

# Exploring the Rural Market - Consumer Preferences towards Organic Food Products

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## Abstract

The objective of the study is to explore the consumer preferences towards organic food products in the rural market context of covid-19. A sample of 110 respondents from Pollachi and Udumalpet of Tamilnadu is included in the study. Convenience sampling technique is used for conducting the research. A standard questionnaire is used to collect data from respondents. The data is collected from the respondents who visit organic food store and department stores in Pollachi and Udumalpet. Simple percentage analysis, Independent Sample T test, One Way Anova, Tukey HSD Test is used for statistical analysis. Organic cooking oil, milk and meat products are highly preferred by the respondents. The mean score value for preference of organic food products has increased on daily, weekly and yearly basis after Covid. This shows there is an increase in preference of organic products after Covid-19.

Keywords: Organic Food Products, Customer Preferences.

## INTRODUCTION

Fruits, vegetables, grains, dairy foods, eggs, cooking oil and to some extent, meats and poultry can be included in the list of Organic Food. Without the use of pesticides, synthetic chemicals, or fertilisers, organic products are cultivated. Animals that are raised organically are those that are fed organic feed, kept free of antibiotics and growth hormones, and frequently treated more compassionately and given better spaces to roam than their non-organic counterparts. Even though it is still in its inception, the Indian organic food sector has begun to expand quickly.

The main justifications given by consumers for choosing organically grown foods are the following: (i) they believe they are consuming food with little to no pesticide residue, (ii) they want to support a business that is more considerate and has fewer negative effects on the environment, and (iii) they think organically grown food has a higher level of nutrients. Organic food is increasingly in demand as a result of consumers' growing awareness of the connection between nutrition and health, their enhanced understanding of food quality characteristics, and their access to information about new production and processing technology.

## REVIEW OF LITERATURE

**Ranjithkumar (2006)** investigated respondents' attitudes toward natural, organic foods. He discovered that people favour organic food due to its flavour and health benefits.

**Shaharudin et al. (2010)** discovered that consumers in Malaysia place a high value on health consciousness and the perceived value of buying organic food goods.

Customers prefer organic products because they are healthier, according to **Miguel Llorens et al (2011)**'s study of consumer behaviour and brand preferences in organic supermarket products in Spain.

**Sathyendra Kumar et.al (2015)** studied the customer's attitude towards organic food products Consumption and Market potential of Organic food product in Mysore City. It was found that most of the consumer especially in urban prefer organic food product.

**Mohana Soundari et.al (2017)** studied the customers preferences towards organic products and found that customers prefer organic food product for its quality.

## STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The India organic food market is experiencing a robust growth with the rising awareness about the products. The growing

level of health consciousness in the country is a key factor driving the demand for organic food. The nutritional content and quality of the food people eat have begun to be paid attention to by Indian consumers leading to the growing demand for organic food. In addition, the consumer spending on health and wellness products has increased dramatically due to factors including strong economic growth, urbanisation, and rising income levels. In addition, the strong government funding is catalysing the market for organic food in India. The Government of India encourages organic farming through financial assistance to farmers who are implementing organic farming under various government schemes, such as the Mission for Integrated Horticulture Development (MIDH), National Food Security Mission (NFSM), National Mission for Sustainable Agriculture (NMSA), and Rashtriya Krishi Vikas Yojana (RKVY). As per the research firm IMARC, the Indian organic food market reached a value of US\$ 704 million in 2018, which is expected to grow at a CAGR of 20 per cent – hitting US\$ 2,091 million by 2024. Further propelled by a surge of demand in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, India continues to be an emerging market for organic food and beverages with robust prospects. In this context, the study titled “Exploring the Rural market - Consumer Preferences towards Organic Food Products” is taken.

## OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To study the demographic profile of the respondents buying organic food products
2. To study the type of organic products preferred by the customers.
3. To study the Preference of Purchase of Organic Products Before and After Outbreak of Covid-19
4. To examine the preferences and factors affecting the consumer’s purchase intention towards organic food products.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study is descriptive in nature. The study is based on primary data. A sample of 110 respondents from Pollachi and Udumalpet is included in the study. Convenience sampling technique is used for conducting the research. A standard questionnaire is used to collect data from respondents. The data is collected from the respondents who visit organic food store and department stores in Pollachi and Udumalpet during the period of September to November 2021.

Secondary data is collected from various books, magazines, journals and websites. Simple percentage analysis, Independent Sample T test, One Way Anova, Tukey HSD Test is used for statistical analysis. The data is analysed using SPSS V.21.

## DATA ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents

Gender	Frequency	Percent
Male	66	60.0
Female	44	40.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Age	Frequency	Percent
18-25	30	27.3
26-40	15	13.6
41-55	35	31.8
Above 56	30	27.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Marital Status	Frequency	Percent
Married	78	70.9
Unmarried	32	29.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Education	Frequency	Percent
School Level Education	15	13.6
Under graduation	64	58.2
Post graduation	31	28.2
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Monthly Income	Frequency	Percent
Less than Rs.25000	33	30.0
Rs.26,000 -Rs.50,000	20	18.2
Rs.51,000 -Rs.1,00,000	33	30.0
Rs. 1 lakh and above	24	21.8
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Number of Family members	Frequency	Percent
1-2	6	5.5
3-4	74	67.3
5-6	18	16.4
Above 6	12	10.9
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Occupation	Frequency	Percent
Student	26	23.6
Homemaker	15	13.6
Private Employment	40	36.4
Government Employee	5	4.5
Self Employed	16	14.5
Retired	8	7.3
<b>Total</b>	<b>110</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Table 1 shows that 60 percent of the respondents are male and 40 percent of them are female. 70.9% of respondents are married and 29.1% of respondents are not married. 58.2% of the respondents have their under graduation degree as their educational qualification. 30% of the respondents have their monthly income between Rs.51,000 to Rs.1,00,000. Another 30% of their respondents have their income less than Rs.25,000/. 67.3 % of respondents have three or four members as their family size and 36.4 % of the respondents are private employees.

Table 2: Type of Organic Food Preferred by Customers

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Fruits and Vegetables	110	2.00	5.00	3.3545	1.00992
Pulses and cereals	110	2.00	4.00	2.6727	0.76757
Coffee and Tea	110	1.00	4.00	2.4818	1.02027
Millets	110	2.00	4.00	3.5909	0.78162
Cooking Oil	110	4.00	5.00	4.4909	0.50221
Milk	110	4.00	5.00	4.7273	0.44740
Meat Products	110	1.00	5.00	4.1091	1.01679

Table 2 shows the type of organic food preferred by the customers. The mean score of most of the products are greater than three which shows that for most of the products respondents agree to prefer organic food products. The mean score for organic cooking oil, milk and meat products are greater than 4 which shows very high preference for these products The mean score for organic fruits and vegetables and millets is greater than three which shows the next higher preference.

Table 3: Preference of Purchase of Organic Products Before and After Outbreak of Covid-19

	N	Mean score	
		Before Covid	After Covid
Daily	110	3.3545	3.6909
Weekly	110	3.7636	4.0909
Monthly	110	4.1636	4.1545
Yearly	110	3.7727	3.8182

Table 3 shows Preference of Purchase of Organic Products Before and After Outbreak of Covid-19. The mean score value of preference of organic food on a weekly basis has increased from 3.76 to 4.09. The above table shows that the mean score value for preference of organic food products has increased on daily, weekly and yearly basis after Covid. This shows there is an increase in preference of organic products after Covid-19.

Table 4: Source of Information about Organic Food Products

Source of Information	Frequency	Percent
Newspaper	22	20.0
Pamphlets	14	12.7
Internet	2	1.8
Friends	69	62.7
Awareness Program	3	2.7
Total	110	100.0

Table 4 shows source of information about information about organic food products. 62.7% of respondents get to know about the organic products through friends and 20% through newspaper. This shows that word of mouth reference has more influence to prefer the organic food products.

Table 5: Opinion on Price of Organic Food Products

Opinion on Price	Frequency	Percent
Expensive	59	53.6
Moderate	49	44.5
Low	2	1.8
Total	110	100.0

Table 5 shows that 53.6% of respondents have the opinion that organic products are expensive and 44.5% respondents have the opinion that the prices are moderate.

Table 6: Maintenance of Health and Fitness of Respondents

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Exercise	110	3.00	5.00	4.7000	0.59893
Food	110	4.00	5.00	4.7545	0.43233
Diet	110	2.00	5.00	3.4727	0.94538
Sports & Games	110	2.00	5.00	3.2273	0.80889
Yoga & Meditation	110	2.00	5.00	3.7091	1.06956
Regular Medical Check up	110	2.00	5.00	3.2545	1.30234

Table 6 shows how the respondents maintain their health and fitness. The mean score value shows that the respondents give more importance to Food and Exercise for maintaining their health and fitness followed by Yoga & meditation and Diet.

Table 7: Reason for Preferring Organic Food

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Healthier for me and my family	110	4.00	5.00	4.5727	0.49695
Less Environmental Impact	110	3.00	5.00	3.9909	0.43884
Fresh and Taste Better	110	4.00	5.00	4.5636	0.49820
High Quality	110	4.00	5.00	4.4000	0.49214
Trustworthy Source	110	3.00	5.00	4.0545	0.40266
Support local agriculture and farmers	110	3.00	5.00	3.7909	0.59193
It is a hot trend nowadays	110	2.00	4.00	2.4727	0.70005
Status Symbol	110	2.00	5.00	2.8091	0.99996
Easily available	110	2.00	4.00	3.8727	0.38573

Table 7 shows the mean score value for preferring the organic food products. It can be inferred from the table that respondents prefer organic food as it is healthier for them and their family. It is followed by the reason organic food is fresh and taste better, high quality and trustworthy source of information. Table 7 also shows that respondents do not prefer organic food for its Status symbol and trend.

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics for Important Factors influencing for buying Organic Food

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Lower price for organic products	110	2.00	5.00	3.6364	1.01120
More Knowledge about organic products	110	2.00	5.00	3.7000	0.64324
Greater Availability of Organic Products	110	3.00	5.00	3.9909	0.25325
More Advertisements for Organic Products	110	1.00	4.00	2.4727	0.71304
Wider Product Selection for organic food	110	2.00	4.00	2.7909	0.85773
Strong Influence from friends and family	110	1.00	4.00	3.3364	0.80454
Scientific evidence organic foods are healthier	110	2.00	4.00	3.2364	0.67630

Table 8 shows factors influencing the respondents to buy organic products. Greater availability of organic products, more knowledge about organic products and lower price for organic products are the important factors influencing customers to buy organic food. Advertisements and wide selection of organic foods are found to be less important factors influencing to buy organic products.

Table 9: Independent Sample t Test: Gender and Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Opinion on Price of Organic Products	Equal variances assumed	1.252	0.266	0.072	108	0.943	0.00758	0.10505	-0.20064	0.21580
	Equal variances not assumed			0.074	98.685	0.941	0.00758	0.10284	-0.19650	0.21165
Organic Food Preference	Equal variances assumed	2.402	0.124	-1.222	108	0.225	-0.05387	0.04410	-0.14129	0.03355
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.178	80.771	0.242	-0.05387	0.04571	-0.14483	0.03709
Organic Food Importance	Equal variances assumed	0.221	0.639	-1.550	108	0.124	-0.13420	0.08660	-0.30586	0.03746
	Equal variances not assumed			-1.555	93.375	0.123	-0.13420	0.08631	-0.30558	0.03718

Table 9 shows Independent Sample t Test between Gender and Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products. It is found that opinion on price of organic foods, organic food preference, Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products is not based on gender.

Table 10: One way ANOVA - Age and Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products

Factors	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Opinion on Price of Organic Products	14.092	3	4.697	28.663***	0.00
Organic Food Preference	3.212	3	1.071	47.086***	0.00
Organic Food Importance	14.857	3	4.952	74.971***	0.00

\*\*\* Significant at 1% level

Table 10 shows the relationship between Age and Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and important factors influencing to buy Organic Food Products. The results show that age is influencing opinion on Price, reason for Preference and important factors influencing to buy Organic Food Products at 1% level of significant.

Table 10.1: Tukey HSD Test for Age and Opinion on Price for Organic Food

Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	2
41-55	35	1.1714	
18-25	30	1.2	
26-40	15		1.8667
Above 56	30		1.9333
Sig.		0.995	0.938

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Tukey HSD Test for Age and Opinion on Price for Organic Food in Table 4 shows that the respondents in age groups 41-55& 18-25 have similar opinion on price and the respondents in age group 26-40 & Above 56 have similar opinion on price of organic products.

Table 10.2: Tukey HSD Test for Age and Reason for Preference for Organic Food

Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
18-25	30	3.6		
41-55	35		3.8254	
26-40	15		3.8889	
Above 56	30			4.0593
Sig.		1	0.453	1

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Tukey HSD Test for Age and Reason for Preference for Organic Food in Table 5 shows that the respondents in age group 26-40 & 41-55 have similar reasons for preferring organic food. Respondents in age group of 18-25 have same preference and respondents above 56 years have same preference for organic food products.

Table 10.3: Tukey HSD Test for Age and Important factors Influencing to Purchase Organic Food

Age	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
41-55	35	2.9633		
18-25	30	3.0952		
26-40	15		3.4476	
Above 56	30			3.8571
Sig.		0.277	1	1

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Tukey HSD Test for Age and Important factors Influencing to Purchase Organic Food in Table 6 shows that respondents in age group 41-55 & 18-25 have similar opinion on factors influencing to purchase organic food.

Table 11: Independent Sample T test for Marital Status and Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products

		Levene's Test for Equality of Variances		t-test for Equality of Means						
		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
									Lower	Upper
Opinion on Price of Organic Products	Equal variances assumed	23.952	0.000	3.914***	108	0.000	0.41506	0.10604	0.20488	0.62525
	Equal variances not assumed			4.452	78.325	0.000	0.41506	0.09322	0.22948	0.60064
Organic Food Preference	Equal variances assumed	16.347	0.000	8.614***	108	0.000	0.31766	0.03688	0.24457	0.39076
	Equal variances not assumed			10.197	86.442	0.000	0.31766	0.03115	0.25574	0.37959
Organic Food Importance	Equal variances assumed	109.658	0.000	3.459***	108	0.001	0.30998	0.08961	0.13236	0.48760
	Equal variances not assumed			4.973	103.054	0.000	0.30998	0.06234	0.18635	0.43361

\*\*\*Significant at 1% level

Independent sample test from Table 11 shows that there is significant difference in Marital Status and Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products at 1% level. Therefore it can be inferred that married and unmarried respondents have varied opinion on price, preference and factors influencing to buy organic products.

Table 12: ANOVA for Education and Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Opinion on Price of Organic Products	Between Groups	1.775	2	0.888	3.200**	0.045
	Within Groups	29.688	107	0.277		
	Total	31.464	109			
Organic Food Preference	Between Groups	0.965	2	0.482	11.082***	0.000
	Within Groups	4.658	107	0.044		
	Total	5.622	109			
Organic Food Importance	Between Groups	1.470	2	0.735	3.857**	0.024
	Within Groups	20.388	107	0.191		
	Total	21.858	109			

\*\*Significant at 5% level

\*\*\*Significant at 1% level

Table 12 shows ANOVA for Education and Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products. The results of the study shows that there is statistically significant difference in Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products between respondents of different educational qualification.

Table 12.1: Tukey HSD Test for Education and Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products

Education	N	Price	Preference		Importance	
		Subset for alpha = 0.05	Subset for alpha = 0.05		Subset for alpha = 0.05	
		1	1	2	1	2
Undergraduation	64	1.3750	3.7639		3.2627	
Post graduation	31	1.6129	3.8961	3.8961	3.2634	
School Level Education	15	1.6667		4.0222		3.6000
Sig.		0.116	0.061	0.078	1.000	1.000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

The above table 12.1 shows that inspite of the educational qualification all the respondents have the similar opinion that organic food is expensive. The respondents belonging to under graduation and post graduation have similar opinion and agree to the reason why they prefer organic food. Respondents belonging to post graduation and school level education have similar preference and agree to buy organic food. Respondents belonging to under graduation and post graduation have similar opinion on important factors influencing to buy organic food.

Table 13: ANOVA for Monthly Income and Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Opinion on Price of Organic Products	Between Groups	13.906	3	4.635	27.985***	0.000
	Within Groups	17.558	106	0.166		
	Total	31.464	109			
Organic Food Preference	Between Groups	2.059	3	0.686	20.422***	0.000
	Within Groups	3.563	106	0.034		
	Total	5.622	109			
Organic Food Importance	Between Groups	7.302	3	2.434	17.726***	0.000
	Within Groups	14.556	106	0.137		
	Total	21.858	109			

\*\*\*Significant at 1% level

Table 13 shows ANOVA for Monthly Income and Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and important factors influencing to buy Organic Food Products. The results of the study shows that monthly income influence Opinion on Price, Reason for

Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products between respondents of different monthly income at 1% level of significance.

Table 13.1: Tukey HSD Test for Monthly Income and Opinion on Price and Importance of Organic Food Products

Monthly Income	N	Price		Importance		
		Subset for alpha = 0.05				
		1	2	1	2	3
Rs.26,000 -Rs.50,000	20	1.1000		3.0571		
Less than Rs.25000	33	1.1212		3.1082	3.1082	
Rs.51,000 -Rs.1,00,000	33		1.8182		3.3420	
Rs. 1 lakh and above	24		1.8333			3.7500
Sig.		0.998	0.999	0.959	0.108	1.000

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Table 13.1 shows that respondents with monthly income Rs.26,000- Rs.50,000 and less than Rs.25,000 have similar opinion on Price. Respondents with monthly income Rs.51, 000 to Rs.1, 00,000 and Rs. 1 lakh & above have similar opinion on price. Further regarding the important factors influencing to buy organic products respondents with monthly income of less than Rs. 25,000 and Rs.51,000 to Rs. 1,00,000 have similar opinion

Table 13.2: Tukey HSD Test for Monthly Income and Opinion on Preference of Organic food products

Monthly Income	N	Subset for alpha = 0.05		
		1	2	3
		Less than Rs.25000	33	3.6532
Rs.26,000 –Rs.50,000	20		3.8000	
Rs.51,000 -Rs.1,00,000	33		3.9158	3.9158
Rs. 1 lakh and above	24			4.0093
Sig.		1.000	0.107	0.257

Means for groups in homogeneous subsets are displayed.

Table 13.2 shows Tukey HSD Test for Monthly Income and Opinion on Preference of Organic food products. The results of the study shows that respondents with monthly income Rs.26,000 –Rs.50,000 and Rs.51,000 -Rs.1,00,000 have similar opinion regarding preference of organic products.

## FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

### Demographic profile of the respondents

70.9% of respondents are married and 29.1% of respondents are not married. 58.2% of the respondents have their under graduation degree as their educational qualification. 30% of the respondents have their monthly income between Rs.51,000 to Rs.1,00,000. Another 30% of their respondents have their income less than Rs.25,000/. 67.3 % of respondents have three or four members as their family size and 36.4 % of the respondents are private employees.

### Type of organic products preferred by the customers

Organic cooking oil, milk and meat products are highly preferred by the respondents. The mean score for organic fruits and vegetables and millets is greater than three which shows the next higher preference.

### Preference of Purchase of Organic Products Before and After Outbreak of Covid-19

The mean score value for preference of organic food products has increased on daily, weekly and yearly basis after Covid. This shows there is an increase in preference of organic products after Covid-19.

### Preferences and factors affecting the consumer's purchase intention towards organic food products

Respondents prefer organic food as it is healthier for them and their family. It is followed by the reason as respondents consider organic food is fresh and taste better, high quality and trustworthy source of information. It is also found that respondents do not prefer organic food for its Status symbol and trend.

62.7% of respondents get to know about the organic products through friends. This shows that word of mouth reference has more influence to prefer the organic food products.

### Maintenance of Health and Fitness of Respondents

It is found that the respondents give more importance to Food and Exercise for maintaining their health and fitness followed by Yoga & meditation and Diet.

### Relationship between demographic variables and opinion on price of organic foods, organic food preference, Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products

It is found that opinion on price of organic foods, organic food preference, Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products is not based on *gender*.

The results show that *age* is influencing opinion on Price, reason for Preference and important factors influencing to buy Organic Food Products at 1% level of significant.

Tukey HSD Test shows that respondents in age groups 41-55& 18-25 have similar opinion on price and the respondents in age group 26-40 & Above 56 have similar opinion on price of organic products.

Tukey HSD Test shows that respondents in age group 26-40 & 41-55 have similar reasons for preferring organic food. Respondents in age group of 18-25 have same preference and respondents above 56 years have same preference for organic food products.

The results of the study show that *marital status* of the respondents has significant influence on price, preference and factors influencing to buy organic products.

The results of the study show that *monthly income* influence Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products between respondents of different monthly income at 1% level of significance.

## CONCLUSION

Many people have changed their dietary habits as a result of the worldwide health crisis. The need to isolate oneself from society has changed consumer behaviour in terms of what they purchase, how much they purchase, and how they purchase it (a place where the consumers do their shopping). Customers now find themselves in a new situation where shopping has to be done online in addition to other everyday tasks. The bulk of consumers in the COVID-19 era have begun to put their own safety and their families' welfare first. The study has given some interesting results which can be used by the organic food producers, retailers and departmental stores. Organic cooking oil, milk and meat products are highly preferred by the respondents. The mean score value for preference of organic food products has increased on daily, weekly and yearly basis after Covid. This shows there is an increase in preference of organic products after Covid-19. The results of the study shows that monthly income influence Opinion on Price, Reason for Preference and Important factors Influencing to buy Organic Food Products. Respondents prefer organic food as it is healthier for them and their family. It is followed by the reason organic food is fresh and taste better, high quality and trustworthy source of information. Greater availability of organic products, more knowledge about organic products and lower price for organic products are the important factors influencing customers to buy organic food. This research can be used to apply different marketing techniques by marketers and other elements influencing consumer preferences across different social strata.

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