

ETHICAL AI AND CONSUMER TRUST PARADOX: ENHANCING ORGANIC FOOD BRANDING IN KARNATAKA

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ABSTRACT

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is one of the most dynamic and influential forces shaping the global economy, moving beyond basic digital work to become a strategic partner in "Enterprise Intelligence 5.0" (Magsi et al., 2026). In Karnataka, a leader in India's organic farming, the state has established itself as an organic powerhouse with approximately 1.2 lakh hectares of land under certified cultivation (KSDA, 2025). This study examines how organic food brands in Karnataka can utilize ethical AI to foster authentic consumer trust, positioning technology as a strategic partner designed to enhance information transparency and supply chain reliability (Wang, 2026). The paper aims to analyze the challenges of "greenwashing" and the "AI Trust Paradox," where consumer trust significantly diminishes if an AI interface appears overly anthropomorphized or intrusive (Nie et al., 2026). By synthesizing reports and secondary data from 2021 to 2026 with a focus on Bengaluru, Mysuru, Mandya, Hassan, Tumkur, and Chamarajanagara the study identifies a deep digital-cultural divide in AI receptivity (Ramesh, 2022). The research further demonstrates that ethical AI serves as a powerful equalizer for MSMEs, providing affordable tools like QR codes and blockchain tracking to verify organic authenticity and compete with large-scale retailers (Waruwu et al., 2023). To address persistent data privacy concerns where 71% of consumers remain skeptical, the study advocates for the human-centric MANAV framework, focusing on Accountability, Accessibility, and Verifiable transparency (Joshi, 2025). The study concludes that a "one-size-fits-all" strategy is ineffective for Karnataka's diverse landscape; instead, a localized approach integrating digital verification with local languages and traditional values is essential for transforming the organic sector into a transparent, verifiable, and trust-based marketplace (B.A. & Guruprasad, 2025). Ultimately, this integration builds a sustainable digital bridge between the rural farmer and the health-conscious urban buyer.

Keywords: Ethical AI, AI Trust Paradox, Organic Food Marketing, Consumer Behavior, Karnataka, MSMEs, Digital Trust Ecosystem, Technology Acceptance.

1. INTRODUCTION

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is growing fast. It includes tools that create content and tools that analyze data, and it has completely changed how companies do research and run their businesses. As Wang (2026) points out, these tools do much more than basic digital work; they open new ways to collect data and connect with customers. Today, AI isn't just replacing human jobs it's becoming a partner that works alongside us a change often called "Enterprise Intelligence 5.0" (Magsi et al., 2026). In Karnataka, which is a leader in India's organic farming, this shift is very clear right now. In the 2025-26 State Budget, the government showed a massive commitment to this sector, which saw a strong 9.1% growth this year

(Government of Karnataka [GoK], 2025). The state has firmly established itself as an organic powerhouse, with approximately 1.2 lakh hectares of land now under certified organic cultivation (Karnataka State Department of Agriculture [KSDA], 2025). This growth is supported by the "Vasudhamruta" program, which aims to improve soil health over the next three years. As the sector moves toward modern stores and ethical branding, cities like Bengaluru and Mysuru are leading the way, especially since India's organic food market is now valued at over \$2.3 billion in 2025 (IMARC Group, 2025).

However, brands still face a tough problem: many shoppers are skeptical and worry about "greenwashing," or fake organic claims. While AI can help by providing clear proof and tracking where food comes from, it also creates an "AI Trust Paradox." Recent research shows that while people trust AI because it seems fair and objective, they actually lose confidence if the AI acts too much like a human or feels too intrusive (Nie et al., 2026). To fix this, Karnataka is even upgrading its "Raitha Kare Kendra" (Farmer Call Centre) with AI technology to give both farmers and shoppers reliable, real-time information.

This study looks at how organic brands in Karnataka can handle these new challenges by combining strong leadership with clear ethical rules (Magsi et al., 2026 Joshi, 2025). By looking at districts like Hassan, Tumkur, and Chamarajanagara, the research explores how businesses can move away from simple promises and toward a transparent, honest system. This approach respects local differences while building the kind of trust that keeps customers coming back.

1.1 BACKGROUND OF ORGANIC FARMING IN KARNATAKA

Karnataka has become a leader in India's organic movement by moving away from chemical farming and toward natural, healthy agriculture. At first, the focus was just on growing the food, but today it has turned into a professional market with organized stores and trusted brands. The success of modern retailers who sell both online and in person shows that people really want clean, ethically sourced food (B.A. & Guruprasad, 2025). This change proves that being "organic" in Karnataka is now just as much about how the food is sold and presented as it is about how it is grown. The demand for these organic products is mostly centered in big economic hubs. People in different regions view ethical brands differently, with major districts like Bengaluru, Mysuru, Hassan, Tumkur, and Chamarajanagara becoming the main markets (Ramesh, 2022). In fact, current reports show that over 30% of all organic farming in Karnataka is concentrated right in the Old Mysuru region, specifically in districts like Mysuru, Chamarajanagara, and Tumkur (KSDA, 2025). Because shoppers in these areas are more aware and have easy access to organic stores, these cities are the perfect places to test new tools like Artificial Intelligence. In the end, Karnataka's organic sector is doing two things at once: keeping traditional farming alive in rural areas while using high-tech tools to build trustworthy brands in the cities. As the organic sector continues to grow, city shoppers are starting to expect digital proof and real-time monitoring. This means brands can no longer rely on simple labels alone; they must provide interactive proof that connects the customer directly to the farm. By using AI to bridge this gap, businesses can create a "digital story" for every product, making the entire journey from the soil to the shelf completely visible.

This level of transparency is key to overcoming the deep doubts that often exist in new markets. Furthermore, as technology becomes easier to use, even smaller producers in districts like Mandya and Chamarajanagara can get ahead by showing their authentic farming methods to the whole world. Ultimately, this high-tech approach doesn't replace the human side of farming it actually makes it stronger. It ensures that the hard work of rural farmers is

recognized and rewarded by health-conscious city buyers. This mix of tradition and technology is what will define the future of Karnataka's agricultural economy.

1.2 The Marketing Challenge

Despite the steady growth in Karnataka's organic sector, businesses still face a difficult road when trying to use AI to build real trust. One of the biggest hurdles is the strong doubts consumers feel; they are often price-sensitive and constantly worry about "greenwashing" or fake organic claims. Recent market research indicates that up to 71% of Indian consumers have encountered misleading green claims, while only 29% fully trust corporate sustainability communications (YouGov, 2023; ResearchGate, 2026). Because of this, brands have to work much harder to be transparent rather than just making shiny environmental promises (Ramesh, 2022; Sharma, 2025). Interestingly, bringing AI into the mix adds a strange psychological layer that researchers call the "AI Trust paradox." For example, if an AI agent sounds too much like a human, it can actually make people trust the brand less and lower their desire to buy (Nie et al., 2026). There is also a "trust paradox" where being too loud about using AI in branding can sometimes turn people away from high-involvement products like organic food, even if the tech actually makes the service better (Islam et al., 2026). These technological hurdles are made worse by very real fears about privacy and the "secret" way AI algorithms make decisions (Joshi, 2025; Oluwafemi et al., 2021). To really succeed, brands have to find a careful balance between smart marketing and strict ethical standards that respect consumer rights. Finally, Karnataka's own regional diversity makes things even more complex. Since ethical awareness is mostly concentrated in urban hubs like Bengaluru, brands struggle to create one single marketing strategy that works for the entire state's varied demographic landscape (Ramesh, 2022).

This challenge is further complicated by the diverse literacy and digital comfort levels found across Karnataka's rural and urban divide. While a tech-savvy shopper in Bengaluru might demand deep data, a consumer in a smaller town might view high-tech labels as a sign of unnecessary industrialization rather than purity. This creates a secondary marketing challenge how to use AI to prove authenticity without making the product feel 'artificial' or disconnected from the soil. Additionally, as more brands enter the market, the noise of competing AI claims can lead to 'information overload,' causing consumers to revert back to traditional, unverified local sources out of habit. To overcome this, marketing strategies must move beyond technical jargon and focus on cultural resonance. Ultimately, the challenge lies in making ethical AI invisible but its benefits undeniable, ensuring that technology serves as a bridge rather than a barrier between the farmer's integrity and the consumer's health

1.3 THE ROLE OF AI AND ETHICS

In the world of modern marketing, Artificial Intelligence (AI) plays two very different but important roles. On one hand, it is a powerful tool for building honest and authentic brands. By tracking complex supply chains and automatically creating reports on sustainability, AI helps businesses prove their claims and fight against "greenwashing." Recent nationwide surveys in early 2026 show that 68% of Indian online shoppers actually want to use AI to verify the authenticity of products and sellers (Fortune India, 2026). This technology isn't just for giant corporations; even small and medium-sized businesses (MSMEs) can use AI to strengthen their branding and build long-term loyalty. This is significant because MSMEs now contribute approximately 31.1% to India's GDP and are being encouraged by the India AI Mission (2026) to adopt these tools for better market competitiveness. Interestingly, some studies show that shoppers trust product information more when it comes from an AI rather than a human because they feel technology is more objective and fair (Nie et al., 2026; Reji et

al., 2025). In fact, over 60% of Indian AI users now trust AI recommendations as much as, or more than, traditional human expert sources (Kearney, 2026).

However, there is another side to AI that requires very careful ethical management. If not handled correctly, it can destroy the very trust it is trying to build. Any marketing strategy that uses personal data must be balanced with strict ethical rules. Data from 2026 reveals that 81% of users feel the risks of companies collecting their data are greater than the benefits, and 48% have stopped shopping with a company due to privacy worries (ElectroIQ, 2026). Without honesty and a focus on keeping data safe, businesses face serious risks like privacy scares or a general fear of "creepy," over-automated marketing (Joshi, 2025). To avoid these risks, organizations must move beyond theory and practice the MANAV vision a human-centric AI framework focused on Accountability, Accessibility, and Verifiable transparency.

Furthermore, the true power of ethical AI lies in its ability to empower the consumer, turning them from passive buyers into active participants who can verify every claim. When a brand is brave enough to open its data to the public, it signals a level of confidence that traditional marketing simply cannot match. This shift is particularly important for local communities in Karnataka, where the relationship between the farmer and the buyer has always been based on mutual respect. By digitizing this respect through ethical AI, we are simply giving it a modern, indestructible foundation. Ultimately, the goal is to ensure that while algorithms work behind the scenes, the focus remains squarely on the well-being and privacy of the individual. In this way, technology becomes a guardian of authenticity, ensuring that the "organic" label remains a symbol of purity that both the producer and the consumer can believe in.

1.4 SCOPE OF THE STUDY

This study looks at how ethical AI, customer trust, and organic branding work together in Karnataka's evolving market. While the research covers the entire state, it focuses on districts like Bengaluru, Mysuru, Hassan, Mandya, Tumkur, and Chamarajanagara because they offer a perfect mix of urban and rural shoppers. As of 2026, Karnataka remains an organic leader with about 1.2 lakh hectares of certified land. We are specifically exploring how AI tools like QR codes that track food origins and automated sustainability reports are cleaning up the industry by replacing vague marketing talk with solid, verifiable facts.

A big part of this work is about understanding the human side what actually makes a person trust a digital brand enough to buy from it? This is crucial because, while technology makes shopping easier, nearly 71% of people are still worried about their data privacy. We also look at how local languages and cultural identity can make high-tech tools feel more familiar and less "robotic". Finally, we've set clear boundaries: we aren't looking at the science of soil or farming; we are strictly focused on the marketing side. With India's organic market hitting a \$2.3 billion valuation in 2025 and growing at 19% annually, this research provides a practical guide for both small farmers and big stores to build a more honest and transparent marketplace in Karnataka

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review basically shows that for AI to work in Karnataka's organic shops, it needs to be more than just "smart" it has to be honest. Using ideas like the Technology Acceptance Model, researchers found that while people like how AI gives them clear facts, they only truly buy in if they feel the system has integrity and isn't just a fancy marketing trick (Nie et al., 2026). Scholars like Oluwafemi (2021) and Waruwu (2023) have tracked how this has changed over the years, showing that even small local businesses can now use AI to

prove their food is real, helping them stay competitive. However, there is a tricky "AI Trust Paradox" found by Islam (2026) and Komal (2025) shoppers actually get suspicious if an AI sounds too much like a human or if the branding is too "in your face," which can actually make them less likely to buy.

To fix this, the research suggests creating a Digital Trust Ecosystem that mixes high-tech proof with a local touch. This means instead of a "one-size-fits-all" plan, brands should follow the lead of experts like Ramesh (2022) and B.A. & Guruprasad (2025) by using local languages and traditional values to make the technology feel familiar. By looking at other countries like Brazil and Indonesia, we see that trust is built when tech is used to protect privacy and verify the truth, rather than just to sell more products. Ultimately, this review highlights a big opportunity by using a human-centered approach (like the MANAV framework), Karnataka's organic sector can stop just making promises and start providing the digital proof that builds real, long-term loyalty between farmers and families.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a descriptive research design based entirely on secondary data. Instead of conducting new surveys or interviews, the research involves collecting and analyzing existing information from academic journals, government reports, and market studies published between 2021 and 2026. The analysis specifically focuses on data regarding organic farming in Karnataka and global trends in AI ethics. By reviewing these documents, the study identifies the main challenges businesses face and how consumer trust changes when AI is used in branding. This method allows for a deep look into the "AI trust paradox" by comparing findings from different researchers to create a clear picture of Karnataka's organic market today.

4. OBJECTIVES

Main Objective:

·To find out how honest AI builds customer trust and changes organic food sales in Karnataka.

Specific Objectives:

- 1.To see if buyers trust organic brands more when AI does the marketing instead of humans.
- 2.To understand how city and town buyers in Karnataka feel about brands using AI.
- 3.To learn what stops businesses from using AI to sell their organic products.
- 4.To check if using AI to show eco-friendly practices makes customers more loyal.
- 5.To create a simple guide for businesses to use AI honestly and protect privacy.
- 6.To see how small businesses in Karnataka are using AI to change their sales methods.

5. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The research findings suggest that ethical AI is fundamentally changing Karnataka's organic market by replacing vague marketing claims with verifiable, data-backed integrity. Analysis of recent studies shows that consumers in urban hubs like Bengaluru generally trust information provided by AI more than human agents, primarily because they perceive technology as more objective and honest. However, a significant "trust paradox" exists: making AI appear too human or being too overt about its use can backfire, especially for high-stake products like organic food, leading to increased consumer suspicion. While the transition to AI-driven branding helps small businesses (MSMEs) compete with larger

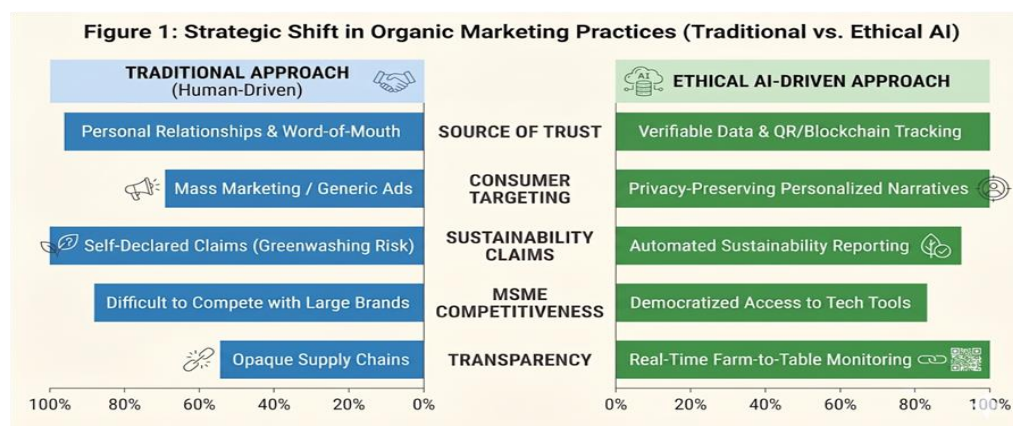
retailers by proving authenticity through QR codes and real-time tracking, major hurdles such as deep-rooted greenwashing skepticism, high price sensitivity, and data privacy concerns remain. Ultimately, while the shift from traditional word-of-mouth to high-tech transparency is effective, success in Karnataka requires a localized approach that respects the different digital comfort levels and cultural nuances found across the state's diverse districts.

Table 1: Comparative Framework of Traditional vs. AI-Driven Marketing Practices

Strategic Metric	Traditional Approach (Human-Driven)	Ethical AI-Driven Approach (Transformed)	Primary Value Added
Source of Trust	Personal Relationships & Word-of-Mouth	Verifiable Data & QR/Blockchain Tracking	Objectivity
Consumer Targeting	Mass Marketing / Generic Advertisements	Privacy-Preserving Personalized Narratives	Relevance
Sustainability Claims	Self-Declared Claims (Greenwashing Risk)	Automated Sustainability Reporting	Verification
MSME Competitiveness	Difficult to Compete with Large Retailers	Democratized Access to Tech Tools	Market Equity
Transparency	Opaque and Segmented Supply Chains	Real-Time Farm-to-Table Monitoring	Authenticity

Note. Data synthesized from Waruwu et al., 2023; Sharma, 2025; and Reji et al., 2025

The data presented in Table 1 highlights a fundamental shift in how organic brands in Karnataka are moving from old-school, relationship-based marketing to a more high-tech, data-driven approach. Essentially, we are seeing a move away from "taking someone's word for it" toward "seeing the proof for yourself." Instead of just relying on personal connections or generic ads that often feel like "green washing," ethical AI allows brands to use tools like QR codes and block chain to provide real-time evidence of where their food comes from. What's really interesting is how this levels the playing field for smaller businesses (MSMEs); it gives them the same sophisticated transparency tools as big retailers, allowing them to compete on honesty rather than just big advertising budgets. By focusing on privacy and verifiable facts, this transformation turns organic marketing from a series of claims into a transparent, trustworthy system that respects the consumer's intelligence.



The data in Figure 1 essentially captures the "big shift" currently happening in Karnataka's organic market, moving away from a system based on "taking someone's word for it" to one rooted in digital proof. By contrasting the two approaches, the chart shows that trust is being redefined; instead of

relying on generic ads or local relationships that can sometimes feel vague or even misleading, ethical AI allows brands to use tools like block chain and QR codes to offer real-time, verifiable evidence of authenticity. This transformation is a game-changer for smaller businesses (MSMEs), as it proves that they don't need massive advertising budgets to compete with big names they just need transparency. Ultimately, the figure demonstrates that by replacing opaque supply chains with open, privacy-focused data, organic brands can finally move past the skepticism of "green washing" and build the kind of genuine consumer loyalty that lasts.

Table 2: Regional AI Adoption Framework – Karnataka’s Organic Sector

Market Segment	Primary Districts	AI Strategy & Implementation	Trust Building Mechanism	Consumer Profile
High-Tech Urban Hubs	Bengaluru	Omnichannel AI: Advanced tracking, automated sustainability reports, and personalized digital narratives.	Data Objectivity: Focus on precision, privacy, and verifiable carbon footprint data.	Tech-savvy, high awareness, high data privacy concern.
Heritage & Education Hubs	Mysuru, Hassan	Interactive Transparency: QR-based digital storytelling that connects heritage with modern health standards.	Supply Chain Integrity: Verification of GI (Geographical Indication) tags and origin stories.	Health-conscious, values tradition, moderate tech-comfort.
Emerging Organic Clusters	Mandya (Pandavapura)	Soil-to-Shelf Proof: AI tools focusing on soil health logs and zero-chemical certification for jaggery and cereals.	Purity Verification: Proving the shift from chemical to natural farming through real-time data.	Health-sensitive, recovering trust in regional produce.
Traditional Farming Belts	Tumkur, Chamarajanagara	Localized MSME Support: Simple, Kannada-first AI interfaces and localized digital tracking for small producers.	Cultural Resonance: Using digital proof to reinforce traditional, ethical farming reputations.	Value-driven, low-to-moderate digital literacy.

Note. Conceptual framework synthesized from secondary literature analysis (Ramesh, 2022; B.A. & Guruprasad, 2025; KSDA, 2025; and recent 2026 regional policy updates).

Table 2 basically shows that trust doesn't look the same everywhere in Karnataka, so AI shouldn't either. It breaks the state into four "trust zones": in Bengaluru, AI needs to act like a strict auditor that provides hard facts and high privacy for tech-savvy shoppers; in Mysuru and Hassan, it works like a storyteller that connects modern health data with local heritage. In Mandya, the focus shifts to being a "health guardian" that uses digital logs to prove the soil is finally healing from chemicals, while in Chamarajanagara and Tumkur, it acts as a simple bridge that uses the Kannada language to help small farmers prove their honesty. By

matching the technology to the local culture of each district, businesses can make sure AI feels like a helpful, trusted assistant rather than something confusing or "creepy."

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the study of Karnataka's organic market and the challenges faced by local businesses, I propose the following practical recommendations:

1. **Move from "Promises" to "Proof":** Organic brands should stop relying on simple labels and start using technology like QR codes. If a consumer can scan a product and see exactly which farm it came from in Karnataka, their trust will increase instantly. This shift ensures that transparency becomes a physical part of the product rather than just a marketing slogan. Providing this level of detail helps eliminate the fear of "greenwashing" and empowers the consumer to make informed, healthy choices.
2. **Support Small Farmers (MSMEs):** Technology should be made affordable for small-scale organic producers. Government and tech providers should create simple AI tools that help small farmers show their authenticity without spending a lot of money on big marketing ads. By lowering the entry barrier for high-tech tools, we can ensure that local farmers are not left behind by large corporate retailers. This support will allow the unique, high-quality produce of Karnataka's rural districts to reach a wider, more appreciative audience.
3. **Respect Regional Differences:** Marketing shouldn't be the same for everyone. Brands should use advanced digital marketing in cities like Bengaluru, but in smaller towns, they should focus on combining local language and traditional values with digital proof. Understanding the cultural nuances of each district allows for a more "human" connection between the brand and the buyer. This balanced approach ensures that technology feels like a helpful assistant rather than a confusing or intrusive stranger.
4. **Prioritize Honesty and Privacy:** When using AI to track customer data, brands must be very honest about how they use that information. Protecting the privacy of the consumer is the only way to build a long-term relationship in the organic sector. Businesses should clearly explain why they are collecting data and how it benefits the shopper's experience. When a customer feels safe and respected, their loyalty to the brand grows, creating a sustainable foundation for the business.
5. **Focus on Awareness Programs:** There is a need for more programs that teach both farmers and consumers about the benefits of "Ethical AI." When people understand that technology is there to protect them from fake products (green washing), they will accept it more easily. These programs should be conducted in local languages to ensure that the message of digital trust reaches every corner of the state. Educating the community builds a shared sense of responsibility for maintaining the integrity of the organic movement.

LIMITATIONS

Every research study has its own boundaries. This work relies on secondary data like existing reports and journals instead of new surveys, so the results depend on the quality of those original sources. Since Artificial Intelligence moves very fast, the trends discussed are based on what was known up to early 2026 and may change as technology evolves. Also, most available information focuses on cities like Bengaluru, which might not fully show the views

of people in rural areas. The study is strictly about marketing and trust, without looking into the actual science or methods of organic farming.

8.CONCLUSION

Ultimately, the future of organic food in Karnataka lies in building a "digital bridge" of honesty where ethical AI provides verifiable proof like QR codes to solve the "trust paradox" and empower small farmers. For our diverse state, success means using high-tech tools to protect privacy while keeping the message rooted in local languages and traditions to ensure the "organic" label remains a symbol of true purity. Moving forward, future research should empirically validate this Regional AI Adoption Framework and Digital Trust Ecosystem across emerging markets to further refine how cultural nuances influence technology acceptance and inclusive agricultural growth.

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