

FACTORS INFLUENCING THE SELECTION PATTERN OF MULTI FORMAT FOOD ITEMS AMONG UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY IN MALABE, SRI LANKA

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ABSTRACT

The message conveyed by various types of packaging and the formats considered to have a major role in sales of food. This study was carried to investigate the factors influencing the selection pattern of multi format food items among university community. A descriptive cross sectional study with a sample size of 150 cases was conducted in selected universities in Malabe suburb, Sri Lanka using interview based questionnaire. The results revealed that demographic factors have no significant relationship with product sales while packaging on the other hand showed a major influence on customer's decisions. Results further indicated no significant relationship between age, income level, education level and the occupation with the factors which are influenced for the selection of multi format food items. The major influencing factors in selecting multi format food items found to be cost, availability, type of package, packaging material and the quality of the food item.

Keywords: Multi format food items, Selection pattern, University community

1. INTRODUCTION

Packed food items are becoming popular among modern customers all over the world. Hence the different styles of packaging play a major role in the marketing of multi-format food items [1].

The message conveyed by various types of packaging and the formats have proven to play a large role in sales. Type of package determines hundreds of thousands of rupees spent every year for which manufacturers or distributors should give careful consideration to as they strive to cut or maintain costs while preserving the quality of products.

The new generation of consumers is looking for something more, better and different and are willing to pay more for the experience offered. However, today's hard economy has forced everyone to be more cautious. While they're willing to pay more for a great experience, their hard-earned money is distributed with care. [2,3]

It is essential to evaluate packaging and updating it to match product's strength to reach target segment in food marketing. Since today's marketplace is saturated, emotions permeate more buying decisions than ever. Hence manufacturers' initiatives, product messaging and packaging design helps establish, communicate and reinforce individual's place in the market place. Everything from the size to the finish of packaging sends a message that intentionally or unintentionally affects buying decisions of customers [1].

Therefore the primary objective of this study was

to investigate the factors influencing the selection pattern of multi format food items among university community. This will give the industry a better understanding about the factors that influence the public's decisions and further improve customer satisfaction of the product.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Procedure for Analysis

Four universities (SAITM, SLIIT, CINEC & HORIZON) located in Malabe suburb, Sri Lanka were involved in this study having mixed population of students, lecturers, supporting staff and parents.

A descriptive cross sectional study was conducted to gather data. The research sample consisted of 150 individuals excluding students of under 18. A structured questionnaire was used as data gathering tool. An interviewer based questionnaire was carried out by researchers and the participants were evaluated according to their competent language skills, providing further clarifications and explanations where needed. The questionnaire included a list of predetermined answers from which the participants were allowed to select their preference. The survey questionnaire included Demographic information such as gender, age, education level, monthly income level, occupation and seven previously selected multi format food items and the factors that would influence the person's decision in the products they purchase.

The questionnaire was validated by conducting a pilot study of 6 samples in both Sinhala and English languages prior to the survey.

Data gathered were analyzed by using the Statistical Package Social Sciences (SPSS). Descriptive statistical parameters were used for all variables (frequency, cross tabulations, Chi-square etc.).

3. RESULTS

Out of 150 only 140 of analyzable questionnaires were obtained. Ten questionnaires were excluded as respondents refused to provide certain information.

The demographic information of the survey was not shown in the results and major emphasis was given to find factors that impact people's food choices. The results present the relation between the packaging type and the people's preference for selecting different multi format food items.

3.1. Factors influencing the selection of different food items

Tea:

Among respondents majority prefers to buy loose leaf (41.35%) where as 39.85% preferred to buy tea bags and only 18.80% preferred to select tea leaves in metal or plastic cans. Table 1 showed the reasons for selecting loose tea leaves and reasons behind the less preference for tea bags and packed leaves in metal or plastic cans.

This result shows that most of the people like loose leaf tea because of its high quality at a lower price

Table 1: Factors influencing the selection of tea leaves

Type of product	Parameter	(%)
Loose tea	High quality at a low price	34.8
	Tend to be of high quality	32.6
	Young & fresh leaves	17.4
	Superior flavor & aroma	13
	Upscale appearance	2.2
Tea bags	Tea bag material interfere with tea brewing	34
	Cannot see the state of the leaves due to bag material	31.9
	Lose their freshness too quickly	14.9
	Loose more nutrients in the bag due to tea bags	10.6
	absorbing some catechins	8.5

	Lack of variety	
Metal/plastic cans	Expensive	51.7
	Added Weight	32.7
	Less availability	16.3

and the most of them reject tea bags because they are not confident or aware about the tea bag material. It indicates that if the manufactures can assure the quality of the tea bag material, people will tend towards buying tea bags. The main reason for rejecting metal/plastic tin is the cost.

Fruits:

The buying behavior of fruits is shown in Figure 1.

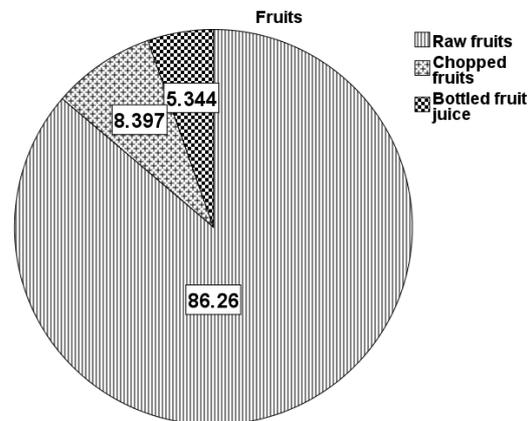


Figure 1: Preference of buying fruits.

Results indicated that majority of people preferred to buy fresh fruits compared to chopped fruits or bottled fruit juices. The major influencing factors for selecting fresh fruits includes: High level of nutrients (52.5%); No additives (24.8%); easily available (18.8%); Cheap (3%). Results revealed that people always think about the nutrition level of fruits and their freshness according to the reasons not selecting chopped fruits such as: Doubts on freshness (59.4%); Can contain preservatives (32.7%); Little bit expensive (6.9%). The least preference was shown over the bottled fruit juices. The governing factors for least preference were: Preservatives, dyes & sweeteners are added (69.7%); Harmful chemicals in the plastic bottles can seep into the juice (11.1%); Large amount of sugar (10.1%); Less nutritional value (9.1%). Today's customers are more concern about preservatives and additives in the food products as illustrated in the selection of fruits. Therefore it is manufacturers' responsibility to maintain a standard level of freshness in chopped fruits and label it accordingly.

Beverages:

Three types of beverage packages can be seen in the market. They are Cans, Glass bottles and plastic bottles. Among the responded 54.81%

preferred to buy beverages in glass bottles due to following reasons: Non-reactive (48.5%); Transparent, can see the inside content (18.5%); It is strong & rigid (13.6%); Long shelf life (7.6%); Resistant to heat (7.6%); Non permeable, odor from the drink (4.5%). Among the respondents 29.63% and 15.56% were preferred to select beverages packed in plastic bottles and Cans respectively. The reason for less preference for beverages in plastic bottles and Cans are summarized in the Table2.

Table 2: Factors influencing the less selection preferences for beverages packed in plastic bottles and Metallic Cans

Type of package	Parameter	(%)
Plastic bottles	Can react & cause harmful side effects due to chemical reactions when exposed to the sun	67.7
	Difficult to recycle	16.9
	Absorb food colors or smells due to being a porous material	10.8
	Less appealing	10.8
	With time, becomes yellow	4.6
Cans	Cannot see the inside	41.8
	Easily damaged	29.9
	Expensive	14.9
	Unavailability	11.9

The harmful effect of packaging material is the major factor influencing the people not to buy beverages packed in plastic bottles. This indicates the requirement for new initiatives in beverage packaging.

Meat:

Selection behavior of meat products is shown in the Figure 2. According to the results majority of sample population preferred to buy unpacked fresh selected meat cuts. The major reasons influencing consumer decision are: Pre-cleaned meat cuts (28.3%); Provide higher percentage of usable meat cuts (26.7%); Less time to prepare & cook (25%); Cheap (11.7%); Less freezer space (8.3%).

The results indicate less preference for vacuum packed meat and processed or cured meat. Among the respondents, 33.9% declared that they are not confident about the quality of the vacuum packed meat where as 32.2% believed that vacuum packed meat contains additives and preservatives. 18.6% expressed that vacuum packed meat are expensive while 15.3% said that there is no opportunity to judge the quality of the vacuum

packed meat. People do not prefer to buy processed or cured meat. The factors influencing this decision are: Contain additives & preservatives (52.5%); Less natural nutritional value (13.6%); Original taste changes (11.9%); Expensive (8.5%); Less availability (8.5%) and Contain artificial flavors (5.1%).

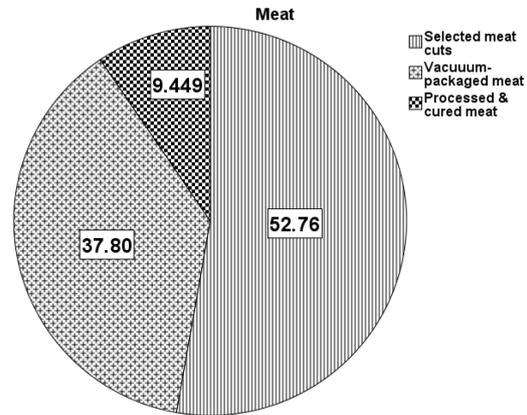


Figure 2: Consumer buying behavior of Meat

Liquid Milk:

Consumption of liquid milk has been increased over the last years in Sri Lanka due to the uncertainty of the quality of dried milk powder. Therefore consumer preferences for fluid milk packages are an important aspect in the marketing process. As shown in the Table 3 people preferred to buy milk packed in glass bottles and less preference was shown over the milk packed in polyethene bags.

Table 3: Consumer preferences for different kind of packages used for liquid milk and underline factors for their decision

Type of milk package and level of preference	Influencing factors for selection/not selection	(%)
Glass bottles 45.86%	Inertness to chemical substances	34.6
	Transparent	32.7
	Strong bottles	21.2
	Water & gas barrier	11.5
Milk cartons 39.85%	Cannot see the content	79.2
	Easily not available	13.2
	Expensive	7.5
Polythene packets 14.29%	Not sure about the quality of plastic used	50.9
	Can be easily adulterated	30.2
	Short shelf life	13.2
	Need to keep at fixed temperature	5.7

Powdered milk:

The results revealed that the 54.81% of the sample population preferred to buy powdered milk packed in plastic bags while 45.19% expressed their preference over the Milk Cans (Tin). The factors influencing to select powdered milk in plastic bags are: Cost is low (48.4%); Easily available 3 (2.8%); Light weight (12.5%); Less storage space required (6.3%). The reasons for comparatively less preference for canned milk powder are: Expensive (52.4%); Corrosion (28.6%); Vulnerability to acids (9.5%); Heavy (6.3%); Cannot see the content (3.2%).

According to the results majority of the people consider about the cost when buying milk powder. If tinned milk can be delivered for a lower price which will be compatible with the price of packed milk, the sales of tinned milk can be increased.

Grains:

Comparative to other food items people preferred to buy packed grains (57.46%). The preference level for unpacked grains was 42.54%. The major influencing factor for selecting packed grains was identified as its cleanliness and standard (68.2%). On the other hand 31.8% preferred to buy packed grains due its easiness in storage and transport. According to our results the reasons for less preference over the unpacked grains are: The chance of being contaminated is very high (59.4%); Doesn't have a standard (40.6%).

According to the results it is clear that when purchasing grains, majority of the people consider about the cleanliness & the quality. Even though 42.54% of people like buying loose grains because they can buy the exact amount needed, a higher percentage of people prefer packed grains. The sales of loose grains can be boosted by assuring the quality of grains and by minimizing the chances of being contaminated.

4. CONCLUSION

The present study was conducted to investigate the influential factors for the selection of multi format food items. This study has shown that

there is no significant relationship between age, income level, education level and the occupation with the factors which are influenced for the selection of multi format food items. Therefore it can be concluded that the major factors influencing the selection of food items are cost, availability, type of package, packaging material and the quality of the food item.

5. REFERENCES

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