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Understanding Consumer Buying Behavior and Fostering Awareness for Improved Purchasing Decisions with Regards to Food Products

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Abstract

Good nutrition begins with smart choices in the grocery store. Buying behaviour and practices of consumer therefore highly influences the market listing of the products. Thus, this research aims to assess the existing buying behaviour of consumers and to create awareness for better buying practices. The overall response regarding buying practices was found to be positive. However, it was observed that there is lack of awareness and understanding with respect to

importance of food labels. After imparting knowledge to the selected sample regarding the importance of food labels, FSSAI mark and online complaint portal; they responded that they will preferably buy foods products with complete labelling. Most of them were found to be aware about reading food labels and identify healthy food options using food labels.

Keywords: Buying Behaviour, Buying Practices, Consumer, Food Labels, Food Products

Introduction

The word consumer emerged from a Latin word “consumens” which means to buy products and services for direct use (Hanus, 2016)^[1]. The study of individuals, groups or organizations and the processes they use to opt for services and its impacts on consumer and society is known as consumer behavior. Buying behaviour is a decision making process and acts of people involved in buying and using products (Kodali & Telaprolu, 2018)^[2].

In 2023, analysts expect there to be 218.8 million digital buyers there. This marks a 1.9% annual increase from the previous year. The number of people shopping online in the US is set to continue growing. By 2026, this figure is set to hit 230.6 million (Yadav *et al.*, 2024)^[3].

Consumer buying decision consists of five steps. These are problem identification, look for information, evaluation of alternatives, purchase decision, and post-purchase behaviour (Qazzafi, 2019)^[4].

It is important to fulfil the needs and desire of consumer (Gupta & Jain, 2014)^[5]. Now-a-days, there are rapid changes in the market. It is not easy to match customer demands (Rungsrisawat *et al.*, 2019)^[6].

Staff behavior and shopping environment highly influences the customer satisfaction and experience (Terblanche, 2018)^[7]. Product price, quality, packaging and brand are the critical factors which affects purchase decision (Jayasankaraprasad & Sakshi, 2017)^[8].

According to a study conducted by Rishi & Singh, (2012) physical factors like discounts, quality, brands, display and visual appearance, social factors include staff behavior and temporal factors (store location and area) influence upon the number of visits and amount spent in the supermarket^[9].

Significance of the Study

With the advancement in science and technology, globalization, industrialization; more and more people are working in private sector. On an average people are working for 10-12 hrs per day and most of the time they are in front of the screen, which is making them to lead a physically inactive life. Sedentary lifestyle has increased the prevalence of non-communicable diseases like cancer, diabetes, hypertension, obesity, etc. As both the partners are working in order to lead a better lifestyle and trend of nuclear families is emerging, so the couple have less time to spend in the kitchen. Time constraint has increased the demand of ready-to-eat and semi-processed foods. They have started ordering semi-processed food items through online mode since they

do not have time to go to store for purchasing. Also, because of the existing situation home-made food items are highly preferred to prevent the risk of covid-19 infection. For this, they have to buy semi-processed foods however, preference vary from people to people. Considering the above mentioned points this study was planned to assess the existing buying behaviour of consumers and to create awareness for better buying practices.

Methodology

The present study was conducted in the Mansarovar area of Jaipur, Rajasthan. A total of 100 consumers in the age group of 31-50 years were selected by random sampling method. The data was collected through google forms. The study was conducted in three phases. In phase I, data was collected to assess the existing buying behaviour of consumers using a structured questionnaire which was split into three parts - Section A, Section B and Section C. In phase II of the study, knowledge was imparted through infographics and power point presentation regarding better buying practices and food labels and in phase III, data was collected to assess the impact of imparted knowledge.

Results and Discussion

A) Data collected to assess the buying behaviour of consumers and their general profile

A questionnaire comprising of three sections was shared with all selected members. It consisted of questions related to general information, buying behaviour and food labels. They were all asked to read that questionnaire carefully and fill the suitable answers. After analysing all the 100 responses, it was observed that -

- In the present study, 100 adult males and females in equal proportion have participated. Among them, 52% fall in the age category of 41-50 yrs. whereas 48% were in the age category of 31-40 yrs.
- When the data was collected regarding their professional background, it was found that out of 50% males, 34% were engaged in business and 16% were engaged in service. Among females, 40% were home-makers while 10% were doing business.
- It was reported that 56% were living in joint family and 44% had nuclear families.
- Annual income of 18% people was found to be more than 5 lakhs per year, 56% had yearly income in the range of 2-5 lakhs per year whereas 26% of them had annual income of less than 2 lakhs per year.
- Eighty percent of sample was married while 20% of them were unmarried.
- Data related to educational qualification indicated that 48% of samples were graduate, 38% were found to be post-graduate, 8% have completed senior secondary education whereas 6% were only tenth pass.
- In the present study, it was found that mode of purchasing preferred by 78% sample was offline while 22% opted for online buying. A study by Hanus (2016) also concluded that consumers were happy with online purchasing platforms^[1].
- Out of the total subjects who preferred to purchase offline, 60% go to local nearby market, 22% visit malls or supermarkets while 20% buy food items from wholesaler.
- All the selected subjects who opted for offline purchasing, follow safety measures to prevent

themselves from covid-19 infection. As a measure of precaution, 92% wear mask, 66% carried seventy percent alcohol based sanitizer, 38% avoided touching common touch points, 30% of them preferred selecting less crowded places and 14% used cashless mode of payment to reduce the risk of infection. Also, a study done by Sehgal *et al.*, (2021) highlighted the challenges faced by consumers and abrupt changes in shopping practices due to pandemic^[10].

- In the recent study, it was reported that reasons for online purchasing were home delivery as responded by 68% of the sample and 44% loved discount offers given by companies to promote the sale of their products. Others preferred online shopping due to convenience (34%), variety available (28%), cash backs (14%) and gift vouchers (18%). A study conducted by Rungsrisawat *et al.*, (2019) stated that online buying behavior is affected by various offers given by e-commerce websites^[6].
- Forty-eight percent of the selected samples order grocery from grofers, 16% used jio mart, 10% opted for big basket, 2% used amazon while remaining 24% have never used online platform for buying grocery.
- Sixty-eight percent people do not face any difficulty while online purchasing whereas 32% have faced difficulties while ordering food items through online mode.
- In the present study, it was observed that 34% people were not familiar with online searching of the required food items, 14% hesitated to share credit/debit card information while doing online payment, 8% faced low or poor internet connectivity whereas 58% don't face any difficulty while ordering food items on online mode. Hanus (2016) study showed that people still feel hesitate to share their card details and personal information on online platforms^[1].
- There are number of factors which influence the buying behaviour of people like brand, discount offers, health claims, packaging and advertisements. Consumer behaviour is a multifaceted phenomenon influenced by psychological, social, cultural, and economic factors. Successful marketing strategies hinge on understanding these influences and crafting messages and products that resonate with consumer needs and preferences (Shaw, 2024)^[11].
- Gupta & Jain (2018) studied that behavior of consumer is influenced by marketing techniques^[5]. Gidlof *et al.*, (2017) in his study stated that visual attention is an important predictor while shopping. In this study, it was seen that 72% people get influenced by discount offers, 36% preferred buying branded items, 30% believed in health claims projected by the companies, 6% get attracted by visual appearance while 4% get influenced by advertisements displayed in televisions^[12].
- When asked about the purchase of packaged food items, it was found that 90% people buy biscuits, *papads*, jams, jellies in packed form, 82% subjects buy packed ghee and oil, 56% of them buy packed cereals and pulses, 52% purchased packed spices and condiments, 38% buy packed milk and 22% of them purchase milk products in packed form as well.
- The average expense per month on grocery was reported to be below Rs 5000 by 68% sample, 5000-

- 10,000 Rs (24%) and only 8% of them spend above 10,000 Rs on grocery items.
- Eighty-two percent of selected sample rarely purchase frozen or canned foods and 14% buy it monthly. However, 4% of them procured them through online shopping once a week.
 - The frequency of purchasing non-perishable foods was once a month for 50% people, 22% buy it more than one month, 18% buy it fortnightly while 10% of them purchase it once every week.
 - For perishable food items, 60% people purchase it every week, 24% buy twice a week, 10% buy on daily basis and only 6% buy once in two weeks.
 - Forty-four percent of them felt that there was increase in frequency of online buying of food items during lockdown period while for 46% people it remained the same. However, for 10% sample it was decreased.
 - Eighty-four percent samples also observed change in eating behaviour after covid'19 pandemic whereas for 16% people there was no change in their eating behaviour.
 - It was reported that from the total sample, 96% people were concerned about their health.
 - Eighty-six percent people were interested in buying immune booster foods while 14% were not interested.
 - Majority (86%) of sample like to buy fresh fruits and vegetables for boosting immunity, 46% like to consume home-made *khadas* as immunity booster; 6%, 4% and 2% go for vitamin pills, herbal supplements and synthetic supplements respectively for boosting the immunity.
 - Frequency of dining out before covid'19 pandemic among sample was found to be as follows: Monthly (32%), fortnightly (24%), rarely (18%), once a week (12%), sometimes (4%), never (4%), once in two months (2%) and more than two months (2%).
 - After covid'19, it was found that frequency of dining out was same as before for 60% sample. For others, changes were observed as: Monthly (28%), fortnightly (8%), twice a week (2%) and once a week (2%).
 - Frequency of consumption of home-made foods after covid 19 pandemic has increased among 90% of the households.
 - The frequency of buying cooked food items from outside after covid was found to be as follows: Monthly (40%), sometimes (18%), once a week (12%), fortnightly (10%), rarely (14%) and never (4%).
 - It was also seen that 66% people opted for online delivery of cooked meals whereas 34% avoid online buying the cooked food.
 - Eighty-four percent of the selected sample preferred to buy packaged food items with complete labelling whereas 16% people sometimes purchase packed food items with complete labelling.
 - Food labels were found to be useful by 82% sample while 18% found it useful sometimes.
 - As a layman, 58% people reported that they understand the importance of food labels, 36% do not understand it exactly whereas 6% of the sample responded that they do not know its importance at all. A study by Jain, Gomathi & Kar (2018) also stated that people are aware about food labels but they are facing difficulty in interpretation^[13].
 - Sixty-two percent people always read food labels, 20% read it usually, 14% read it sometimes whereas 4% go through it rarely.
 - While collecting the data for information that is usually seen by people on food labels, following responses were recorded – MRP and expiry date (90%), vegetarian and non-vegetarian mark (62%), brand name (54%), net weight (52%), quality mark (46%), health claim (30%), nutritional content (20%), ingredients (18%) and cooking instructions (14%). A study by Kaur *et al.*, (2016) indicated satisfactory level of awareness related to food labels of packaged items. Most of the people see brand, M.R.P, expiry and manufacturing date of the food products^[14]. Kodali & Telaprolu (2018) in a study stated that people use food labels to compare brands. However, for those who read nutritional information positively influences their behavior towards the food item^[2].
 - Thirty-two percent people agreed that they avoid reading food labels due to brand loyalty whereas 44% did not agree to it. However, 24% people sometimes avoid reading food labels due to brand loyalty.
 - Sixty-two percent sample responded that they avoid reading food labels due to lack of time, 44% get confused with too much information displayed on the label, for 32% of the sample, font size is too small for them to read, 10% of them do not understand the information mentioned whereas for 8% of the respondents, information mentioned on the labels is useless.

B) Data collected to see the impact of imparted knowledge

Based on the responses of the selected sample, teaching materials in form of infographic and power point presentation were designed to create the awareness and convey right information to the respondents. They were given 10 days to carefully read and understand the shared material. Later, post test was conducted by sharing another questionnaire with them to assess the impact of imparted knowledge. Following are the key points of post analysis-

- All the respondents understand the importance of food labels and will prefer to purchase foods with complete labelling.
- All the respondents were aware of the FSSAI mark and online portal through which they can register complaint related to faulty/spoiled food products.
- It was reported that 88% people know that MRP and Batch number are not the part of nutrition fact panel.
- Eighty percent people would see serving size while buying ready-to-eat foods, 14% would see all the mentioned options whereas 6% people preferred to see the serving size of frozen foods only.
- Majority (98%) of the subjects were aware of the fact that trans fats are not good for health while 2% of them preferred buying saturated fats.
- Ninety-two percent of the sample agreed that oats and muesli were rich in fibre, 6% opted for breads and biscuits and 2% choose refined flour.
- It was observed that 96% people would see the sodium content on food packets while remaining 4% do not.
- Eighty-two percent choose the right amount of recommended salt intake which is five grams per day.

However, 12% reported ten grams consumption per day.

Summary and Conclusion

It can be concluded from the present study that majority of the respondents preferred offline purchasing. In case of online buying, some of them were not familiar with the online searching of items, others have low internet speed and few of them hesitate to share the credit/debit card information during payments. It was observed that most of the online shoppers were attracted by home delivery facility. The most contributing factor which influences buying behaviour of consumers was discount offers. It was reported that the frequency of buying perishables and non-perishable food items was different among the sample but they were satisfied with the frequency of purchase and their need. As per the responses it can be concluded that the consumption of home-cooked foods has increased during covid'19 pandemic. However, the overall response regarding buying practices was found to be positive but there was lack of awareness and understanding with respect to importance of food labels.

Keeping in mind all the above listed points, teaching materials in the form of infographic and power point presentation were designed in order to create awareness and communicate right information to the selected sample. Infographic consists of information related to better buying practices while power point presentation has the detailed account of how to read food labels and its applications in daily life.

After imparting knowledge to selected sample, it was observed that, all the respondents understood the importance of food labels, about FSSAI mark and online complaint portal. Finally, they responded that they will prefer to buy food items with complete labelling and will read the labels carefully and identify healthy food options while purchasing.

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