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CHALLENGES IN ORGANIC PRODUCTS MARKETING IN TRICHY DISTRICT: A SUPPLY CHAIN ANALYSIS

[1]S. Rakesh Kumar, [2] Dr. R. Thangasundari

[1]Research Scholar, [2] Assistant Professor

[1]Department of Management Studies, Bon Secours College for Women, Thanjavur, Affiliated to Bharathidasan University.

[2]Department of Management Studies, Bon Secours College for Women, Thanjavur, Affiliated to Bharathidasan University.

Abstract **:** Farmers and retailers face challenges in organic products supply chain due to various reasons. Further, traders and manufacturers encounter issues in delivering organic products. The purpose of the research is to study the socio demographic variables of respondents with respect to organic products supply chain. The primary data were the direct information collected from the respondents using a structured questionnaire. The secondary data were collected from previous research reports, government websites, and other information sources. Simple random sampling method was applied to collect information from 125 respondents in Trichy district. Statistical analyses such as Chi-square test, ANOVA and multiple regression analysis were employed in the current study. The researchers suggest organizing consumer awareness programs through focused educational initiatives and heightened transparency through collaboration of all the stakeholders involved to address the marketing hurdles.

Key words: Marketing challenges, customers, supply chain, organic products, ANOVA

I. INTRODUCTION

In today's business landscape, organic products are experiencing a dramatic growth, witnessing increased demand both domestically and internationally. Health consciousness of the customers drives a preference for organic food products, generating a demand for an effective supply chain to distribute these organic products to customers.

Organic agriculture not only offers opportunities to global traders but also enables suppliers and distributers to increase their profit potential through higher price premiums. In forthcoming years, the organic market is expected to expand significantly in both local and international markets. Simultaneously, majority of farmers in developing countries do not have access to distribute organic products. The major challenges faced by the producers and distributors in developing the organic market stem from the technological issues, insufficient market information and lack of financial support.

Currently, the organic market challenges are mainly faced by non-governmental organizations (NGOs), farmer markets, traders and exporters. The key players responsible for linking products with customers should utilize effective and efficient distribution networks. Organic farming has gained traction across various levels in India. In this regard, NGOs and other organizations are supporting farmers in promoting organic products across widespread areas.

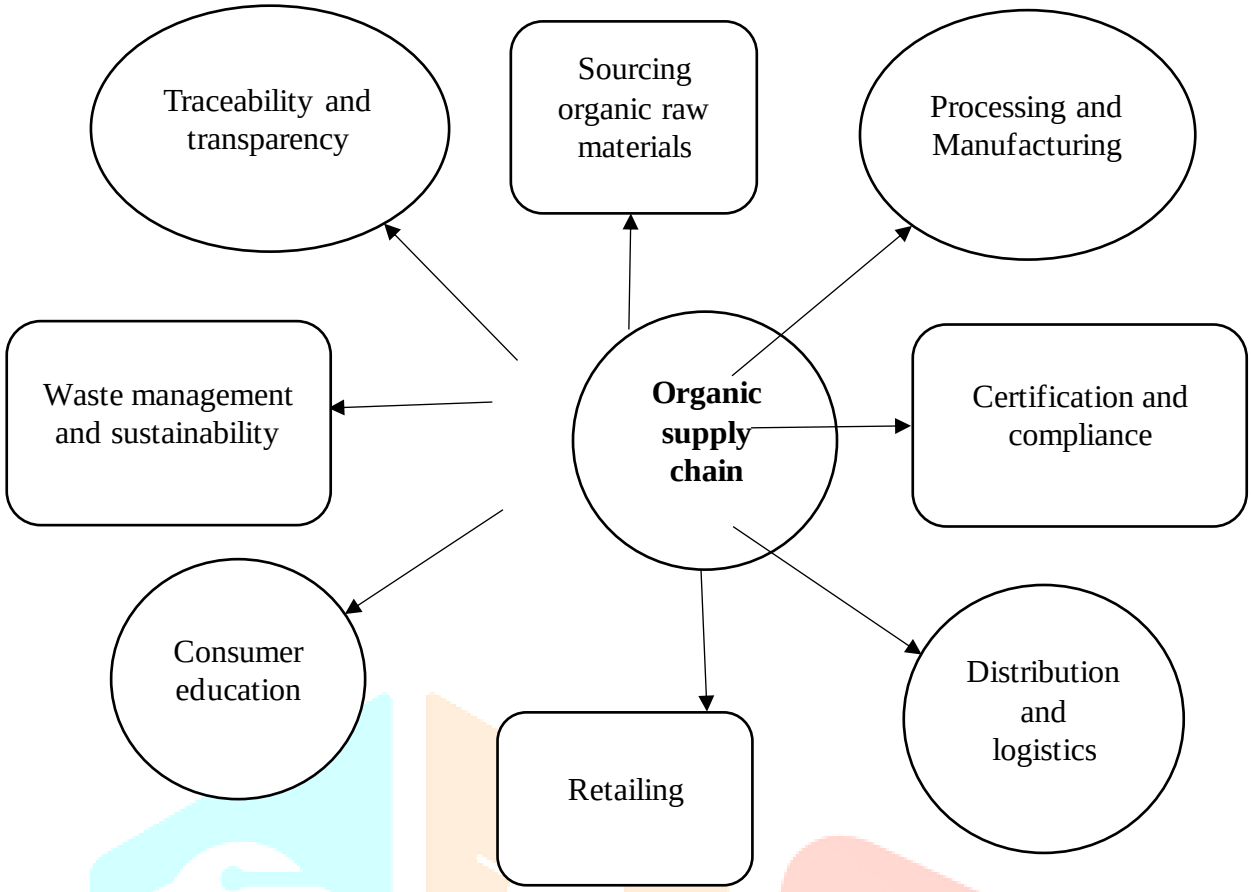

Figure1 Supply chain for organic products

Organic farms grow food crops without the use of synthetic pesticides, herbicides or genetically modified organisms. The supply chain begins with sourcing organic raw materials from certified farms. After procurement, organic food products are sent to processing facilities. These facilities comply with organic processing standards, ensuring that integrity of the organic certification is maintained throughout the production process. All parties involved in the supply chain, from farms to processors, must comply with organic certification standards set by regulatory agencies. Certification ensures that the product meets organic requirements and can be labeled accordingly. Once the organic products are processed and certified, they are distributed to various points of sale. Distribution networks must be carefully managed to maintain the quality of organic products. Organic products are available to consumers through various retail channels, including supermarkets, health food stores and online platforms. Retailers play an essential role in educating consumers about the benefits of organic products. Educating customers is an essential part of the organic food supply chain. Consumers need to understand the value of organic products, including their environmental advantages and potential health benefits. Sustainable and environmentally friendly practices are often an integral part of the organic food supply chain. This includes waste reduction, recycling, and other eco-friendly initiatives. With the growing need for transparency, traceability systems are playing an increasingly important role in the supply chain. Consumers may want to know the origin of their organic products and social media could be used for this purpose.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Food supply chains constantly encounter various obstacles that hinder their ability to provide consumers with affordable, safe, and nutritious food, added to the economic and environmental challenges. Gurrala and Hariga (2022) examined the challenges in food supply chain and analyzed the difficulty in distribution network. Wang and Wu (2022) presented a case study on the application of an e-commerce platform to market organic products. The research examined the strategies and challenges involved in integrating e-commerce into the marketing of organic products. Wang and Kim (2021) conducted a comparative analysis to investigate distribution challenges in organic supply chains, including factors such as logistics, transportation and market dynamics. The study contributes to the understanding of the unique challenges faced by organic supply chains compared to conventional supply chains.

Yadav et al., (2022) studied the challenges of agro-food supply chain, including unavailability of fertilizers and pesticides, lack of human resources, financial issues, unavailability of raw materials and problems in information sharing. Moreover, some of the other difficulties are marketing challenges, problems in transportation and other improper distribution networks. Chandrakala and Devi (2016) conducted a study using scaling technique on the attitude of farmers towards organic farming. Researchers found that utilizing organized retail chains and engaging commission agents for the sale of organic farming products can overcome the transaction risks faced by farmers. Priyadharshini and Venkatapirabu (2016) created a measurement tool assessing farmers' attitudes toward organic farming practices in Tamil Nadu. The scale was constructed using Edward's equally appearing intervals scale and consisted of ten statements. Standardization was conducted to ensure the scale's uniform administration. Sharma and Joshi (2021) explored the intersection between sustainable practices and commercialization challenges in organic supply chains. The authors throw light on the impact of sustainability initiatives on marketing strategies and the broader implications for the organic industry.

Garcia and Lee (2020) presented a study on digital marketing strategies, which are appropriate for organic products in the supply chain. The research explored the integration of technology, social media and e-commerce platforms to improve the visibility and market presence of organic products. This work is poised to provide valuable insights for marketers, supply chain professionals, and businesses interested in leveraging digital tools to drive promotion and distribution.

Johnson and Patel (2020) explored the contemporary developments and marketing obstacles in the organic supply chain, where emerging trends and their impact on the promotion of organic products were studied, taking into account the factors such as consumer preferences, technological advances and market dynamics. Gupta and Verma (2020) studied the effects of information asymmetry on the marketing performance in organic supply chains. Results of the study explained how the information gaps affect various aspects of marketing, including consumer trust, communication strategies, and the overall performance of the organic industry. Patel and Jones (2019) conducted qualitative research using methods such as interviews or focus groups to better understand how consumers perceive and interpret organic supply chains. Findings of the study reveal the importance of trust, transparency and consumer attitudes towards organic products. These results contribute to a deeper understanding of the factors influencing consumer preferences in the organic supply chain. Fonte et al., (2019) used experimental research methods to explore how information about the origin and production process of organic products affects consumer attitudes, examining the role of traceability and transparency in consumer trust in organic products. Gómez-Luciano et al., (2019) studied the adoption of organic agriculture in the Dominican Republic. The study employed both the barriers and driving factors that influence the decision of farmers to adopt organic practices. The study analyzed the factors such as economic considerations, knowledge gaps, and institutional support in the context of organic agriculture.

The emergence of the organic food market is aimed to achieve high profitability. The link between the green supply chain and organic products is considered crucial, mainly due to the dynamic evolution of the market for organic products. Tundys and Rzeczycki (2015) concentrated on examining processes, organizational and legal matters, and implementing innovations, including green aspects like manufacturing, production, and transportation in organic market. Zhang and Liu (2019) discussed the application of green marketing strategies with innovative approaches to promote and position environmentally sustainable organic products throughout the supply chain.

III. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Healthier lifestyles cause a rising demand for organic food products. However, there is a large gap between demand and supply as many farmers encounter challenges like inadequate storage, financial constraints, and supply chain inefficiencies, hindering organic production and distribution. This research aims to explore and analyze the marketing challenges associated with organic product supply chains, assess the prevailing conditions, and propose appropriate and viable solutions to address these issues.

IV. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objectives of the research are as follows:

- To study the socio-demographic backgrounds of the respondents
- To analyze the marketing challenges linked to organic product supply chains
- To suggest suitable solutions for overcoming the problems associated with supply chains of organic products

V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research has used both primary and secondary methods of data collection. The primary data were collected from the respondents by using a structured questionnaire. The secondary data were collected from previous research reports, government websites and other sources of information. A simple random sampling method was adopted to collect the information from 125 respondents in the study area. Descriptive and statistical analysis (mean and standard deviation, Chi-square test, ANOVA and regression analysis) were conducted using SPSS version 26.

5.1 Reliability and Validity of the Data

The Cronbach's alpha test was used to determine the reliability of the constructs. A Cronbach's alpha equal to or greater than 0.6 (Hair et al., 2014) was deemed acceptable.

Reliability statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	No. of Items
0.777	20

All the values of Cronbach' s alpha were greater that 0.7 indicating reliability of the responses.

VI. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

6.1 Data Analysis and Interpretation

The socio-demographic data of the respondents are presented in Table1. The data showed that majority of the respondents were males (60.8%), where 24.0% were below 30 years and 20.0% of the respondents fall into the age group of 31-40. Also, about 60.8% of the respondents were married; 23.2% were farmers by their occupation and 39.2% had an annual income below 50,000 INR.

6.2 Mean and standard deviation for certification and standard of marketing challenges in supply chain management towards organic products.

Table 2 illustrates the identified mean for all the three variables of marketing challenges, namely, 'organic certification is complex', 'marketing strategies built consumer trust' and 'high cost' in supply chain management towards organic products. The variable "organic certification is complex" is sustainable in the scale of neither agree nor disagree. The standard deviation of the respective variables shows that the other two factors deviate more towards the scale agree. However, the standard deviation alone is not particularly useful without a context within which one can determine a meaningful result. The above results show that 'marketing strategies built consumer trust and required high cost' can be considered as important agreeable factors by the respondents towards certification and standard.

6.3 Mean and standard deviation for distribution challenges related to marketing challenges in supply chain management towards organic products.

Table 3 gives the identified mean for all the three variables of marketing challenges in supply chain management towards organic products and shows that "limited channels availability" is sustainable in the scale of neither agree nor disagree. The standard deviation of the respective variables shows that the other two factors deviate more towards the scale agree. However, the standard deviation alone is not particularly useful without a context within which one can determine a meaningful result. The above result shows that "low accessibility and increased online platform" are felt as agreeable factors by the respondents as important variables towards distribution challenges.

6.4 Pearson's chi-square test was used to find whether there was an association between gender of the respondents and consumer awareness towards organic supply chain.

HYPOTHESIS H1

Null hypothesis H10

There is no significant association between gender of the respondents and consumer awareness towards organic food products supply chain.

Alternative hypothesis H11

There is a significant association between gender of the respondents and consumer awareness towards organic food products supply chain.

Chi-square analysis displaying consumer awareness towards organic supply chain is shown in Table 4. The table clearly shows that the Pearson's chi-square value is lower than the standard table value and at 0.05 % significance level. In this study, the null hypothesis was accepted and it is proved that there is no association between gender of the respondents and consumer awareness towards organic food products supply chain.

Table 3 represents the results of chi-square analysis conducted on three different variables: 'Benefits of organic products," "Educate the value of the product," and "Sustainable practices." For all three variables, the results of Pearson's chi-square test attest that there is no significant association between each of the variables and gender. Similarly, likelihood ratio shows no association between the variables and gender. Also, the chi-square statistics (0.00 – 0.69) and p-value ranging between 0.793 – 0.985 suggest no linear association between the variables and gender.

6.5 Pearson's chi-square test was used to find whether there was an association between age of the respondents and consumer awareness to buy organic food product.

HYPOTHESIS H2

Null hypothesis H20

There is no significant association between age of the respondents and consumer awareness towards organic food products supply chain.

Alternative hypothesis H21

There is a significant association between age of the respondents and consumer awareness towards organic food products supply chain.

Chi square analysis displaying customer awareness towards organic food products supply chain is shown in Table 5. The Pearson's chi-square value is lower than the critical value at 0.05 % significance level. In this study, the null hypothesis was accepted proving that there is no association between age of the respondents and customer awareness.

The chi-square analyses were conducted on three variables: "Benefits of organic food product,""Educate the value of the product," and "Sustainable practices." Each variable is assessed using three different chi-square statistics: Pearson's chi-square test, likelihood ratio, and linear-by-linear association. For all three variables, the results of Pearson's chi-square test attest that there is no significant association between each of the variables and age. Similarly, likelihood ratio also shows no significant association between variable and age. Linear-by-linear association showed chi-square statistics (0.53 -1.804) and p-values (0.179 -0.466), suggesting no significant linear association between the variables and the age of the respondents.

6.6 ANOVA test for marital status and consumer perception towards organic price premium

HYPOTHESIS H3

Null Hypothesis H30

There is no significant association between marital status of respondents and consumer perception.

Alternative Hypothesis H31

There is a significant association between marital status of the respondents and consumer perception.

Table 6 is the summary of ANOVA conducted to study the impact of different factors ("More expensive," "High quality," and "Health benefits and environment") on a dependent variable (marital status).

The factor "more expensive" does not have a significant effect on the marital status as indicated by the non-significant p-value (0.664). Similarly, the variables "high quality" and "health benefits and environment" do not have a significant effect on the dependent variable as indicated by their p-values 0.966 and 0.985, respectively. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted proving that there is no association between marital status of the respondents and consumer perception towards premium price of organic products.

6.7 ANOVA test for annual income and consumer perception towards organic price premium

HYPOTHESIS H4

Null Hypothesis H40

There is no significant association between annual income and consumer perception.

Alternative Hypothesis H41

There is a significant association between annual income and consumer perception.

Table 7 exhibits the results of ANOVA conducted to test the impact of different factors ("More expensive," "High quality," and "Health benefits and environment") on the dependent variable, annual income.

The factor "More expensive" does not have a significant effect on the annual income as indicated by the non-significant p-value (0.732). Similarly, factors "high quality" and "health benefits and environment" do not have a significant effect on the dependent variable as indicated by their non-significant p-values 0.893 and 0.707, respectively. Thus, the null hypothesis is accepted suggesting that there is no association between annual income and consumer perception towards premium prices of organic products.

6.8 Regression analysis between gender of the respondents and supply chain transparency towards organic supply chain

Table 8 presents the results of a multiple regression analysis with the dependent variable being "Gender of the respondents" and three independent variables: "Difficulties in supply chain," "Transparency in supply chain," and "Assurance in organic claims."

For all three independent variables, the p-values are greater than 0.05, suggesting that none of the coefficients are statistically significant. The low R^2value (0.005) suggests that the three independent variables are not statistically significant and have no influence on the gender of the respondents towards organic products supply chain.

6.9 Regression analysis between marital status of the respondents and supply chain transparency towards organic supply chain

Table 9 summarizes the results of a multiple regression analysis with the dependent variable “marital status" and three independent variables: "difficulties in supply chain," "transparency in supply chain," and "assurance in organic claims." For "Difficulties in supply chain," the p-value is less than 0.05 suggesting that this variable is statistically significant. However, for "transparency in supply chain" and "assurance in organic claims," the p-values are greater than 0.05 indicating that these variables are not statistically significant. In summary, the regression model suggests that among the three independent variables, only "difficulties in supply chain" has a statistically significant effect on marital status.

VII. CONCLUSION

The current study makes the following conclusions:

- 'Marketing strategies built consumer trust' and 'high cost' are considered important agreeable factors by the respondents towards organic products supply chain.
- The frequency analysis shows that the customers are from varied backgrounds and that majority of the respondents are not aware of the benefits of organic products and their impact on health.
- The variables 'low accessibility' and 'increased online platform' are considered agreeable factors by the respondents towards distribution challenges.
- Chi-square analysis reveals that there is no association between gender of the respondents and consumer awareness towards organic food products supply chain.
- Pearson's chi-square test attests that there is no significant association between each of the variables 'Benefits of organic food product,' 'Educate the value of the product,' and 'Sustainable practices' and age.
- ANOVA proves that there is no association between 'marital status' or 'annual income' of the respondents and consumer perception towards premium price of the organic products.
- Multiple regression analysis between gender of the respondents and three independent variables ('Difficulties in supply chain,' 'Transparency in supply chain,' and 'Assurance in organic claims') suggests no influence of the gender of the respondents towards organic products supply chain.

The quality of the product and the environmental sustainability determine the high price of the product. Most of the respondents felt that the price of the organic product is expensive and it makes the organic products non-affordable to buy on a regular basis.

VIII. FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Many marketers and producers have been facing difficulties to supply the organic products. Based on the observations in this study, the researchers suggest consumer awareness programs on organic supply chains through targeted efforts to educate consumers and increased transparency as remedial measures to overcome the marketing challenges of organic products supply chain. Stakeholders, including government agencies, NGOs and industry players may collaborate to develop comprehensive awareness programs. These initiatives can highlight the health benefits of organic products, highlight the environmental benefits of organic farming, and increase consumer awareness of the importance of certification labels. Efforts are needed to standardize and harmonize organic certification across regions to address concerns about authenticity. Implementing a clear and accessible labeling system, accompanied by a user-friendly online platform can provide consumers with detailed information about the journey of organic products from farm to consumers. Additionally, fostering partnerships with retailers and engaging in digital marketing strategies can help disseminate information effectively. By creating a well-informed consumer base, the organic supply chain can not only meet the growing demand for organic products but also promote sustainable and profitable agricultural practices.

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Table 1 Descriptive analysis

Socio-economic values of the respondents	Variables	Frequency	Percentage
Gender of the respondents	Male	76	60.8
	Female	49	39.2
	Total	125	100.0
Age of the respondents	Below 30	30	24.0
	31-40	25	20.0
	41-50	24	19.2
	51-60	25	20.0
	61 and above	21	16.8
	Total	125	100.0
Marital status	Married	76	60.8
	Unmarried	49	39.2
	Total	125	100.0
Occupation of the respondents	Farmers	29	23.2
	Sub-contractors	27	21.6
	Food processors	23	18.4
	Distributors	24	19.2
	Importers and Exporters	22	17.6
	Total	125	100.0
Annual Income	Below 50,000	49	39.2
	50,001-100,00	27	21.6
	100,001-150,000	26	20.8
	150,001 and above	23	18.4
	Total	125	100.0

Table 2 Mean and standard deviation

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Organic certification is complex	125	3.47	1.255
Marketing strategies built consumer trust	125	3.27	1.346
Required high cost	125	3.36	1.358

Table 3 Mean and standard deviation

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Limited channels availability	125	3.47	1.255
Low accessibility	125	3.27	1.346
Increased online platform	125	3.36	1.358

Table 4 Chi-square analysis

		Value	Df	Asymp. Sig.(2-sided)
Benefits of organic products	Pearson's chi-square test	.413[a]	4	.981
	Likelihood ratio	.412	4	.982
	Linear-by-linear association	.000	1	.985
	No of valid cases	125		
Educate the value of the product	Pearson's chi-square test	.660[a]	4	.956
	Likelihood ratio	.670	4	.955
	Linear-by-linear association	.069	1	.793
	No of valid cases	125		
Sustainable practices	Pearson's chi-square test	.283[a]	4	.991
	Likelihood ratio	.286	4	.991
	Linear-by-linear association	.057	1	.812
	No. of valid cases	125		
Where 'a' is gender of the respondents				

Table 5 Chi-square analysis

		Value	Df	Asymp.Sig.(2-sided)
Benefits of organic food product	Pearson's chi-square test	10.086[a]	16	.862
	Likelihood ratio	10.911	16	.815
	Linear-by-linear association	1.695	1	.193
	No of valid cases	125		
Educate the value of product	Pearson's chi-square test	11.853[a]	16	.754
	Likelihood ratio	12.694	16	.695
	Linear-by-linear association	1.804	1	.179
	No of valid cases	125		
Sustainable practices	Pearson's chi-square test	10.109[a]	16	.861
	Likelihood ratio	10.142	16	.859
	Linear-by-linear association	.530	1	.466
	No of valid cases	125		
Where 'a' is age of the respondents				

Table 6 ANOVA of hypothesis H3

		Sum of squares[a]	Df	Mean square	F	Significant value
More expensive	**Between**	.317	1	.317	.190	.664
	Within	205.235	123	1.669		
	Total	205.552	124			
High quality	**Between**	.003	1	.003	.002	.966
	Within	211.245	123	1.717		
	Total	211.248	124			
	Between	.001	1	.001	.000	.985

Health benefits and environment	**Within**	195.151	123	1.587		
	Total	195.152	124			
'a' is the marital status of the respondents; level of significance = 0.05%						

Table 7 ANOVA of hypothesis H4

		Sum of squares[a]	**df**	**Mean square**	**F**	**Sig.**
More expensive	**Between**	2.169	3	.723	.430	.732
	Within	203.383	121	1.681		
	Total	205.552	124			
High quality	**Between**	1.069	3	.356	.205	.893
	Within	210.179	121	1.737		
	Total	211.248	124			
Health benefits and environment	**Between**	2.229	3	.743	.466	.707
	Within	192.923	121	1.594		
	Total	195.152	124			
'a' is the annual income of the respondents						

Table 8 Regression analysis

	Unstandardized coefficients		**Standardized coefficients**	**T**	**Significance**
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
(Constant)	1.425	.146		9.755	.000
Difficulties in supply chain	-.033	.047	-.084	-.700	.485
Transparency in supply chain	-.026	.043	-.069	-.606	.546
Assurance in organic claims	.047	.038	.130	1.247	.215
	R=.071[a]	R^2=.005	Adjusted R^2=-.020	F=.495	
a. Dependent Variable: Gender of the respondents					

Table 9 Regression analysis

	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Significance
	B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
(Constant)	1.361	.147		9.258	.000
Difficulties in supply chain	-.017	.047	-.045	-3.72	.711
Transparency in supply chain	.034	.043	.091	.787	.433
Assurance in organic claims	-.005	.038	-.015	-.140	.889
	R=.071[a]	R^2=.005	Adjusted R^2=-.020	F=.495	
a. Dependent Variable: Marital status					