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Organic Wellness: Influencing consumer decisions via Cause Marketing

Jitendra Kumar Das, Shilpi Jain, Sriparna Basu, and Bishakha Majumdar wrote this case solely to provide material for class discussion. The authors do not intend to illustrate either effective or ineffective handling of a managerial situation. The authors may have disguised certain names and other identifying information to protect confidentiality.

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On February 3, 2017, Krishan Guptaa, the founder, managing director, and chief executive officer (CEO) of Organic Wellness Products Private Limited (Organic Wellness), an organic health products company, received an award for Emerging Start-Up Company of the Year. While on the dais at the 18th National Management Summit on Leading Transformation of Organizations in the Digital Age, held in New Delhi, India, Guptaa announced that he would receive the award with his farmer associates—cultivators who produced the raw materials for Organic Wellness’s offerings. At Guptaa’s request, the farmers had come all the way from Bundelkhand in central India to share in the moment of glory for the organization and its founder. Guptaa dedicated the award to his employees and farmer associates. He also announced that the latter would be accompanying him to Germany and China in 2017–2018 for various international expos that the organization would be participating in.

According to a report prepared by TechSci Research and the Associated Chambers of Commerce of India on the Indian organic food market, exports of organic foods were slated to triple in the next four years in India due to the government’s relaxing restrictions on the export of organic goods.[[1]](#endnote-1) As a firm that specialized in organic health supplements and beverages, Organic Wellness thus stood to gain from the expanding markets. In fact, Guptaa had received some proposals from US firms for strategic tie-ups. However, by May 2018, Guptaa had realized that a growing market also meant increased competition and succeeding in such a scenario called for adopting the right kind of marketing strategy and ensuring market readiness in terms of proper supply chain, consistent quality, and competitive pricing. To upstage the competition, Organic Wellness thus needed an aggressive approach to marketing and promotions. Although Organic Wellness’s business was on the expected growth trajectory, Guptaa wondered if his company, with its unconventional cause-centric approach to marketing—which functioned without a sales force and relied mainly on word-of-mouth strategies—would be able to cope with the rising competition.

Guptaa was facing a crossroad: should he continue on the same path for now, or should he adopt the conventional paid mechanisms of marketing? It was time for him to decide.

Organic Industry: Back to the Roots

The United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) defined “organic farming” as the cultivation of crops using cultural, biological, and mechanical practices that supported the cycling of on-farm resources, promoted ecological balance, and conserved biological diversity in accordance with the devised regulations.[[2]](#endnote-2) Organic operations had to maintain or enhance the quality of soil and water while also conserving wildlife, wetlands, and nature. Fertilizer, irradiation, and genetic engineering methods were not used in organic farming.[[3]](#endnote-3)

Agriculture, in its pre-industrial form, had been in practice for thousands of years and resembled what was widely known as organic farming today (i.e., farming without the use of chemicals or machinery).[[4]](#endnote-4) However, after the Industrial Revolution, many inorganic farming methods came into existence; not all of these methods were well researched, and many of their side effects were unknown.

The first half of the 20th century bore testimony to a concurrent progression of knowledge in biochemistry and engineering, which affected farming practices in a radical manner. The introduction of mechanized farm equipment and the commercialization of genetically modified seeds changed the character of farming in various ways.[[5]](#endnote-5) As more and more areas were brought under cultivation through the efficient use of machinery, crop production ballooned, leading to food sufficiency for the world’s growing population. However, the widespread use of chemical fertilization and genetically modified crops led to alarming consequences such as the inadvertent human consumption of chemical pesticides, the destruction of species of insects and birds due to their exposure to poisonous sprays, and the destruction of soil quality and groundwater resources by harmful chemicals.[[6]](#endnote-6)

In the early 1970s, many developed countries realized these ramifications and started re-embracing organic means of agricultural production. However, in order to meet food-security concerns for their expanding populations, developing countries such as India and Mexico still promoted the use of cost-effective and quick-yielding nitrogen-based fertilizers.[[7]](#endnote-7) This extracted massive costs with respect to human health and the environment and wrought havoc on other economic activities; for example, oyster beds had to be shut down in Mexico, as they were declared hazardous from nitrogen pollution.[[8]](#endnote-8) By 2007, however, major sections of society were waking up to the problems of genetically modified crops and inorganic (i.e., chemical) fertilizers and seeking an alternative in organic farming. Three strong worldwide developments pushed the revival of organic cultivation methods and the growth of organic products: 1) the adverse effects of inorganic produce on human health and the environment; 2) the stringent restrictions imposed by developed nations on the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides in agricultural products exported from other countries; and 3) the price premium that exporters of organic products received.[[9]](#endnote-9)

Conventional versus Organic Farming: Cost and Revenue Implications

Conventional farming scored higher than organic farming with regard to economy of scale. Further, owing to the exclusion of low-priced and high-yielding fertilizers, organic farming had to take recourse to alternative means of cultivation that tended to be expensive.[[10]](#endnote-10) The high production and packaging costs of organic food made it 25–50 per cent more expensive than equivalent conventional food items (see Exhibit 1). This led to low demand in price-sensitive domestic markets. Additionally, domestic retailers were unwilling to stock organic products on their shelves, as they feared stock would not move.[[11]](#endnote-11)

As a result of these challenges, most organic food producers in India focused on exports. The total organic food exports during fiscal year (FY) 2015–2016 was 263,687 metric tons (t),[[12]](#endnote-12) and the export value realization was approximately US$298 million.[[13]](#endnote-13) Organic Indian products were exported to more than 150 countries, including the United States, Canada, Switzerland, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa, as well as other countries in the European Union, Southeast Asia, and the Middle East.[[14]](#endnote-14) In India, most organic food sellers or organizations were working with organic farmers; they were investing in technology, raw material, land, and logistics to ensure the quality and quantity of produce.

Revenue Implications

A variety of factors affected revenue generation in an organic business, including the year of establishment (this indicated the policy framework it coincided with), product type (i.e., food or non-food), the premium or non-premium nature of the product (e.g., coffee beans, basmati rice, or superfood, etc.); the business’s target market (i.e., local or international) and location; the organization’s engagement with farmers and other stakeholders; and whether the business sold both conventional and organic products or organic products only. Another key factor that affected the growth of an organic business was e-commerce, which not only improved the reach of organic products but also improved the variety of offerings, with customer reviews, functioning as testimonials in all categories.[[15]](#endnote-15)

In 2015, net worldwide sale of organic food was valued at approximately $81.6 billion.[[16]](#endnote-16) In Asia, the organic production area was approximately 2.9 million hectares, which made up nine per cent of the world’s organic agricultural land. The principal countries were China, with 1.6 million hectares, and India, with 1.5 million hectares.

India and Organic Farming

Organic farming was significant for India— a land of fertile farmlands, diverse agroclimatic conditions, a huge labour force, and a large pool of knowledge encompassing both traditional farming systems and a 4,000-year history of organic crop production. Concepts such as biodynamic, green manuring, crop rotation, vermicompost, living fences, and cover crops had been listed and explained in ancient Vedic manuscripts such as the *Vrikshayurveda*, which recommended the below approaches and processes.[[17]](#endnote-17)

A **biodynamic** view was one that considered the farm a living, dynamic, and spiritual entity with its own rhythms and life forces. Biodynamic farming had two basic components: 1) farming operations based on astronomical calendars and 2) special organic preparations used as sprays and compost.

**Green manuring and cover crops** involved sowing a crop like sunn hemp or fava bean just before the monsoons (i.e., rainy season). After 35–40 days, the crop was cut down and mixed into the soil, after which time the season’s main crop was sown. Green manuring was beneficial in that it fixed the level of nitrogen and helped to improve soil texture and water-holding capacity. Green leaf manuring could also be carried out if enough leguminous leaves were available.

**Cover crops** were nitrogen-fixing crops that grew fast and required little or no inputs like water or additional manuring. They were used for covering the soil during fallow months, adding nitrogen to the soil, suppressing weeds, and preventing soil erosion, and were later used as biomass.

**Crop rotation, multicropping, intercropping,** and **polyculture** were systems that traditional farmers followed to maximize the use of all available inputs, including soil, water, and light. Crop rotation was a sequence of cropping whereby two dissimilar types of crops followed each other: examples included cereals and legumes, and deep-rooted and short-rooted plants. Combinations depended on local situations.

**Biological and natural pest and weed control** eventually took the focus.The ancient farming system believed that in a well-managed organic farming system, pests and weeds were an integral part, as they did not usually get out of control. Many farmers used prophylactics such as diluted cow urine and vermiwash (the fluid from a vermicompost tank) to prevent weeds and insect attacks. Additionally, several plants such as ginger, chili, custard apple seeds, turmeric, garlic, tobacco, sweet flag, basil, and Persian lilac were commonly used for preparing natural biopesticides. Some additional ancient organic farming practices were as follows:

**Composting—**Farmyard waste formed excellent compost in one to six months, depending on the composting process used. Vermicomposting was a method that used earthworms to eat and break up organic waste.

**Living fences—**Farmers used to plant living fences made of agave, Jatropha curcas, Euphorbia, and fava bean. Having such fences around the field had multiple benefits. They provided protection from trespassers and cattle, as the species that were suitable for live fences were thorny, inedible, and not eaten by animals.

**Reduced tillage**—This was a practice of minimizing soil disturbance by allowing crop residue or stubble to remain on the ground instead of being thrown away. The technique was applied to wheat crops by some practitioners in India, especially in Punjab and other northern and north-western states. It was becoming popular because of the direct economic benefits it provided to farmers. With less tilling, farmers saved machinery use, fuel, labour, and time.[[18]](#endnote-18)

Realizing the export potential of organic products in India, in 2001, the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)[[19]](#endnote-19) and the Ministry of Agriculture and Farmers’ Welfare designed a standard for organic product exports known as the National Programme for Organic Production (NPOP) and implemented a Participatory Guarantee System for India (PGS-India). The NPOP provided accreditation for certification bodies, standards for organic production, and promotion of organic farming. NPOP standards were recognized by the European Commission and Switzerland as equivalent to their standards. Similarly, the USDA recognized NPOP conformity assessment procedures of accreditation as equivalent to those of the United States. The objective of the PGS-India was to encourage farmers to adopt organic farming on a large scale. Beside these, state governments and several not-for-profit organizations were offering training, financial assistance, knowledge, and market exposure related to organic farming to the rural community. The government was also developing an organic value chain for north-eastern states in India, and many states set up third-party certification bodies to reduce the cost of certification.[[20]](#endnote-20) These measures and recognitions contributed to exponential growth in the export of organic Indian products, with a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 25 per cent during 2014–2019.[[21]](#endnote-21)

In 2015–2016, the total farming area in India under organic certification was 5.71 million hectares, including 1.49 million hectares of cultivable agricultural land and 4.22 million hectares of forest and wilderness growing minor forest produce.[[22]](#endnote-22) In FY 2015–2016, India produced approximately 1.35 million tonnes of certified organic products, including dietary supplements and food products such as sugar cane, oilseeds, cereals, cotton, pulses, medicinal plants, tea, fruits, spices, dried fruits, vegetables, and coffee. There was significant revenue growth in each segment, with the largest being in organic tea (see Exhibits 2 and 3).[[23]](#endnote-23)

Organic Products: Business Potential in the Indian Market

In terms of consumption, the organic market in India was still at a nascent stage. Organic products tended to be priced about three to four times higher than conventional products, limiting their consumption to the upper middle class of Indian society. However, post globalization and the liberalization of the Indian economy in 1991, the dynamics of the Indian domestic market started changing due to an expanding middle-class population, higher disposable incomes, and a growing health consciousness among consumers. The health foods market was worth ₹90 billion[[24]](#endnote-24) in 2010, and it was expected to grow at a CAGR of 20 per cent to ₹225 billion by 2015.[[25]](#endnote-25) In FY 2013–2014, India had the largest number of organic food producers (650,000), followed by Uganda (190,000) and Mexico (169,000).[[26]](#endnote-26) Some of the prominent players in the Indian organic market were Patanjali Ayurved Limited, with a turnover of ₹107 billion in FY 2017; the Himalaya Drug Company (Himalaya Drug), with a turnover of ₹18 billion in FY 2016;[[27]](#endnote-27) Organic India Private Limited (Organic India), with a turnover ₹3.7 billion in FY 2017;[[28]](#endnote-28) Conscious Food, with a turnover of ₹2 billion in FY 2017; and Morarka Organic Foods Limited, with a turnover of ₹671 million in FY 2017 (see Exhibit 3). These organizations had been in the business for more than two decades, which gave them a strong foothold and enriched experience in the industry. In addition, there were more than 25 e-commerce platforms (both general and specific) selling organic products, such as Innovative Retail Concepts Pvt. Ltd.’s Bigbasket.com, Amazon.com, Inc., Grofers International Pvt. Ltd., Organic Shop, Organic Food in India, I Say Organic, Fabindia Overseas Pvt. Ltd., and Natural Mantra, among others.

A survey conducted in 2017 by the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations found that most organic companies had reported a boost in revenue (between 10 to 50 per cent) over the past five years, depending on the category of products they sold.[[29]](#endnote-29) By 2017, the production, availability, and visibility of organic products in India further improved, with organic farming and products promoted under various government schemes.[[30]](#endnote-30) Organic products were endorsed by celebrities, chefs, and health experts and were prominently displayed in the aisles of retail outlets, pharmacies, supermarkets, and specialty stores. The number of retail and distribution stores exclusively selling organic products was also on a healthy growth path.

Challenges

Most farmers in India were small or marginal farmers with a typical landholding of less than or equal to two hectares. The total land available for cultivation was 7,020,000 hectares, with merely 0.4 per cent of total agricultural land under organic cultivation; hence, the availability of quality raw materials at competitive prices was always a major issue. Moreover, it was difficult to convince farmers to adopt organic farming as it was initially cost intensive, with low productivity. Further, there was a transition time period of three years that farmers had to wait before getting their farms certified organic. Typical agricultural land took three years to become ready for organic farming.

The transportation, logistics, and maintenance involved in organic farming were other important components in the organic-harvest supply chain. The handling, transportation, storage, and packing of organic products needed to be carried out according to specifications and under certified conditions. Traceability was an additional concern, as it ensured product quality throughout the entire chain. Processing, storage, and transportation were generally handled by the private sector entrepreneur, wholesaler, or exporter, and these processes required significant upfront capital. Additionally, low farm productivity and seasonality, perishability, and intermediation resulted in lack of distribution in supply and quality, which, in turn, impeded production, processing, and exports. Guptaa, who had been living in a metropolitan city, soon realized that large distances between farmlands and production units would cause such recurring issues.

Krishan Guptaa and Organic Wellness

A chemical engineer by training, Guptaa started his career with the Colgate-Palmolive Company in May 1988 and subsequently worked with several national and multinational organizations in India, Europe, and the United States including Gillette, the Godrej Group, the Reckitt Benckiser Group, and Oriflame Holding. It was during his stint as the CEO and managing director of Organic India, a firm with one of the largest market shares in the organic products market in India, that Guptaa grew aware of the exponential growth of the organic market and the plight of organic farmers. To benefit the farmers and boost the use of organic products in a sustainable manner, Guptaa quit Organic India and set up his own venture—Organic Wellness Products Private Limited—in 2015.

The organization’s tag line was “Together, Let’s Heal the World.” According to Guptaa, it was more than just a brand tag line; it was an expression that invited an active participation in the firm’s efforts to do the following:

* Care for habitats and the environment.
* Give family farmers their rightful place under the sun.
* Generate sources of youth employment.
* Empower women toward social and financial independence.
* Create a happy, contented inner circle of employees and business associates.
* Promote healthy living by encouraging a shift to organic food.

The first Organic Wellness farms and manufacturing plants were set up in Bundelkhand in Madhya Pradesh, India. This relatively remote location was chosen to ensure production in a pollution-free zone and thus remove the hazard of pollutants contaminating the products. The manufacturing plant was set up close to the farms to follow a “farm-to-factory” approach, minimizing the time it took for freshly harvested produce to reach the factory, better retaining crop freshness. With growing demands, Organic Wellness gradually started procuring from organic farms in other Indian states such as Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and Rajasthan.

Developing a value chain for the products was a major challenge for Guptaa. Although consumers were aware of the health benefits of organic products, many were sceptical about the quality and intimidated by their price. Counterfeit organic products were widely available, which adversely affected consumer trust. It was critical for companies involved in the organic business to increase awareness among consumers—across all income groups and in both metropolitan and rural locations—and develop trust regarding product quality and authenticity certifications.

Therefore, Guptaa’s first challenge was to spread awareness and advocate the authenticity of his products.

Business not “as usual” at Organic Wellness

Guptaa said,

I am not here to sell a product. I am here to educate people about my very unique business model—lean, mean, and thin . . . This is a company which is profitable from Day-1, a company with zero debt and zero investors, and yet salaries and bonuses are paid on time . . . It is about unique products, unique packaging, and thus a unique business model.

Organic Wellness aimed to bring value to all its stakeholders—farmers, employees, business associates, consumers, and the Earth—as its way of addressing sustainability. It followed a business model that few organic firms in India followed, with practices such as giving a percentage of the profit to farmers, training farmers in the latest technologies, and offering seeds and funding to farmers, with a promise to buy their entire yield. Organic Wellness entered into contracts with its “Family Farmers” for “large scale organic farming with complete buy-back assurance of their organic produce at competitive market prices.”[[31]](#endnote-31) According to Guptaa, this buyback assurance was what set his company apart and ensured that famers continued working for Organic Wellness, even when there would be other channels by which to sell their produce. Organic Wellness also had a profit-sharing model that gave farmers five per cent of the profit obtained from the sale of a product for which they had supplied the raw materials. Farmers were treated like heroes at Organic Wellness. The CEO regularly took them to international forums, where they were presented as the face of the company. Designers for product packaging were hired from the nearby villages so that employment generation extended to the adjoining rural areas. Organic Wellness had 300 dedicated farmers.

To ensure quality and brand value, all Organic Wellness products, whether sold in the international or national markets, were produced, priced, and packaged alike. Guptaa insisted that all the raw materials used in Organic Wellness products were produced at the “family farms” to ensure “organic produce” status and the company’s credibility. Organic Wellness’s quality standards were recognized as USDA Organic and Halal and were certified by TQ Cert, OneCert, the International Organization for Standardization, and the Food Safety and Standards Authority of India.

In addition, Guptaa took several other measures to ensure the consistent supply of quality raw materials and maintain quality of production, packaging, and delivery. He organized regular training programs for farmers on methods of farming, seeds, manures, and organic certifications. A research and development unit was set up at the shop floor, and soil health checks were organized at regular intervals.

By 2017, Organic Wellness was producing a range of certified organic wellness and health products and shipping them to various locations both within and outside India. The offerings were classified into four major categories: OW’Real (tea), OW’Heal (health supplements), OW’Zeal (energy enhancers), and OW’Meal (food grains and regular food products) (see Exhibit 4). Apart from these, Organic Wellness also offered accessories such as jute bags and self-management books and was planning to launch offerings in the dog food segment. It was exporting to 27 countries around the world such as Canada, the United States, Sweden, the United Kingdom, Australia, and France, and also had a pan-India presence. In terms of price, Organic Wellness had a distinct policy of maintaining cost leadership over its competitors. For instance, the holy basil tea (*tulsi* in Hindi) was priced at $1.50, whereas a similar offering from competitors varied between $2.50 and $3.00. Quinoa, a superfood, was priced at $3.00, compared to competitors’ offerings, which were priced between $4.60 and $9.00.

Demand-Side Bottlenecks

Reaching the end consumer was radically tough in the presence of the global giants. Typically, cash-rich organizations like Organic India and Himalaya Drug promoted their products using a balanced combination of offline (primarily consumer fairs, industry expos, television, radio, print media, and kiosks) and online (organic and paid digital marketing, information blogs, YouTube, banner ads, affiliates, and contests) channels. The approximate annual budget was $5–$10 million (75 per cent of the total budget was allocated to offline channels, and the rest went to digital channels). Organic Wellness’s digital strategy aimed to engage customers, attract new customers, provide helpful solutions through expert advice, and build the brand. A small health care and consumer packaged goods organization like Organic Wellness, with a turnover of approximately $1 million, spent somewhere between 6.5 and 11 per cent of their revenue on marketing and promotions. Out of that budget, 15–35 per cent (approximately $8,000–$13,000) was spent on digital marketing (see Exhibit 5).[[32]](#endnote-32) Because Organic Wellness’s priority was to set up its operations, spending $8,000–$10,000 was difficult.

Infrastructural Issues

Bundelkhand, the region where Guptaa established his production unit, had witnessed low rainfall, power shortages, drought, extreme heat, and low levels of ground water for the past several years. Local political instability was prominent. Further, land relations were complicated, and often the landholder was not the actual cultivator. The land would be offered on a lease to other cultivators who did not have holdings of their own. Institutional credit and other facilities were not easily available to these unregistered cultivators and tenant farmers. Thus, while the National Commission for Enterprises in the Unorganised Sector recommended small-scale implementation of land reform packages to improve the plight of small and marginal farmers,[[33]](#endnote-33) providing security of tenure and farming resources to such small farmers was difficult.

Marketing at Organic Wellness

Guptaa’s plan was to get product quality, operations, and processes on track before moving to big-budget marketing campaigns. Organic Wellness therefore followed a principle of no paid advertisements, focusing instead on “cause-related marketing,” letting the product do its own talking, and relying on word-of-mouth promotion. The firm gained publicity from the numerous awards its CEO won. Guptaa, along with his corporate team and farming partners, regularly participated in national and international exhibitions and showcased products at conferences, seminars, fairs, and award ceremonies.[[34]](#endnote-34) Guptaa also delivered TED Talks in educational and corporate institutions to publicize Organic Wellness’s approach to doing business as a socially viable business model. The intention was to communicate to consumers that their decision to buy would not only be a benefit to themselves but would also have an impact on the community, society, and the environment. These marketing efforts built strong relationships with customers and enhanced Organic Wellness’s corporate image as a brand with a difference.[[35]](#endnote-35)

Perhaps the only area of Organic Wellness’s marketing strategy that approached the conventional path was that of social media marketing. However, even here, there was no paid marketing effort by the company. From the company’s inception until 2017, Guptaa personally maintained the company’s YouTube and Facebook pages. Social media channels such as Facebook, YouTube, and Twitter were widely used by marketers to build brand awareness and consistently yield viewer engagement. The choice of these channels was appropriate, as statistics showed that [93 per cent of social media advertisers](https://sproutsocial.com/insights/facebook-stats-for-marketers/) used Facebook advertisements, and about 26 per cent of Facebook users who clicked on advertisements reported making a purchase. Images accounted for 75–90 per cent of Facebook advertisement performance, and the average click-through rate in Facebook advertisements across all industries was 90 per cent.[[36]](#endnote-36) Similarly, in the case of YouTube, in 2015, the average views per YouTube video (including those that featured people or were associated with blogs) was 2,354. Approximately 75 per cent of Indian YouTube users went on to visit a site mentioned in a YouTube video, three out of five viewers posted a comment about the video, and seven out of 10 viewers scrolled down to read comments others had written.[[37]](#endnote-37) In 2017, there were close to 35 million views of posts related to health and fitness.[[38]](#endnote-38)

Organic Wellness’s social media posts covered new product offerings as well as posts on the lives of organic farmers and the process of manufacturing organic products (see Exhibits 6 and 7). In March 2018, Organic Wellness’s YouTube page had 191 subscribers, 56 official videos posted, and an average of 165 views per video, with a maximum of 650 views. The official Facebook page had daily posts, with an average of 14 likes per post (maximum 2,149 views). Apart from this, the company also used WhatsApp to push word-of-mouth marketing for new product launches. Guptaa cited the example of basil seeds—a product that was launched in Srinagar, Jammu and Kashmir, in just five days during Ramadan using WhatsApp, which went on to earn a revenue of $26,000.[[39]](#endnote-39)

“Zero Sales Force” Policy at Organic Wellness

The other highly distinctive feature of Organic Wellness, according to Guptaa, laid in its sales strategy. In an industry that relied extensively on sales teams and distribution networks, Organic Wellness cultivated a “zero sales force” strategy. Organic Wellness products could be purchased directly online—on sites such as Amazon and Flipkart—as well as from distributors. Organic Wellness dealt directly with distributors and required advance payment, which eliminated the need for follow-ups. Consistent with its stance toward offering unified business policies across the globe, the company’s wholesale rates to distributors were the same in India as they were elsewhere—a 38 per cent discount on the printed maximum retail price (MRP), which was a legally mandated detail on a product label in India.

The third channel that Organic Wellness exploited was sales through consumer-turned-distributors (CTDs). Customers who had benefitted from the products were encouraged to become small-scale distributors and sell Organic Wellness products in their own social circles. To give all such individual sellers an equal share of the profits, Organic Wellness avoided second-level recruiting of new CTDs by original CTDs, preferring instead to maintain a first-level connection to all individual CTDs. As a wholesale rate, CTDs received a 30 per cent discount on the MRP. Organic Wellness direct sellers came from all backgrounds—professors, marketing managers, homemakers, doctors, and information technology professionals. The minimum order for direct sales was $100 per transaction for distributors. To protect market share, individual direct selling by CTDs was encouraged only in areas where Organic Wellness did not yet have a distributor.

Seeing the success of the CTD model, distributors themselves requested the opportunity to recruit such direct sellers. In the absence of conventional marketing campaigns, CTD word of mouth was expected to influence potential new clients. Such second-level sellers were given a margin of 18–22 per cent, depending on the distributor’s discretion (see Exhibit 8).

Avoiding the sales force model was Guptaa’s conscious strategic decision. It saved the cost of employing a sales force (with associated salaries and benefits), related travel costs, and the hassle of following up with and keeping a sales team motivated. Organic Wellness believed in putting that money toward providing discounts to distributors and helping them launch and push products, as the distributors were experts in their respective markets. However, to maintain consistency in branding and create an impression of realistic pricing, Organic Wellness had a policy of not allowing distributors or direct sellers to offer a discount of more than 10 per cent on the maximum retail price (MRP).

Which Way from Here?

One challenge facing Organic Wellness was to cater to expanding markets and maintain its presence in existing ones. Guptaa, however, felt relatively assured in this regard: His profit-sharing model, which other firms in the market were yet to replicate, gave him a competitive advantage over other businesses. He also drew strength from the social capital he had built up with the farmers over time. Farmers could directly contact him by phone at any time. He visited his farmlands regularly and took the farmers with him to national and international publicity events. He believed that the strength of these relationships would keep the farmers from going elsewhere in the case of an expanding market. What concerned Guptaa more was that farming as a profession was erratic and unprofitable. The challenge was to keep the farmers interested in agriculture more as a business and less as a farming activity and show them growth opportunities in this area.

Staying relevant in customers’ minds proved challenging for Organic Wellness in an environment that constantly bombarded consumers with information about diverse organic product offerings from different brands and their relative merits and demerits, with each brand doing everything they could to convey that they alone were able to provide a particular experience.

Thus far, Organic Wellness had followed their “zero sales force” policy and did not employ paid advertisements; instead, they allowed the product to do its own talking and relied on word-of-mouth promotion. The firm gained publicity from the numerous awards the founder had won. The objective was to avoid heavy expenditure toward direct or digital marketing in the initial stages (2016–2017) and instead focus on developing standard processes. The organization adopted a mixed-method approach to marketing, where offline channels such as commercial fairs, exhibitions, and award ceremonies were chosen for sharing the story of how Organic Wellness evolved, while online channels such as Twitter, YouTube, Facebook, and WhatsApp were selected for communication regarding the brand, products, events, and partnerships. In all social media posts, the farmers and their achievements were celebrated, and Guptaa could be seen working with his farmers, celebrating their festivals, donating to their children’s education, empowering them through training in modern machinery and technologies, and acknowledging his distributors’ performance. Guptaa’s differentiated marketing technique created appeal through authenticity by drawing attention to the cause rather than the product. However, the imperative question was, “Was this sufficient?”

In contrast to Organic Wellness, competitors such as Organic India had been spending heavily on conventional marketing in FY 2018–2019 through such means as print media, distributing free product samples to airline passengers, or allocating $1.2 million exclusively for customer engagement via digital marketing channels.[[40]](#endnote-40) Organic India was projected to become a $70 million brand by 2020. In such a competitive environment driven by multiple channels, would Organic Wellness’s message of emotional and social connection still manage to evoke a response?

Until now, Guptaa had mostly relied on word-of-mouth and non-paid forms of marketing, but he wondered if these would be enough to meet his future goal of expansion, or whether it was time to shift to more conventional forms of paid marketing to enhance Organic Wellness’s market presence.

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EXHIBIT 1: INDUSTRY ESTIMATES OF costs INCURRED IN ORGANIC FARMING

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Parameters | Percentage of Costs (%) |
| Farmer training | 8–10 |
| Premium paid to farmers | 10–15 |
| Processing costs | 4–6 |
| Inventory holding costs (includes storage costs) | 6–8 |
| Logistics and distribution costs | 6 |
| Packaging costs | 3 |
| Retailer margin | 12 |

Source: Compiled and created by the case authors based on data retrieved from E. Kumar Sharma, “Pure Grain,” *Business Today*, February 17, 2013, accessed April 19, 2019, www.businesstoday.in/magazine/features/organic-food-fast-catching-on-with-the-indian-consumer/story/191942.html.

EXHIBIT 2: THE INDIAN ORGANIC PRODUCT PORTFOLIO

Source: Created by the case authors.

EXHIBIT 3: PROMINENT ORGANIZATIONS SELLING ORGANIC FOOD IN INDIA (2012)

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Total Market Size = ₹10 Billion** | | |
| **Companies** | **Turnover (in ₹ Billion)** | **Percentage (%)** |
| Organic India | 1.75 | 18 |
| Conscious Food | 1.20 | 12 |
| Ecofarms (India) | 0.85 | 9 |
| Morarka Organic Foods | 0.75 | 8 |
| 24 Mantra | 0.65 | 7 |
| Navdanya | 0.25 | 3 |
| Fabindia | 0.20 | 2 |
| Others | 4.35 | 44 |

Source: Created by the case authors based on data published in Yes Bank Ltd., *Indian Organic Food Market: Jaivik India 2012*, conference report, 40, August 2012, accessed April 19, 2019, www.yesinstitute.in/reports/food/JAIVIK%20-%20Indian%20Organic%20Foods%20Market.pdf.

EXHIBIT 4: ORGANIC PRODUCTS BY ORGANIC WELLNESS

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **OW’Real (Green Tea)** | **OW’Heal (Single Herbs)** | **OW’Zeal (Top of the Chain)** | **OW’Meal** |
| [Tulsi Green Tea with Saffron](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=GREEN%20TEAS&&subcat=Tulsi+Green+Tea+%2B+Saffron) | [Amla C+](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=SINGLE%20HERBS&&subcat=Amla+C%2B) | [Quinoa](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=TOP%20OF%20THE%20CHAIN&&subcat=Quinoa) | Cereal |
| [Tulsi Green Tea Premium](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=GREEN%20TEAS&&subcat=Tuls+Green+Tea+Premium) | [Ashwagandha W+](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=SINGLE%20HERBS&&subcat=Ashwagandha+W%2B) | [Moringa Powder](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=SUPER-POWERS&&subcat=Moringa+Powder) | Lentils |
| [Tulsi Green Tea Classic](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=GREEN%20TEAS&&subcat=Tulsi+Green+Tea+Classic) | [Shatavari A+](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=SINGLE%20HERBS&&subcat=Shatavari+A%2B) | Turmeric Powder | Rice |
| [Mashallah Green Tea Classic](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=GREEN%20TEAS&&subcat=Mashallah+Green+Tea+Classic) | [Brahmi+](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=SINGLE%20HERBS&&subcat=Brahmi%2B) | Performance Products (Man-X and Miss-X) | Clarified Butter |
| [Ginger Chai](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=CHAI%20BLENDS&&subcat=Ginger+Chai) | [Moringa](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=SINGLE%20HERBS&&subcat=Moringa) |  | Pickles |
| [Masala Chai](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=CHAI%20BLENDS&&subcat=Masala+Chai) | Turmeric C+ |  | Flour |
| [Tulsi Indian Rose](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=INDIAN%20BLENDS&&subcat=Tulsi+Indian+Rose) | [Acne-Never](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Acne-Never) |  |  |
| [Tulsi Lemon](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=INDIAN%20BLENDS&&subcat=Tulsi+Lemon) | [Breathe-Well](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Breathe-Well) |  |  |
| [Tulsi Sweet Neem](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=INDIAN%20BLENDS&&subcat=Tulsi+Sweet+Neem) | [Diabo-Fit](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Diabo-Fit) |  |  |
| [The Original Tulsi](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=INDIAN%20BLENDS&&subcat=The+Original+Tulsi) | [Heart-Fit](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Heart-Fit) |  |  |
| [Tulsi Moringa](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=INDIAN%20BLENDS&&subcat=Tulsi+Moringa) | [Immuno-U](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Immuno-U) |  |  |
| [Tulsi Ginger](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=INDIAN%20BLENDS&&subcat=Tulsi+Ginger) | [Joint-Fit](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Joint-Fit) |  |  |
| [Tulsi Brahmi](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=INDIAN%20BLENDS&&subcat=Tulsi+Brahmi) | [Fat-Fit](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Fat-Fit) |  |  |
| Om Shanti for Relaxation | [Liv-Fit](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Liv-Fit) |  |  |
|  | [Stone-Free](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Stone-Free) |  |  |
|  | [Lipid-Fit](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Lipid-Fit) |  |  |
|  | [Women-Tone](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Women-Tone) |  |  |
|  | [Om Shanti](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Om+Shanti) |  |  |
|  | [Herbo-Cal](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Herbo-Cal) |  |  |
|  | [Skin-Tone](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Skin-Tone) |  |  |
|  | [Bowel-Move](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Bowel-Move) |  |  |
|  | [Tulsi+](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Tulsi%2B) |  |  |
|  | [Trikatu](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Trikatu) |  |  |
|  | Triphala |  |  |
|  | [Acne-Never](http://organicwellness.com/category2/?cat=FORMULATIONS&&subcat=Acne-Never) |  |  |

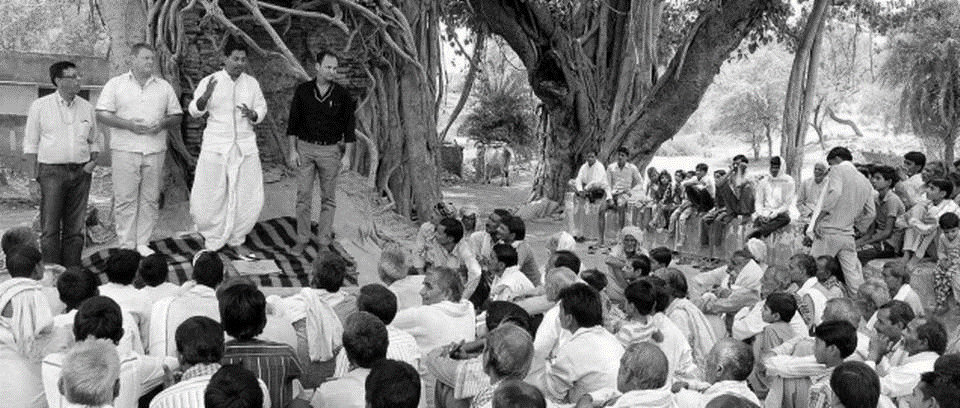
Source: Created by the case authors based on an interview conducted with Organic Wellness founder Krishan Guptaa on September 4, 2017.

EXHIBIT 5: SUGGESTED PERCENTAGE BREAKDOWN OF DIGITAL MARKETING SPEND FOR A SMALL ORGANIZATION WITH A TURNOVER of US$1-2 MILLION

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Digital Marketing Channels** | **Percentage Range of Budget Allocation—Low to High (%)** |
| Search advertising | 15–20 |
| Display advertising (banner ads) | 7–12 |
| Social advertising (Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn) | 10–15 |
| Email marketing | 5–10 |
| SEO / content | 15–20 |
| Training & consulting | 25–30 |
| Marketing technology | 8–12 |
| Note: Channel selection is dependent upon the nature of the business, industry, target customers, and campaign objective. It is assumed that 6 per cent of total revenue is allocated for marketing activities and that out of that 6 per cent, about 30–35 per cent is allocated for promotion through digital marketing channels. | |

Source:Created by the case authors based on the tool proposed by Chris Leone, “How Much Should You Budget for Marketing in 2019?,” WebStrategies Inc., September 19, 2018, accessed April 19, 2019, www.webstrategiesinc.com/blog/how-much-budget-for-online-marketing-in-2014.

EXHIBIT 6: ORGANIC WELLNESS FOUNDER ADDRESSING COMMUNITY of farmers



The collective: Krishan Guptaa (third from left), managing director of Organic Wellness, addressing a meeting of farmers in the village square of Babai village, Bundelkhand, India, in June 2017.

Source: Photograph provided by Organic Wellness.

EXHIBIT 7: ORGANIC WELLNESS FOUNDER, KRISHAN GUPTAA, and FARMERS AT TAJ VIVANTA, MUMBAI, ON MAY 18, 2018

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Source: Facebook Mobile Uploads of Organic Wellness titled “Organic Wellness Products Pvt. Ltd.” Taj Vivanta, May 18, 2018, https://bit.ly/2wxAgSq.

EXHIBIT 8: VALUE CHAIN AND SALES STRATEGIES AT ORGANIC WELLNESS

(2)

(3)

(4)

Distributors

Farmers

Organic Wellness

End customers

(4)

Organic product

Raw materials

Customer-turned-distributor (CTD)

(3)

(1)

1. Organic products are sold online by Organic Wellness to end customers.
2. Organic products are sold by Organic Wellness to distributors. Distributors sell the products directly to end customers.
3. Organic products are sold by Organic Wellness to CTDs. CTDs sell the products directly to end customers.
4. Organic products are sold by Organic Wellness to distributors. Distributors sell the products to CTDs who, in turn, sell them to end customers.

Source: Created by the case authors based on an interview conducted with Organic Wellness founder Krishan Guptaa on September 4, 2017.

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