of taste and quality, the organic products I had were pretty good.....'

Moving on, the **disadvantages** highlighted by the interviewees have been presented next.

The short expiration of organic foods was deemed as a negative

'I4:Maybe one disadvantage is that the expiry of organic foods is shorter than regular food since they are not sprayed with any chemicals or preservatives. They need to be eaten quickly or else they might rot.'

Organic food also had a reduced taste according to some interviewees

'I1: I feel the taste of organic foods is a bit less and different than regular products, so that might be a disadvantage. But, that is maybe because regular foods have many added preservatives and chemicals which make it taste better.....'

Low availability was another major issue with organic foods

'I6: There are times when I find certain organic products to be 'out of stock' in the online stores. I feel the items are not stocked enough in comparison to other products.....'

'I5: I guess you can say that the availability is a bit lower than other items. Maybe that is a disadvantage perhaps.'

Last of all, the **general experience** of consuming organic foods by the interviewees has been presented.

Some of the interviewees had a great experience in consuming organic foods

'I10: My experience has been fantastic in terms of consuming organic food on a regular basis. I couldn't be happier.'

'I5: I have generally had a very good experience with organic foods.....'

Similarly, good experiences of organic food consumption were also narrated

'I7: Experience is good; some of the local brands are stepping up and trying to match the standards of the international brands. That is appreciable.....'

'I9: If I have to sum up my experience, I would say that it is good.'

However, one interviewee had neither a good nor bad experience

'I1: My experience of eating organic foods is ok, not that great, not that bad either. Just ok I suppose.....'

One interviewee had a mixed experience

I6: If I have to sum up my experience, I would say it is mixed. There are good times as well as frustrating times while buying such products.

The perception of consumers towards organic food products were thematically grouped into 3 segments; perceived advantages, disadvantages, and overall experience. Each segment will be discussed separately.

Interviewees expressed that the biggest benefit of consuming organic foods was the health factor. Free of chemicals and preservatives, organic foods were deemed as natural and healthier than regular food items. Another positive side that was narrated was the idea that natural resources

were being conserved which was seen as good for the environment. Plus, the quality of organic food items was also praised. The satisfaction of consuming organic items was well expressed

However, some of the negative aspects of consuming sustainable foods were also depicted. One intriguing aspect was the short shelf-life and reduced taste of such items. Interviewees claimed that since they weren't sprayed with preservatives, organic food didn't last long and lacked taste. But, this was seen in a positive light since chemical-free food is ultimately healthier. Coming back to the other disadvantages, availability was another issue. Encountering 'out of stock' signs were common among consumers since the supply of such products isn't adequate enough.

Considering both sides of the coin, the overall experience of consumption was generally good among the sample. Most of them praised the usage of such healthy products. Only one respondent was found to be indifferent about his/her experience. In addition, another respondent had a mixed reaction towards organic food consumption since the positive and negative aspects both play a part. Moreover, these findings are also important with regards to the first research question. Overall, it can be concluded that the satisfaction level linked to consumption of organic foods is considerably high among the sample.

3.4.7. Barriers towards organic food consumption

The following themes emerged from the subsequent answers given by interviewees:

Overall, organic foods were criticized for being expensive

'I1: Well, one of the big barriers is certainly the price. As you know the price of organic food is higher than the regular food. But, sometimes I am willing to pay higher thinking about sustainability so I don't mind.....'

'I4: Sustainable foods are also relatively expensive which is discouraging at times. But making them is indeed costly so the extra cost needs to be paid by the customer ultimately.'

The limited availability and variety of such products were also stressed

'I9: Availability is indeed low. You can't expect to find all the organic food items in one shop. I made accounts in multiple online stores so that I have alternatives when I don't find my desired items in one shop.'

'I7: I talked about variety which is also a barrier if you're looking to try something new but you can't.'

Additionally, the lack of authentic information was also a concern

'I8: Misinformation is one problem about organic products. In my personal opinion, some of the local products I have seen claiming to be organic but it seems suspicious.'

'I1: Another barrier I believe is authentic information about sustainability might be low. Many brands have a habit of labeling regular products as organic incorrectly to influence customers.'

Organic foods had a low shelf-life according to some interviewees

'I9: You also have to eat the organic food products quickly since they have a tendency of rotting early.'

'I7: The expiry dates are shorter for organic products when compared to normal products. That is a problem since I feel an added pressure to finish them up before they expire. You can't store organic food for a long period of time.....'

Inadequate marketing communication was also a barrier to organic food consumption

'I3: Brand communication is ok but I feel it can be better. Like, they should explain the health benefits more clearly for each product.....'

'I10: I think brands don't do enough to market organic foods properly. I think the health benefits aren't really talked about enough. If people are unaware, they will always go for the cheapest item. But, the cheapest product is often the unhealthiest so it isn't good for consumers.....'

There were many hindrances to organic food consumption that were identified by the sample. Most of them have been arranged above. The high prices of organic food products were talked about by many interviewees. However, it must be noted that many of them were willing to pay a premium to consume healthy and chemical-free products. Hence, this is one barrier that has a silver lining to it. Moving on, the limited availability and variety of organic food in the market was also pointed out. Another key aspect that was brought to light was the aspect of authenticity.

Some of the interviewees narrated that many of the local organic brands might not be sincere in labeling products as 'organic'. In fact, there are many products that are falsely labeled as such to motivate customers.

Subsequently, one of the barriers happened to be the relatively low expiry date on sustainable food items. As mentioned earlier, organic food does not have any preservatives in them which naturally shortens its lifespan. Finally, the inadequacy in terms of marketing communications was brought up. Consumers feel that more should be done to highlight the health benefits of organic food items. To sum up, it is evident that many barriers exist when it comes to consuming organic food.

These themes were vital in answering the second research question about barriers to organic food consumption. Many barriers do exist in Bangladesh which need to be eliminated in order to foster the growth of the organic food market. Barriers like inadequate awareness, high prices, negative perceptions, distrust, and low availability exist across different markets (Ewah and Ekeng, 2009). Hence, the hindrances to organic food consumption are consistent with the results of previous studies.

3.4.8. Customer recommendations about organic foods market in Bangladesh

The following themes emerged from the subsequent answers given by interviewees:

The first recommendation was about maintaining a chain of sustainability

'I8: The chain of sustainability needs to be consistent in Bangladesh. If a product is produced as a sustainable one, it must make sure that everything in that chain is sustainable. Like the ingredients and the workers need to be in line with sustainability. I sincerely hope that the government and other concerned authorities take the right steps to ensure this happens.'

The second recommendation was about enhanced marketing

'I3: My advice for organic brands is to develop their marketing communication more so that people are aware of such products and their benefits. I would also like to see physical advertisements of such products on billboards and newspapers if possible. There is potential for the organic food market in Bangladesh to grow even more and become well-established.'

The third recommendation was about funding sustainable businesses

'I9: If more organizations come forward and fund sustainable businesses in Bangladesh, that would be good. As far as I know, profit margins are lower so not many purely sustainable businesses can survive in the long run. They need our support so that they can grow and customers can enjoy organic food products more readily.'

Government interventions were another suggestion made by interviewees

'I1: I believe the government needs to introduce a formal system of organic certification to combat the problem I just talked about. With the right certifications in place, organic foods in Bangladesh will continue to spread and gain popularity. I hope they become more affordable as well so that many people can consume it.'

'I10: There need to be some firm policies on the development of organic farming and organic foods overall. Not just a policy but there should be proper enforcement of the said policy. It isn't possible for the market to grow without such robust support. That is something I want to see and also increased media support for promoting the organic food market.'

Promoting usage among the youth was also highlighted as a suggestion

'I7: My recommendation is to market organic food products to the youth in a trendy and fashionable way. If the trend of having organic food catches on, the youth can drive the development of this market. Currently, the market is slowly progressing but I would like to see it take off soon. Hoping to see some advancements in this regard.'

Finally, increasing the supply of organic food to meet the rising demand was encouraged

'I6: stock availability should improve so that it can meet the rising demand of sustainable food products.'

'I4: The demand for organic food is steadily rising in Bangladesh. Nowadays, many people like me are conscious about what we are having and want to consume healthy organic food items. I advise that the supply of such foods be increased with the increasing demand.'

'I2: I sincerely hope that more shops adopt organic foods irrespective of the profit margins. Protecting the environment is also important. Sustainable products should become common across all stores here.'

Interviewees had the opportunity to openly suggest their recommendations for the development of the organic food market in Bangladesh. All of these suggestions have been presented above.

First of all, the concept of ensuring a chain of sustainability was stressed. Everyone from the workers to the materials used in production should fall under ethical and sustainable guidelines as per one of the interviewees. Secondly, improving the overall marketing communication of organic products was suggested. More physical advertisements like those on billboards and newspapers were urged. Speaking of marketing, one of the intriguing recommendations was to promote organic food towards the youth of Bangladesh. If the trend catches on, it could drive the market forward according to a respondent.

Another vital aspect brought forward was the need for financially supporting businesses involved in producing organic food. Such businesses along with organic farms should get monetary support since the profit margins are relatively low. Similarly, there is a need to adopt and enforce policies by the government to bolster the organic food market in Bangladesh. They should introduce formal certification systems according to the suggestions of the sample. Finally, one of the most important things highlighted was the need to increase the overall supply of organic foods in Bangladesh.

These suggestions also play a part in answering the second research question since they help in eliminating the barriers to organic food consumption discussed earlier. It is clear that the demand for such goods is slowly rising and the market should be prepared to cater to that. Altogether, it can be said that the recommendations put forward by the sample are praiseworthy and commendable. They are definitely worth implementing for the betterment of the organic food market in Bangladesh.

3.5. Research implications

This master thesis has made significant contributions to the existing literature. From the managerial perspective, the results have revealed that there is a need to ensure a chain of sustainability when it comes to producing organic food products. From the manufacturing, packaging, and labor standards, everything needs to be sustainable in the production line.

Therefore, the concerned managers and authority figures need to take steps in order to make sure that each process in the supply chain is indeed sustainable. Speaking of the supply chain, the existing supplies of organic food items need to steadily increase to keep up with the gradually rising demand. Some cases of products being ‘out of stock’ were reported in the results of this thesis. Furthermore, the quality of marketing sustainable food products needs to be improved since there is an ambiguity that prevails in the current situation.

In terms of theoretical implications, it was revealed that consumers were willing to pay higher prices to purchase organic food. The benefits were worth the premium as contrary to the existing literature (Miremadi *et al.*, 2012; Sheila *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, the attitude-behavior gap among the studied consumers is relatively less since they are being driven by the health benefits of organic food items (D’Souza, 2004, 13). Even though the marketing is not up to par, the safer alternative to traditional food products is much more important for the customer base in this thesis. Hence, it can be concluded that the theory of planned behavior (TPB) holds true for consumers who purchase organic food in Bangladesh (Taufique *et al.*, 2017).

As for explicit contributions of this thesis, it must be noted that most of the researches in the past employed a quantitative approach and suggested a qualitative approach for future studies (Hoque, 2020; Siddique and Hossain 2018; Taufique, 2017; Iqbal, 2015). Hence, this thesis acted upon said suggestions and delivered a qualitative study to fill in the current literature gap. Moreover, the previous studies mentioned above were all based in Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh. However, this research has taken insights from consumers residing in other cities of Bangladesh like Chittagong, Sylhet, and Khulna in addition to Dhaka. Subsequently, the selected consumers for this study came from various backgrounds in terms of age, gender, income group, and profession. This produced more representative results since it presented the insights of a varied consumer base. Overall, considering the managerial, theoretical, and explicit implications of the study, this thesis has made a considerable contribution to the existing literature.

3.6. Research limitations and future directions

This master thesis had limitations, as in any academic research. Few main limitations can be listed as the fact that the research was conducted during the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic which made things challenging. Lockdowns around the world affected everyone.

Moreover, the author was based in Estonia and the interviews were taken from Bangladesh via Skype. The lack of physical, face-to-face communication is another limitation. The interviewees may have revealed even more information had the interviews been taken physically. Interviewees had availability issues since the timetable was strict.

The sample size was also limited to 10 interviewees from a few cities in Bangladesh. Finding organic food consumers in the country was tough, to begin with. Time limitations on part of the author also restricted the prospect of taking more interviews. Many future research opportunities emerge from this thesis. Further studies can be done on a bigger sample from multiple cities in Bangladesh to increase the inclusion and accuracy of results. A mixed-method approach is also recommended that combines both qualitative and quantitative data. The demographic profile of the interviewees should also be widened to encompass other people like students and the elderly.

Another approach can be that of experimentation where participants are brought in to physically experience organic foods. Subsequent observational data will prove to be invaluable in this regard. How participants interact with the products, how do they perceive and consume them on the spot?; these are some of the questions further studies can answer. To sum up, there are multiple avenues to study the organic food market in Bangladesh since very little research exists on this topic.

CONCLUSION

Overall, it is evident from this thesis that there is potential for the organic food market in Bangladesh to grow even further. Currently, there is a slow and steady rise in demand for such goods. Consumers are gradually becoming aware of the importance of having healthy and chemical-free organic food. Furthermore, there is decent satisfaction when it comes to consuming such products as seen from the data presented. However, there are some downsides to it like paying higher prices but that is something they are willing to do. The recommendations of the interviewees also pave the way for practitioners and researchers alike in this field.

This thesis has made a contribution to the field of sustainability. Important aspects like the consumer's perception of sustainability, their awareness levels, and factors that affect purchasing decision of such goods were scrutinized.

In terms of data collection, the thesis employed interviews with a semi-structured questionnaire. Thematic analysis was used to unearth the themes and patterns within the answers. The results have revealed that interviewees consume a variety of organic foods and that their consumption frequency is slowly increasing. In terms of awareness, consumers rely on multiple platforms like social media, peer influence, and product reviews. Additionally, factors like absence of preservatives, health benefits, and following trends were deemed to be the biggest motivations towards organic food consumption. To sum up, interviewees exhibited a decent level of satisfaction in terms of consuming organic food products.

However, there were some barriers that were brought to light such as high prices and low availability of organic foods. Consequently, many suggestions were made to improve the scenario of the organic food market in Bangladesh. Government interventions and increased promotion of such goods were highly recommended by the sample.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Indicative interview guide

Verbal Instructions (Read out to interviewees): I am conducting a research titled ‘The Role of Sustainability in Consumer Behaviour in the food sector of Bangladesh’. There are 9 questions in this interview that will help me to understand issues about this topic. Like your perception of sustainability, your awareness levels, and challenges of consumption. Your meaningful insights will be invaluable to this research. Moreover, I would also like to mention that at no point in this interview, you will be asked to submit any personal information like names email, phone number and so on. We are following strict ethical guidelines as per international research standards. All data collected for this study will be confidentially managed while maintaining full privacy. Your interview will also be recorded for data analysis purposes and be deleted accordingly.

I. For the record, could you state your age, gender, profession, location, and income group?

II. What is your understanding of the concept of ‘sustainability’?

III. Which sustainable products have you consumed so far?

IV. How often do you use these products mentioned above?

V. What are your sources of awareness when it comes to sustainable products? (Social media, peer influence, advertisements, billboards, etc.)

VI. Which factors influence you to buy sustainable products? (Product’s material, packaging material, eco-friendly labelling, production technology, brand etc.)

VII. What is your general perception towards sustainable products? (Advantages, Disadvantages, consumer’s personal experience, etc.)

VIII. What are some of the barriers you have faced towards sustainable product consumption? (High price, low availability, poor brand communication, etc.)

IX. Would you like to add any additional comments or recommendations about the sustainable product market in Bangladesh?

Appendix 2. Transcripts of interviews

Interviewee: I1

I. For the record, could you state your age, gender, profession, location, and income group?

So, at the moment, I am currently located in Chittagong which as you know is in the southern part of Bangladesh. My age range belongs to the 35- to 40-year-old group and I am a male person. My income group falls under the low-income category as far as my knowledge. My occupation is that of a small shop owner involved in selling various household items.

II. What is your understanding of the concept of 'sustainability'?

Yes, well sustainability actually goes beyond just saving resources of the environment. Socially safeguarding people is also part of that. As you know there was a garments factory collapse here in Bangladesh a few years back. The international fashion brands did not ensure safety and security of the workers here. Now, those companies are making sure that workers are in safe working environments. I guess you can say that this is a form of social sustainability. So, this is my idea of the concept.

III. Which sustainable products have you consumed so far?

When I think about it, I have had the experience of eating organic foods a few times. I remember eating some freshwater shrimps that were organic. I also recall eating some mango pickle that one of my close friends gave me. Yeah, that is all that I have had.

IV. How often do you use these products mentioned above?

I really do not use them on a regular basis. It is very occasional. I guess around a few times in a month. Sometimes there is a gap where I do not have them. But every now and then I end up having some of the organic foods that I talked about before.

V. What are your sources of awareness when it comes to sustainable products? (Social media, peer influence, advertisements, billboards, etc.)

To be honest, I do not use social media much, so I do not know about that. My main source of awareness is my friends and close relatives. I got to know about organic foods from them. Sometimes they supply me with such products if I need it. Overall, peer influence is my primary source of information for sustainable foods.

VI. Which factors influence you to buy sustainable products? (Product's material, packaging material, eco-friendly labelling, production technology, brand etc.)

Mostly I look for the 'organic' label on products that I buy. Some of the packaging also mentions how the food has been sustainably produced so that also motivates me. Like in case of organic

shrimp, the packaging mentions how they are farmed in an ethical and sustainable way. If I am convinced that the product is organic, I buy it. Trusting the brand is also important for me.

VII. What is your general perception towards sustainable products? (Advantages, Disadvantages, consumer's personal experience, etc.)

My experience of eating organic foods is ok, not that great, not that bad either. Just ok I suppose. I feel the taste of organic foods is a bit less and different than regular products, so that might be a disadvantage. But that is maybe because regular foods have many added preservatives and chemicals which make it taste better. In terms of advantage, I believe that the products are chemical free and made by workers in sustainable environments, which I value most.

VIII. What are some of the barriers you have faced towards sustainable product consumption? (High price, low availability, poor brand communication, etc.)

Well, one of the big barriers is certainly the price. As you know the price of organic food is higher than the regular food. But sometimes I am willing to pay higher thinking about sustainability, so I do not mind. Another barrier I believe is authentic information about sustainability might be low. Many brands have a habit of labelling regular products as organic incorrectly to influence customers.

IX. Would you like to add any additional comments or recommendations about the sustainable product market in Bangladesh?

I believe the government needs to introduce a formal system of organic certification to combat the problem I just talked about. With the right certifications in place, the organic foods in Bangladesh will continue to spread and gain popularity. I hope they become more affordable as well so that many people can consume it.

Interviewee: I2

I. For the record, could you state your age, gender, profession, location, and income group?

I happen to be a female in the age range of 25 to 30. Currently, I am living in Dhaka which is the capital city of Bangladesh. By profession I am working in the administration department of a local company here. Finally, I fall under the category of high-income group. Hope that answers your question.

II. What is your understanding of the concept of 'sustainability'?

When I hear the word 'sustainability', the first thing that comes to my mind is the idea of sustaining. I believe the concept is related to preserving current resources without harming the environment and compromising the future. That is my understanding of the concept.

III. Which sustainable products have you consumed so far?

There are a variety of organic foods that I have consumed myself. For example, I have had organic dry fishes like Rupchada and Koral. I have also consumed organic castor oil once as well. Oh, and I have also used organic moringa powder too.

IV. How often do you use these products mentioned above?

As for the frequency of usage, I would say I use these products about once or twice every week. Like the organic dry fishes, I have at least once a week. The other products are used a bit less. Overall, about twice a week is my usage rate.

V. What are your sources of awareness when it comes to sustainable products? (Social media, peer influence, advertisements, billboards, etc.)

Actually, social media is the best place for me to keep updated about such products. I come across a lot of Facebook pages that sell organic food so that is my primary source of information. Sometimes, I also hear about new organic products from my friends. Do not think I have seen much physical advertisements about such products though.

VI. Which factors influence you to buy sustainable products? (Product's material, packaging material, eco-friendly labelling, production technology, brand etc.)

What I feel is that marketing a product as 'organic' motivates me to buy them. For example, most of the sustainable products I bought had the word 'organic' written on the packaging. Their appearance was also primarily green which indicates sustainability. Overall, a combination of marketing and packaging influences me in this regard.

VII. What is your general perception towards sustainable products? (Advantages, Disadvantages, consumer's personal experience, etc.)

The biggest advantage is my peace of mind. When I consume an organic food, I feel satisfied knowing that I am doing my part in saving the environment. However, there are some issues in purchasing those products like being out of stock due to low supply. Overall, my personal

experience is that I enjoy having organic foods. The advantages are greater than the disadvantages for me.

VIII. What are some of the barriers you have faced towards sustainable product consumption? (High price, low availability, poor brand communication, etc.)

As you know, the prices of organic foods are relatively higher than regular ones. But price has never been an issue for me since my peace of mind is greater. One barrier that I feel is that there are not many Facebook pages that sell such goods. There are only a few so I get to choose from a limited number of shops. Fewer shops mean less choices and less availability.

IX. Would you like to add any additional comments or recommendations about the sustainable product market in Bangladesh?

I sincerely hope that more shops adopt organic foods irrespective of the profit margins. Protecting the environment is also important. Sustainable products should become common across all stores here.

Interviewee: I3

I. For the record, could you state your age, gender, profession, location, and income group?

I would like to start by saying that I am a male person belonging to the age range of 20 to 25. At the moment, I am living in Sylhet, Bangladesh which is located in the north eastern part of the country. Currently, I am a manager in a logistics firm over here. As for income group, I would classify myself as being part of the higher middle-income group.

II. What is your understanding of the concept of 'sustainability'?

To me, sustainability refers to protecting the environment and the resources it gives us. We must be careful not to harm the environment and overuse natural resources. I believe we can also protect our surroundings by reducing the usage of some harmful items like single-use plastic and packaging.

III. Which sustainable products have you consumed so far?

Well, there are a few organic foods that I have had so far. Firstly, I have consumed organic gold tea and lychee flower honey. I enjoy tea and honey, so the organic options attracted my attention. These are the ones I have mainly had.

IV. How often do you use these products mentioned above?

In terms of frequency, I would say I use them a few times in a month. It is not something that I use regularly. I prefer them as special items that I like to use occasionally. When I feel that I need a change of taste from regular tea and honey, I use the organic options.

V. What are your sources of awareness when it comes to sustainable products? (Social media, peer influence, advertisements, billboards, etc.)

Mainly I come to know about organic products from the convenience stores near my house. When I shop for regular items, new arrivals in the organic section catch my eye. Sometimes I do see advertisements about such products on social media. But mainly I keep updated by going to the shops nearby.

VI. Which factors influence you to buy sustainable products? (Product's material, packaging material, eco-friendly labelling, production technology, brand etc.)

The brand is most important to me. For example, I depend on Parmeeda for my organic food products. They are a brand with both physical and online shops here in the country. Along with regular items, they mainly focus on selling chemical-free organic products. So, I believe I can trust them for my sustainable needs and get quality goods.

VII. What is your general perception towards sustainable products? (Advantages, Disadvantages, consumer's personal experience, etc.)

One of the positives of consuming organic foods is that I know it is healthy and does not contain any harmful chemicals. Plus, natural resources are also being saved. One negative I have to

mention is that the variety of products is limited. But my general experience of using such products is quite satisfactory. There are definitely more positives than negatives.

VIII. What are some of the barriers you have faced towards sustainable product consumption? (High price, low availability, poor brand communication, etc.)

As I mentioned just now, the variety of organic foods is a bit limited. Brand communication is ok, but I feel it can be better. Like, they should explain the health benefits more clearly for each product. The price is higher than regular products, but I am ready to pay the premium for a safer alternative. Overall, there are some barriers, but I am ready to overcome them to get the sustainable products I need.

IX. Would you like to add any additional comments or recommendations about the sustainable product market in Bangladesh?

My advice for organic brands is to develop their marketing communication more so that people are aware of such products and their benefits. I would also like to see physical advertisement of such products on billboards and newspapers if possible. There is potential for the organic food market in Bangladesh to grow even more and become well-established.

Interviewee: I4

I. For the record, could you state your age, gender, profession, location, and income group?

Yes, ok. So as far as I know, I belong to the lower-middle income group in terms of my earnings. Currently, I am working as an employee at a reputed call centre over here. At the moment, I am located in Khulna, Bangladesh. Lastly, I want to specify that I am female and in the age range of 30 to 35 years old. That is everything you need to know about my background.

II. What is your understanding of the concept of 'sustainability'?

I have seen some examples of sustainability like many houses these days are installing solar panels on their roofs to get renewable energy. As you know, there are some parts of the country with shortage of electricity, so people want to increase self-dependence. Then, there are also some charity organizations that work towards recycling plastic and making useful products out of them. Also, there are some other initiatives where rainwater is collected and used in rural areas where there is water shortage. I believe such activities that support the country economically is what sustainability is all about.

III. Which sustainable products have you consumed so far?

Recently, I have been seeing a lot of organic eggs and milk being sold in the shops near my house. I have tried those products. There are also some organic vegetables that I have eaten like lettuce and tomatoes. These were given to me by relatives who have sustainable farms of their own.

IV. How often do you use these products mentioned above?

I have them around once a week since I prefer organic foods that are not contaminated by any harmful chemicals. So, I would say that 4 to 5 times a month I consume organic foods like the ones I mentioned earlier. Earlier, I did not bother with having them but now since they are becoming more available, I am giving it a shot.

V. What are your sources of awareness when it comes to sustainable products? (Social media, peer influence, advertisements, billboards, etc.)

A bit of everything, I would say. Like I sometimes go online and search for discounts on organic foods from different websites. Then, as I said, some of my relatives also give me certain kinds of organic products. Sometimes, I also see advertisements of various organic product pages on Facebook and Instagram that influence me to visit them. Overall, many sources keep me informed about sustainable foods.

VI. Which factors influence you to buy sustainable products? (Product's material, packaging material, eco-friendly labelling, production technology, brand etc.)

As you know, many of the food products we find in our shops are treated with different chemicals. Avoiding such harmful food is the main motivation for me in terms of buying organic food. I do not want to compromise on health and safety of myself. Production technology is also another factor. Like organic eggs are specially produced and packed in nice containers unlike

regular eggs. So, yes there are the things that influence me the most when I buy organic food items.

VII. What is your general perception towards sustainable products? (Advantages, Disadvantages, consumer's personal experience, etc.)

Yes, like the positive of having organic foods is that they are healthy and full of nutrition. If the source of the products is authentic and trustworthy, then the satisfaction of having such food items is high. I would say my experience so far has been satisfactory when it comes to having sustainable food. I cannot really think of a disadvantage. Maybe one disadvantage is that the expiry of organic foods is shorter than regular food since they are not sprayed with any chemicals or preservatives. They need to be eaten quickly or else they might rot.

VIII. What are some of the barriers you have faced towards sustainable product consumption? (High price, low availability, poor brand communication, etc.)

Trusting the source of organic food items is sometimes difficult. They are produced by companies that are not well known so there is an issue of whether they make real organic food or not. Sustainable foods are also relatively expensive which is discouraging at times. But making them is indeed costly so the extra cost needs to be paid by the customer ultimately. I also feel they should increase their marketing communications about such products to motivate customers.

IX. Would you like to add any additional comments or recommendations about the sustainable product market in Bangladesh?

The demand for organic food is steadily rising in Bangladesh. Nowadays, many people like me are conscious about what we are having and want to consume healthy organic food items. I advise that the supply of such foods be increased with the increasing demand. More promotion of sustainable foods will definitely benefit everyone in the long run.

Interviewee: I5

I. For the record, could you state your age, gender, profession, location, and income group?

Right, so for my occupation or profession, I would like to state that I am working at a renowned IT company. As for my age, I am between 40 and 45 years of age and my gender is male. At present, I am living in Comilla, Bangladesh which is quite near to the capital city of Dhaka. Finally, my income group falls under the 'low' category as far as I know. That is all.

II. What is your understanding of the concept of 'sustainability'?

It is all about balance, according to my belief. Humans should develop their society in such a way as to not harm Mother Nature. Unfortunately, people are more focused on expanding their avenues and not caring for their surroundings. The balance of nature is definitely disturbed now more than ever. We should focus on conservation rather than depletion to restore this balance. Otherwise, the harmony of our society will be compromised.

III. Which sustainable products have you consumed so far?

There are some I had, to be honest. There were some organic products given to me by my siblings that I tried. I had organic tea and organic honey. As you know, Bangladesh is famous for producing tea and many producers are now also making organic tea to expand their businesses.

I6: Mainly, I actually buy various types of organic food items for my children. There are organic cereals and pastas available that I regularly buy. I try to mix and match the flavours of cereal and pasta so that the kids enjoy.

IV. How often do you use these products mentioned above?

At this age, having regular tea is a habit of mine like many others. Sometimes, I try to have organic tea besides the regular one. I try to make sure that I have it at least a few times every week. Organic tea feels lighter and better at times. So, yes that is what my usage pattern of sustainable products looks like.

V. What are your sources of awareness when it comes to sustainable products? (Social media, peer influence, advertisements, billboards, etc.)

Initially, I had heard about organic food items from word-of-mouth communication from by siblings and some other close acquaintances. I occasionally use social media so that is not a big source for me. I have also noticed some convenient stores advertising such products on their shelves so that is another way of knowing about sustainable products. Yeah, these are all the sources of information I can think of.

VI. Which factors influence you to buy sustainable products? (Product's material, packaging material, eco-friendly labelling, production technology, brand etc.)

My biggest motivation for having organic food is my overall health. At this age, I am trying to shift to healthier alternatives slowly. Moreover, having products from a trusted brand like Kazi & Kazi Tea is also satisfying since they have a good reputation. I know that their products are authentic which motivates me to have them. Right, so these are my primary motivations for having organic foods.

VII. What is your general perception towards sustainable products? (Advantages, Disadvantages, consumer's personal experience, etc.)

I do not really have any disadvantages in mind. I have generally had a very good experience with organic foods. They taste lighter and seem healthier than regular alternatives. I guess you can say that the availability is a bit lower than other items. Maybe that is a disadvantage perhaps. But, altogether, I had a decent and positive experience of consuming organic items.

VIII. What are some of the barriers you have faced towards sustainable product consumption? (High price, low availability, poor brand communication, etc.)

As I mentioned, availability is one issue with organic foods. They are also promoted as special products, so the price is also a bit higher. They are indeed special, in my view. I have also heard from my relatives that certain organic foods do not last that long since they are fully natural. But that is expected since they do not contain any pesticides or chemicals.

IX. Would you like to add any additional comments or recommendations about the sustainable product market in Bangladesh?

Although, there are some negatives, the positives of sustainable foods are greater. The respective authorities should take initiatives to highlight those positives and promote organic food products throughout Bangladesh. I believe there is a bright future for them in this country.

Interviewee: I6

I. For the record, could you state your age, gender, profession, location, and income group?

Ok, so my income group belongs to the upper-middle income category. I happen to be an online entrepreneur involved in selling clothes. As for my gender, I am a male person in the age group of 30 to 35 years. My official residence is situated in Dinajpur, Bangladesh. I hope that answers your question.

II. What is your understanding of the concept of 'sustainability'?

Sustainability is about doing simple things like switching off the lights and fans to save power. It can also be about turning off the water to prevent excess wastage. We need to remember that in many parts of the country people do not get enough water and electricity. So, the lucky ones like us should save as much as we can. My personal opinion is that sustaining means saving and saving is precious.

III. Which sustainable products have you consumed so far?

Mainly, I actually buy various types of organic food items for my children. There are organic cereals and pastas available that I regularly buy. I try to mix and match the flavours of cereal and pasta so that the kids enjoy.

IV. How often do you use these products mentioned above?

Cereal is something that is consumed everyday by my children. So, the organic cereals are bought very regularly. Almost every morning, my kids have it besides regular cereal. As for pasta, that is bought in intervals. Perhaps 2 to 3 times a week they have it. We have a pretty high usage of sustainable food at home.

V. What are your sources of awareness when it comes to sustainable products? (Social media, peer influence, advertisements, billboards, etc.)

I have a habit of checking various online stores to see if there is any discount. Therefore, most of the online stores are my primary way of knowing about such products. I look to save money on buying them, so I check everywhere before ordering organic food. I also get to know about organic children's food from some of the other parents that I know personally. Yes, these are mainly the sources of information for organic foods from my point of view.

VI. Which factors influence you to buy sustainable products? (Product's material, packaging material, eco-friendly labelling, production technology, brand etc.)

Good reviews about organic children's food influences me to buy certain products. Quite often I get to hear from other fathers and mothers about some of the organic baby food they use. If I hear good reviews, I consider buying them. Trustworthy brands also motivate me in this regard. Kids & Mom BD is one of the dependable online stores that sell good quality organic children's food here.

VII. What is your general perception towards sustainable products? (Advantages, Disadvantages, consumer's personal experience, etc.)

There are times when I find certain organic products to be ‘out of stock’ in the online stores. I feel the items are not stocked enough in comparison to other products. But, as a father, knowing that organic food is safe and natural makes me happy. It is good to know that my children are having healthy food from a young age. If I have to sum up my experience, I will say it is mixed. There are good times as well as frustrating times while buying such products.

*VIII. What are some of the barriers you have faced towards sustainable product consumption?
(High price, low availability, poor brand communication, etc.)*

Honestly, I have faced a bit of all the barriers. As I said, low stock of organic food items bothers me regularly. The price is high, but I do not mind paying higher for better and safer quality of food. As long as you buy foreign branded products, the marketing communication is alright. But some of the local brand so have an issue with this.

IX. Would you like to add any additional comments or recommendations about the sustainable product market in Bangladesh?

It is not just adults; the organic food market for children in Bangladesh also has the ability to grow further. Every parent wants the best for their child so I would like to see the development of this market. The local brand communication and stock availability should improve so that it can meet the rising demand of sustainable food products.

Interviewee: I7

I. For the record, could you state your age, gender, profession, location, and income group?

First of all, I would like to say that I am living in Dhaka, Bangladesh. My profession is that of a freelancer doing designing and other various graphical activities. At present, I am in the age range of 20 to 25 years old. Finally, I would like to state that I am male, and my income category falls under the lower-middle income group as per my knowledge.

II. What is your understanding of the concept of 'sustainability'?

Personally, I believe sustainability has to do with doing business in such a way that it benefits employees and workers. There should not be any negative impacts on workers like making them work long hours without overtime pay. Businesses need to have a responsibility to ensure that employees and the surrounding society are impacted in a positive manner. Only then, we can achieve sustainability for people and the society.

III. Which sustainable products have you consumed so far?

When I think about it, there are quite a few organic snacks that I have. Some of the things that come to mind are organic jelly in pineapple and orange flavours. Then there is organic tomato sauce that I like to have with different kinds of fried foods. Lastly, I also have some almonds of the same kind from time to time.

IV. How often do you use these products mentioned above?

I consume each product differently. Like the jellies I like to have at breakfast so for that I buy one jar and it lasts me a month or so. But the tomato sauces finish faster since I have it with snacks in the evening. I buy around 2-3 bottles a month. As for almonds, I have that occasionally like once a week or something.

V. What are your sources of awareness when it comes to sustainable products? (Social media, peer influence, advertisements, billboards, etc.)

My friends were the one who made me aware about organic foods. Previously, I was not aware of it. Now, after seeing them have different kinds of organic foods, I also joined them. I do not think I have seen many physical advertisements of such products; most of it is on social media and other online websites. That is all I can think of when it comes to sources of awareness for organic foods.

VI. Which factors influence you to buy sustainable products? (Product's material, packaging material, eco-friendly labelling, production technology, brand etc.)

It has to be keeping up with the trend among my friends. I get influenced seeing the lifestyle and food choices they make and try to follow that. If I see them having a certain organic product, I also look forward to having it. So, the branding and packaging are all secondary to me. I believe they make the right choices and I naturally follow them to get a taste of this lifestyle.

VII. What is your general perception towards sustainable products? (Advantages, Disadvantages, consumer's personal experience, etc.)

Experience is good; some of the local brands are stepping up and trying to match the standards of the international brands. That is appreciable. I believe the variety of local organic brands is still quite less. So, that is one aspect that needs work. In terms of taste and quality, the organic products I had were pretty good. Generally, I would say everything is decent in terms of having organic food.

*VIII. What are some of the barriers you have faced towards sustainable product consumption?
(High price, low availability, poor brand communication, etc.)*

The expiry dates are shorter for organic products when compared to normal products. That is a problem since I feel an added pressure to finish them up before they expire. You cannot store organic food for a long period of time. I talked about variety which is also a barrier if you are looking to try something new, but you cannot. These are some of the barriers I recall.

IX. Would you like to add any additional comments or recommendations about the sustainable product market in Bangladesh?

My recommendation is to market organic food products to the youth in a trendy and fashionable way. If the trend of having organic food catches on, the youth can drive the development of this market. Currently, the market is slowly progressing, but I would like to see it take off soon. Hoping to see some advancements in this regard.

Interviewee: I8

I. For the record, could you state your age, gender, profession, location, and income group?

At present, I am serving as a senior teacher at a school. Inside Bangladesh, my location happens to be in Khulna. Regarding my income group, I am in the upper-middle category. Furthermore, I would also like to add that I am female, and my age group is in the 35-to-40-year bracket. That is all for my background. I hope that answers all your queries.

II. What is your understanding of the concept of 'sustainability'?

Making sure no harm comes to the Mother Nature and its surrounding environment. It is important to ensure that we save all the resources given to us by nature. Also, having organic food products is important to support businesses that are involved in sustainability. Yes, so I think these are the main things about the concept. Many companies are not concerned about the environment and they rapidly consume natural resources which is bad for the future generation. Everyone must act responsibly.

III. Which sustainable products have you consumed so far?

Organic tea is the main thing that I have. I like to try various flavours of organic tea like ginger and jasmine. Some of the tea is branded in a unique way like 'super calm' and 'relaxation' which I also like to have from time to time. So, yes organic tea is something that I have, and I enjoy it.

IV. How often do you use these products mentioned above?

Pretty regularly. Previously only I used to have organic tea but now I am trying to make my husband have it as well. We usually have it once a day. So, you can guess how many times that are in a month. We have not been able to fully replace the regular tea yet. But slowly I believe we will fully shift to organic tea soon.

V. What are your sources of awareness when it comes to sustainable products? (Social media, peer influence, advertisements, billboards, etc.)

I was searching online and came across the benefits of organic tea of regular tea. As a teacher, I like to go over various news and research articles and get an idea about certain products. Most of the news about organic tea was positive and I decided to try it out. I would say curiosity and positive news about organic tea was my biggest source of information. Hope you understand.

VI. Which factors influence you to buy sustainable products? (Product's material, packaging material, eco-friendly labelling, production technology, brand etc.)

The main thing that influences me to buy such products is the materials they are made with. Like organic tea does not have any added chemicals or stuff like that so it motivates me a lot. Being labelled organic is also another point. Seeing the logo that a product is organic gives me a sense

of relief and influences me to buy it. Yeah, these are the main motivations for me when it comes to buying organic food items.

VII. What is your general perception towards sustainable products? (Advantages, Disadvantages, consumer's personal experience, etc.)

In terms of the products, there are not many disadvantages I can think of. I have a positive perception of organic products. They are healthier than regular products. These days, many products in Bangladesh have harmful chemicals in them which I naturally want to avoid. Having organic products definitely makes me feel safer. So, I will say that the experience has been very pleasing.

VIII. What are some of the barriers you have faced towards sustainable product consumption? (High price, low availability, poor brand communication, etc.)

Misinformation is one problem about organic products. In my personal opinion, some of the local products I have seen claiming to be organic, but it seems suspicious. Pricing is also higher, but I do not mind giving it for a safer alternative. These are the barriers towards organic food consumption that I can think of.

IX. Would you like to add any additional comments or recommendations about the sustainable product market in Bangladesh?

The chain of sustainability needs to be consistent in Bangladesh. If a product is produced as a sustainable one, it must make sure that everything in that chain is sustainable. Like the ingredients and the workers need to be in line with sustainability. I sincerely hope that the government and other concerned authorities take the right steps to ensure this happens.

Interviewee: I9

I. For the record, could you state your age, gender, profession, location, and income group?

Yes, so my age is between 40 to 45 and I am female. As for my occupation, I am a manager at one of the multinational banks here. Moreover, I hail from Chittagong in Bangladesh. My income group is within the high-income category. Yeah, so those are all the answers to your question.

II. What is your understanding of the concept of 'sustainability'?

Considering my profession, it is all about furthering businesses that are sustainable. I have seen some projects of solar and wind energy that was funded by our bank here. It is not just about funding them; it is about being responsible and accountable to all stakeholders. There is also an issue of being transparent and making sure we clearly highlight how funds are used to promote sustainability.

III. Which sustainable products have you consumed so far?

I am trying to focus on organic fruits and vegetables now. Mushrooms, lettuce, bananas, and stuff like that I have eaten so far. There are some more in this category, but I cannot recall at the moment. Mainly, it is organic fruits and vegetables that I have consumed. That is all for my answer.

IV. How often do you use these products mentioned above?

Slowly, I am focusing on increasing the usage of such products. As a family, I try to ensure that my other family members have organic fruits and vegetables at least 3-4 times week. I myself also follow this schedule. Previously, my usage was lower but not it has increased.

V. What are your sources of awareness when it comes to sustainable products? (Social media, peer influence, advertisements, billboards, etc.)

I do see some advertisements here and there about organic products so that keeps me informed to an extent. Some of the online grocery shops do SMS marketing and I notice some organic products in those messages on my phone. After you make an account on certain online shops, they send you SMS from time to time. That is another way of knowing about the current prices of such products.

VI. Which factors influence you to buy sustainable products? (Product's material, packaging material, eco-friendly labelling, production technology, brand etc.)

It is a big relief when you know that you and your family are eating healthy food so that satisfaction is the biggest advantage for me. On the other hand, it is tough to adapt to organic food since we have been having regular food for all our lives. Everything seems a bit different with such products. If I have to sum up my experience, I will say that it is good.

VII. What is your general perception towards sustainable products? (Advantages, Disadvantages, consumer's personal experience, etc.)

In terms of the products, there are not many disadvantages I can think off. I have a positive perception of organic products. They are healthier than regular products. These days, many products in Bangladesh have harmful chemicals in them which I naturally want to avoid. Having organic products definitely makes me feel safer. So, I will say that the experience has been very pleasing.

VIII. What are some of the barriers you have faced towards sustainable product consumption? (High price, low availability, poor brand communication, etc.)

Availability is indeed low. You cannot expect to find all the organic food items in one shop. I made accounts in multiple online stores so that I have alternatives when I do not find my desired items in one shop. You also have to eat the organic food products quickly since they have a tendency of rotting early.

IX. Would you like to add any additional comments or recommendations about the sustainable product market in Bangladesh?

If more organizations come forward and fund sustainable businesses in Bangladesh, that would be good. As far as I know, profit margins are lower so not many purely sustainable businesses can survive in the long run. They need our support so that they can grow, and customers can enjoy organic food products more readily.

Interviewee: I10

I. For the record, could you state your age, gender, profession, location, and income group?

Ok, I want to begin by saying that I am between 20 to 25 years of age. Moreover, I am female, and I am currently living in the city of Sylhet in Bangladesh. Right now, I am working as a government employee for the people's republic of Bangladesh. I believe my income group falls under the lower-middle classification.

II. What is your understanding of the concept of 'sustainability'?

My understanding is that it has to do with caring for the natural environment around us. Respecting and carefully using the resources nature has given us. As human beings, we often overuse these resources and put the Earth in danger. It is our duty to protect nature and everything in it. Yeah, that is what I think about the concept. Saving and protecting the environment for a better tomorrow.

III. Which sustainable products have you consumed so far?

Among the sustainable foods that I have had, organic eggs and meat are the main items. I prefer having meat that is processed from organic farms and eggs that are packaged and labelled as organic. I mainly look for organic beef and chicken in terms of meat. That is everything I have.

IV. How often do you use these products mentioned above?

Me and my husband have organic eggs for breakfast almost every day. We have it pretty regularly. In case of organic chicken or beef, the usage is a bit variable. We have it a few times each week. Not that regular like eggs but we have it a fair amount. Hope that answers your query.

V. What are your sources of awareness when it comes to sustainable products? (Social media, peer influence, advertisements, billboards, etc.)

Hearing about some of these products from my friends and colleagues influenced me. I heard about the benefits of having organic food, so I decided to try it out. My husband also heard from his acquaintances about them. We also see a lot of promotional posts about organic food on social media as well.

VI. Which factors influence you to buy sustainable products? (Product's material, packaging material, eco-friendly labelling, production technology, brand etc.)

Production technology is a big issue for me. I want to make sure that the organic food that I am having has been made in a sustainable way from start to finish. I am not ready to compromise on that. Only products that fulfil these criteria attract my attention. Yes, so that is my main motivational factor when buying such things.

VII. What is your general perception towards sustainable products? (Advantages, Disadvantages, consumer's personal experience, etc.)

I cannot think of any disadvantage at the moment. I strongly believe that the positive side is much greater. Having healthy food that is produced naturally without any harmful fertilizers feels like a blessing. My experience has been fantastic in terms of consuming organic food on a regular basis. I could not be happier.

VIII. What are some of the barriers you have faced towards sustainable product consumption? (High price, low availability, poor brand communication, etc.)

I think brands do not do enough to market organic foods properly. I think the health benefits are not really talked about enough. If people are unaware, they will always go for the cheapest item. But the cheapest product is often the unhealthiest, so it is not good for consumers. Companies should do more to increase the awareness of organic food benefits.

IX. Would you like to add any additional comments or recommendations about the sustainable product market in Bangladesh?

There needs to be some firm policies on the development of organic farming and organic foods overall. Not just a policy but there should be proper enforcement of said policy. It is not possible for the market to grow without such robust support. That is something I want to see and also increased media support for promoting the organic food market.

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