

HOW CONSUMER'S BUYING PATTERN, CULTURE, AND SUBCULTURE RESULTS IN INFLUENCING THE PURCHASE DECISION OF URBAN INDIAN HOUSEHOLDS FOR BRANDED EDIBLE OIL

Gaanyesh Kulkarni¹ & Rajesh K. Srivastava²

¹Faculty, Institute for Future Education Entrepreneurship & Leadership, Lonavala, Maharashtra, India

²Head of the Department & Professor, Sydenham Institute of Management Studies, Research and Entrepreneurship Education, Mumbai,
Maharashtra, India

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ABSTRACT

This article throws light on the effects of consumers' buying patterns of edible oil and the demographics on purchase decision of branded edible oil among urban Indian households. Marketers need to concede that they need to understand and analyze consumer buying patterns in order to stay ahead of the competition in order to build a sustainable competitive advantage for their businesses. The objective of this study was to examine the usage pattern of branded edible oil, user preferences in terms of edible oil types, and impact of cultures and subcultures impact on purchase decision of edible oil consumption by urban households, as India being the multicultural country. This study is a descriptive study based on secondary data. Total 80 research papers have been systematically reviewed from various journals, literature referred to books, magazines, and websites. Consumer buying pattern and demographics found to have considerable influence on forming the purchase decision of edible oil of the urban household customers. This study was based on the review of literature pertaining to the consumer behavioral aspects towards consumption pattern, and influence of culture and sub-culture on the purchase decision of edible oil by Indian households. This study will prove to be useful for edible oil marketers in devising appropriate MARCOMM strategies and tactics for creating brand awareness and enhancing the brand image in the Indian FMCG market.

KEYWORDS: *Edible Oil, Purchase Decision, Consumer's Buying Pattern, Urban Indian Households, Cultures & Sub-Cultures*

INTRODUCTION

Indian culture and edible oil scenario

Edible oil has been a crucial part of Indian cooking having generous to modest usage; as the Indian inhabitants prefer profuse to moderate spicy meals and cuisines. Indians have developed diverse food habits, tastes, and preferences due to the impact of many religions, cultures, and subcultures. Geographical regions and religions are essential in the formation of sub-culture. The preference of individuals who live very close to each other can be different. Individuals belonging to different regions have different subculture values, attitudes and social structures of the members of other sub-culture. These

differences, subcultural segmentation of the market activity has made an important variable¹. Although, oil is one of the major commodities consumed in every household kitchen; health consciousness among the metro households has altered its usage by the edible oil type, namely, refined or filtered (kachi ghani) and the number of nutrients the edible oil encompasses². With advent of new innovations, changes in taste likes and dislikes related to food items; consumers' behavior keeps on changing frequently as the edible oil is an important element household cooking³. In a highly fragmented Indian edible oil industry, marketers of edible oils need to keep abreast of consumers' tastes, forestalling the consumer preferences, vis-à-vis envisaging what products/brands of edible oil would they opt for, from those available in the market⁴. The marketers devise their marketing strategies for edible oil based on the backdrop of Indian culture & subculture which is strongly entrenched in the consumer psyche, and amidst changes in the social environment. Each year, India consumes over 10 million tons of edible oils⁵. The importance of edible oil in our daily diet was well recognized by our ancestors; as a result, it became a part of our food. Oils and fats are basically esters of glycerol and fatty acids. The fatty acids may be either saturated or unsaturated⁶. Conventionally, Indians use two types of edible cooking mediums, namely vegetable oils and vegetable ghee; wherein, the first cooking medium - vegetable oil - was extracted from the seeds, like, groundnut, sesame, mustard, rapeseed, sunflower, etc. while the inhabitants of Gujarat, Maharashtra, Andhra Pradesh, and Karnataka use groundnut oil as a prime medium of cooking oil, the inhabitants of Tamil Nadu use groundnut and sesame oil, whereas, North Indian inhabitants prefer mustard/rapeseed oil, sesame oil or sunflower oil; while coconut oil is extensively used in the state of Kerala, as Kerala being the number one state in production of coconuts. Mustard, sesame, groundnut and coconut oils were traditionally extracted through bullock-driven (wooden) cold presses, called "kachi ghani" that extracted oils at the temperature below 48⁰~50⁰ Celsius, which was the normal heat produced through friction. The share of raw oil & refined oil in the total edible oil market is respectively 42.0% and 42.7% as per the Department of Food & Public Distribution⁶. At one end, the affluent class uses virgin or extra virgin oil (price band Rs. 590/- ~ Rs. 896/- per liter), on the other end, the poor or lower class, which is a major class in India, primarily uses palmolein oil (price band Rs. 40/- to Rs. 55/- per liter)². Newer oils, which were not known before have entered the kitchen, like those of cottonseed, sunflower, palm oil or its liquid fraction, polyolefin, soybean, and rice bran. All of them are again essentially bland, processed edible oils⁶.

Defining Consumer in the Current Scenario

Today's Indian Urban customers are some of the most confident in the world. They are value conscious, demanding and evolving bunch of buyers. They are more experimental and willing to try out new products. One can witness this with the growth and entry of foreign brands, like Wagga Wagga edible oil from Australia. Their focus is shifting from regular FMCG products of soaps, edible oils, creams to health and wellness product like Olive oils, Sugar substitutes, Breakfast Cereals⁷. Today, the organized sector in Indian edible oil business has emerged as one of the fastest growing sectors in recent times creating branded oil sales, leaving a larger number of product choices before consumers to choose from. Consumers are now able to compare many features such as quality, price, and value for money, absorption capacity, brand image, etc. to decide which product they want to buy for their need satisfaction⁸. The consumption is a normal process that goes on from

birth until death of any animal, including a human being. An individual accomplishing the act of consumption is referred to as the "consumer". Currently, urban India accounts for 66% of total FMCG consumption, with rural India accounting for the remaining 34%⁹. In the above context, an attempt has been made to understand as to how consumer buying pattern and culture & subculture results in influencing the purchase decision of urban Indian households for branded edible oils in urban India.

Role of Buying Pattern, Culture & Subculture Role of Consumer buying Pattern in Changing the Purchase Decision of Urban Indian households for Branded Edible Oil

Dawson and Boroadbridge (1988) have stated that as the economy and society has changed over the years, the consumer buying pattern has also changed, and so the retailers' response, and enormous alteration in the shopping as an activity¹⁰. There are incidences of depleting asset base, reduction in savings, increased expenditure on education, increased liabilities due to various types of loans an average urban household has, which has impacted the consumption pattern of provisions vis-à-vis edible oils amongst the Indian middle-class households¹¹. Socio-cultural factors such as religion, beliefs, food preferences, gender discrimination, education and women's employment all have a noticeable influence on food consumption patterns in this region. Mass media, especially televised food advertisements, play an important role in modifying dietary habits¹². As stated by Neeraj Kaushik & Deepak Gupta (2009) in their article, quality and price were found to be the most important criterion for buying patterns in cosmetics, the same factors have also been found to have an influence on the consumption pattern of edible oil in urban Indian households¹³. The buying frequency of people was observed to be a daily basis for a chocolate bar and milk, while items like edible oil, bath soap and shampoo being purchased on weekly or monthly basis¹⁴. (Brown et.al., 2000; Davis and Smith, 2004) have emphasized the need for nutritional awareness, and the rise of disposable income which has led to fast food preferences of young consumers in Malaysia; similarly, the Indian urban households are also giving importance to the nutritional values of the edible oils they consume¹⁵. Nine major factors affect fast-food consumption, i.e. Social Development, Economic Forces, Political Climate, Technological Development, Ecological Development, Market Forecasts, Buying Groups, Equilibrium of Power and Regulatory Framework have been found to be affecting the fast-food consumption, and so has been its effect on edible oil consumption¹⁵.

Role of culture & subculture as one of the key demographic variables in changing the purchase decision of urban Indian households for branded edible oil

As per Jablonski (2012), cultural factors have a significant impact on customer's buying decision⁶. Culture involves society's thoughts, words, their traditions, language, materials, attitudes, and feelings. One of the elements that make culture is beliefs. Beliefs of the people in a community can show similarities. One market segment that is breaking down cultural and global boundaries in an unprecedented way is the urban segment. The urban segment is a unique and diverse blend of ethnicities that is heavily influenced in tastes, attitudes, which may influence the purchase decision of customers for edible oils¹⁶.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer

The consumption phenomenon is described as a natural process that goes on from birth until death. The individual who fulfills the act of consumption is defined as the “consumer” and, according to the consumer, having a better lifestyle is only possible through fulfilling the act of consumption. The act of consumption influences consumers’ purchasing decisions while allowing them to develop new behaviors and attitudes¹⁷. **Consumers** are people or organizations that purchase products or services. The term also refers to hiring goods and services. They are humans or other economic entities that use a good or service. Furthermore, they do not sell on that item that they bought. They are the end users in the distribution chain of goods and services. Consumers are the major factors influencing the sales of any product in the market, but now-a-days large scale adoption of latest technology has empowered consumers in an unimagined way¹⁸. In fact, sometimes the consumer might not be the buyer. Foxall (1987) argues that in the marketing context, the term ‘consumer’ refers not only to the act of purchase itself but also to patterns of aggregate buying which include pre-purchase and post-purchase activities. A pre-purchase activity might consist of the growing awareness of a need or want, and a search for and evaluation of information about the products and brands that might satisfy it. As per Dittmar (2008), the number of research studies conducted by psychologists have repeatedly shown that consumption is an integral part of people’s lives. It has been found that consumer activities can impact upon people’s identities and how individuals convey their social status through the use of certain products and services, for example, by using Saffola Gold used by HIG (higher income group) and/or extra virgin olive oil used by affluent class¹⁹.

Consumer Buying Behavior

As per Solomon (1995), “consumer behavior” is the study “of the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires”. Consumer behavior has been defined by the researchers Arnould, Price, and Zinkhan (2004, p. 9) as, “individuals or groups acquiring, using, and disposing of products, services, ideas, or experiences”²⁰. As stated by Thompson, Haziris, & Alekos, (1994), consumption of edible oil is associated with healthy eating and avoidance of saturated fats amongst the educated households, and also about enhancing the taste of cooked/fried foods, salads; where, in most cases, consumption of the types of oils is discretionary²⁰. Lastly, the consumer analyzes the prevailing prices of commodities and takes the decision about the commodities he should consume⁸.

Consumer’s Buying Pattern

While investigating on consumers’ buying patterns Ehrenberg et.al. (1986, 1990, 1994, and 1995) have systematically identified several regularities amongst which, some of the significant ones are: i) only about 10% of consumers are 100% loyal to one brand over repeated purchases; ii) consumers tend to show brand repertoire comprising of 3-4 brands among which they make their choices; iii) every brand possesses a small share of 100% loyal consumers; iv) each brand’s

market share is distinct from that of other brands; v) an average amount of product bought by consumers across repeated purchases shows little variation, despite the brand they buy; vi) the number of purchases per period (e.g.- 1 year) tend to be stable and similar for all brands; and vii) 100% brand loyal consumers are not necessarily heavy buyers²¹.

Purchase Decision

As per (Peter and James, 2004: 48; Wibowo & Karimah, 2012: 6) the purchasing decision is the process by which consumers make the decision to purchase a variety of products and brands that began with the introduction of needs, information research, evaluation of information, making purchase and then evaluate the decision after purchasing. Purchase decision process consists of five stages, viz. - 1. Recognition of the need; 2. Search for information; 3. Evaluate the alternatives; 4. Purchase decision; and 5. Post-purchase behavior. It is clear that the procurement process begins long before the actual purchase. Marketers need to focus on the entire purchase process, rather than focus only on the purchase decision¹³. Also, according to Schiffman, Kanuk (2004: 547), purchasing decision is “the selection of two or more alternative purchasing decision, it means that someone can make a decision, it should be available some alternative options. So, the outlines are the decision to purchase can lead to how the process in the decision was made. Peter and Olson in the Fransisca’s journal (2013) describes the purchasing decision as to the process of integration that combines the knowledge to evaluate the behavior of two or more alternatives and choose one of them.

Culture, Subculture, and its Influence on Purchase Decision

Culture

As early as 1874, British anthropologist, Taylor, defined culture as a complex whole of knowledge, belief, art, law, morals, customs and any other talents and habits acquired by individuals as members of the society. Redfield (1941), later defined culture as the conventional understandings displayed in the act and artifact, which characterizes societies. Herskovits (1969) said that cultures of no two peoples were identical and that culture is the most fundamental determinant of a person’s want and behavior; hence, culture considerably influences the pattern of consumption and the pattern of decision-making; as for example, Bengalis primarily use mustard oil as a medium of cooking, while south Indians primarily use sesame oil or coconut oil as a medium of cooking²⁰. Culture does have significant variations among social life and people have respect for their own culture¹⁵. As opined by (Hofstede, 1980; Markus and Kitayama, 1991; Havilland, 1996; Schew et al; 1998), cultures are learned, mostly through beliefs, rather than inherited biologically, and parts of the culture work as an integrated whole; hence cultural literacy is of critical importance to success in international marketing²². The cultural dimension deserves serious consideration in the design of every element of the marketing mix²². Based on the literature reviewed, culture for this research study is defined as, a set of socially acquired behavior patterns and meanings common to members of a particular society or social group, including the key elements of family structure¹¹, language²³, beliefs, and values²⁴. Rani (2014), identifies cultural, social, personal and psychological factors as the four major influences on consumer’s buying behavior,

adding that these factors cause consumers to develop product and brand preferences²⁵.

Subculture

Schiffman & Kanuk (1991) have defined 'subculture' as a distinct cultural group that exists as an identifiable segment within a larger, more complex society; adding further that the members of a subculture usually possess beliefs, values, and customs that are distinct from other members of the same society. Two distinct elements exist in a culture that includes: (1) the unique beliefs, values and customs pertaining to the specific subculture and (2) the core theme within a culture that is common to most of the population. For example, African and Hispanic American subcultures have their own unique norms, traits, and orientation; however, both groups still share the dominant traits of the American culture. Similarly, in India, Hindu, Muslim, Jain, Sikh, Buddhist have their unique customs, traits, and orientation; yet collectively all the subcultures share the dominant traits of Indian culture. Thus, it is important for marketers to acknowledge the advent of subcultures and have a microscopic look at smaller market segments and maximize profits in today's competitive yet fragmented market place²⁶. The genesis, maintenance, and change of subcultures are based heavily on endogenous and exogenous means. Subcultures are formed exogenously based heavily on contact within the culture whereas; endogenous means have dominated most of the previous research concerning subcultures²⁶.

Multiculturalism

Multiculturalism is a body of thought in political philosophy about the proper way to respond to cultural and religious diversity. Multiculturalism or Cultural Pluralism is a policy, ideal or reality that emphasizes the unique characteristics of different cultures in the world, especially as they relate to one another in immigrant-receiving nations²⁷. Cultural diversity is not an ancient phenomenon. History witnesses several examples of diverse communities and cultures living coherently within the same society peacefully. In India, people of diverse religions and languages have lived together for several centuries. In some pre-modern societies, differences in religion were even legally recognized and accommodated²⁷. The multicultural framework that was initially devised protected diversity by giving communities the right to govern themselves in some respects. As per Kramsch et.al. (2011), the term multiculturalism is most often used in reference to Western nation-states, which had seemingly achieved a de facto single national identity during the 18th and/or 19th centuries¹⁵. Religiously, Hindus form the majority, followed by Muslim; and the statistics are: Hindu (80.5%), Muslim (13.4%), Christian (2.3%), Sikh (1.72%), Buddhist (0.69%), Jain (0.37%), and other populations (1.02%), and India's state boundaries are largely drawn based on linguistic groups^{28,29}.

Urban Indian Households

Families do not exist in isolation and family dynamics are often best interpreted in the context of their societal and cultural background. Culture has been shown to determine the family structure by shaping the family type, size, and form

(McGill D., 1983; McGoldrick M, Giordano J, Pearce J, 1996) and the family functioning by delineating boundaries, rules for interaction, communication patterns, acceptable practices, discipline and hierarchy in the family. India is classified into 450 districts and approximately 6,30,000 villages, which can be further segmented on different parameters such as literacy levels, accessibility, distribution networks, income levels, market penetration, distances from nearest towns, etc²⁹. As per 2011 Census, the urban population is 37.7 crore (31.16%) as against the total population of 121 crores, while the rural population is 83.3 crore (68.84%). Post-independence, there has been an absolute increase in the urban population which has grown by about 32%, almost two-and-a-half times the rise of the rural population (13%)¹⁰. In India, majority of food consumption is still at home. Nevertheless, out-of-home food consumption is increasing due to increase in urbanization, breaking up of the traditional joint family system, desire for quality, time which translates into an increased need for convenience, increasing number of working women, rise in per capita income, changing lifestyles and increasing level of affluence in the middle-income group had brought about changes in food habits³⁰.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study was a descriptive study based on secondary data. Total 80 research papers were thoroughly reviewed from various journals, and conference proceedings, literature was referred from books, magazines, and websites. During the literature review, it was observed that very fewer studies been done combining all the variables viz. – edible oil, purchase decision, culture, sub-culture, and consumption pattern of edible oils.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The act of consumption influences consumers' purchasing decisions while allowing them to develop new behaviors, attitudes, and the process of integration that combines the knowledge to evaluate the behavior of two or more alternatives and choose one of them¹⁷. As Herskovits (1969) has stated that culture is the most fundamental determinant of a person's want and behavior, and it considerably influences the consumption pattern and the decision-making of the consumers; as for example, Bengalis primarily use mustard oil as a medium of cooking, while south Indians primarily use sesame oil or coconut oil as a medium of cooking²⁰. It is evident from the literature reviewed that culture and subculture¹⁵ do have significant variations among the social life of people and it also impacts the usage pattern of the consumption of provisions and edible oils used by the households. As quality and price (Kaushik& Gupta, 2009) are important criterions which influences the consumption pattern of edible oils; (Brown et.al; 2000; Davis and Smith, 2004) an increased nutritional awareness, and the rise of disposable income the Indian urban households amongst urban Indian households also positively influence buying frequency of the urban households for edible oils, and other provisions, purchased on weekly or monthly basis^{15,14}. It has also been evident from the literature studied that increasing number of working women, rise in per capita income, changing lifestyles of the people at large, and the prospering middle-class has significantly contributed in changing food habits of Indian urban households³⁰.

CONCLUSIONS

In India, majority of food consumption is still at home, and it is evident from the study carried out in forgoing pages that culture, subculture, multiculturalism vis-à-vis rising per capita income levels of Indian households, changing lifestyles of urban Indians, increasing number of working women, and the prospering middle-class in India, vis-à-vis other factors like, brand awareness amongst people along with quality consciousness, and health consciousness has contributed significantly in creating a positive influence on the purchase decision of urban Indian households, for edible oils.

Limitation and Scope for Further Study

This study was based on the review of literature pertaining to the consumer behavioral aspects towards consumption pattern, and influence of culture and sub-culture on the purchase decision of edible oil by Indian households. Nevertheless, there is future scope of primary research being carried out with a field survey in the urban cities of India.

Managerial Implications

This study will be highly useful to the industry experts, and decision-makers in edible oil industry, marketing consultants from FMCG sector in devising suitable long term marketing strategies and tactics that will help in creating brand awareness and strong brand image for their respective edible oil brand/s, vis-à-vis offering quality products to the society.

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