



Multidimensional Analysis of Consumer Behavior towards Horticultural Crops

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Abstract

The horticultural sector is responding to an increased level of interest to consumer demand for products with an increasingly wide array of attributes. The article also throws light into theoretical approaches of consumer behavior as well as dive into factors concerning consumer behavior towards fruits as well as vegetables. Differentiation claims include factors related to experiential eating quality as well as attributes related to environmental and other social outcomes concerning market segmentation. To establish the overall importance and willingness to purchase and/or to pay for horticultural crops, a summary of selected studies on attributes concerning internal and external factors. This study aims to identify number of factors and throws light into the concept of consumer behavior.

Keywords

Consumer behavior, market segmentation and factors concerning consumer behavior

Introduction

In the past decade, because of the intensification of competition in markets, one of the biggest challenges marketers face is to convince the consumers to buy their products. In the case of fruits and vegetables market with easy perishable products, a marketer should know what type of instruments he should apply in order to convince the consumer to buy the products in the right time, before their natural deterioration. India is the second largest producer of fruits and vegetables in the world after China. Indian consumers are consuming less than the WHO recommended quantity 400g (5 servings with an average size of 80g) per day (National Horticultural Board, 2015). For these reasons it is important to identify the behavior of the consumers and their motives in buying these products, which help to identify consumer behavior.

Consumer

Any individual who purchases goods and services from the market for his/her end-use is called a consumer. A person who bought goods or services for own use and needs and not for resale is called consumer (Nagendra, 1994).

Consumer Behaviour

The behaviour that consumers display in searching for, purchasing, using, evaluating and disposing of products and services that they expect will satisfy their needs (Schiffman, 2007).

Consumer behaviour is the study of how people buy, what they buy, when they buy and why they buy (Kotler, 2009).

Consumer behaviour emerged in the 1940s and 50s as a distinct sub-discipline in the marketing area. It is an inter-disciplinary social science that blends elements from psychology, sociology, social anthropology, ethnography, marketing and economics, especially behavioural economics. It examines how emotions, attitudes and preferences affect buying behavior.

Factors Influencing Consumer Behaviour

Kotler (2001) have broadly classified the factors into two bases on the environment of individual as internal factors and external factors.

Internal factors

The factors which are internal to the individual. These were further classified into personal factors and psychological factors (Koudelka, 2013).

Personal factors

They are individual factors of the consumers that strongly influence their buying behaviors. These factors vary from person to person that result in a different set of perceptions, attitudes and behavior towards certain goods and services. It includes age, income, occupation, and lifestyle.

1. **Age:** The consumer buying behavior is greatly influenced by his age, i.e. the life cycle stage in which he falls. The people buy different products in different stages of the life cycle. Example: The women after menopause are recommended by doctors to consume more calcium rich fruits and vegetables as they are prone to calcium deficiency.
2. **Income:** The income of the person influences his buying patterns. The income decides the purchasing power of an individual and thus, the more the personal income, the more will be the expenditure on other items and vice-versa. Example: The exotic vegetables like celery, broccoli, cherry tomato are mainly purchased by rich people because of their high price.
3. **Occupation:** The occupation of the individual also influences his buying behavior. The people tend to buy those products and services that advocate their profession and role in the society. For example, The IT professionals will stick on to cut and packed vegetables which are ready to cook due to their hectic schedule.
4. **Lifestyle:** The lifestyle means individual's interest, values, opinions and activities that reflect the manner in which he lives in the society. Such as, if the person has a healthy lifestyle then he will avoid the junk food and consume more of organic products.

Psychological factors

These factors are what consumers use to interact with their world. They are the tools consumers use to recognize their feelings, gather and analyze information, formulate thoughts and opinions and take action. It includes perception, motivation, learning, and attitude.

1. **Perception:** Perception is the process of selecting, organizing and interpreting information inputs to produce meaning. A person receives information through the senses: sight, taste, hearing, smell and touch. How and what consumers perceive strongly affect their behaviour toward products, prices, package designs, salespeople, stores, advertisements

and manufacturers. For example the consumer goes for purchasing in outlets which he perceives will get fresh produce.

2. Motivation: It involves the positive or negative needs, goals and desires that impel a person to or away from certain actions, objects or situations. By identifying and appealing to people's motives a marketer can produce positive motivation. Each person has distinct motives for purchases, and these change by situation and over time. Consumers often combine economic and emotional motives when making purchases. For example some consumers purchase will products which they like most irrespective of its price due to their emotional motivation.
3. Learning: It consists of changes in a person's behaviour that is caused by information and experience. Variations in behaviour that result from psychological conditions such as hunger, fatigue, physical growth, or deterioration are not considered learning. Consumers learn about products directly by experiencing or using them.
4. Attitude: Predisposition to feel or act in a given manner towards a specific person, group, object, institution or idea. A preference for a particular brand indicates the customer's attitude towards it. Customer attitudes, understanding and awareness of the product are intimately related.

External factors

The factors which are external to individual. These are further classified into cultural factors and social factors (Solomon *et al.*, 2006).

Cultural factors

The *Cultural Factors* are the *factors* that an individual learns at a very early stage of life due to socialization within the family and other key institutions, such as the set of values, preferences, behavior patterns, and perceptions are learned as the individual grows. It includes culture, sub culture and social class.

1. Culture: A culture is a way of living that distinguishes one group of people from another. Much of consumer behaviour is determined by culture. For example in south India, Brahmins cannot tolerate dishes made of shallots and garlic as a part of their tradition.
2. Subculture: A group of people with shared value systems based on common life experiences and situations. It include nationalities, religions, racial groups and geographic regions. It enables segmentation in market to meet the specific needs, motivations, perceptions, and attitude of consumers. For example, in south India, Vegetables like Drumstick, Brinjal, and Coconuts are more prominently used.

Market segmentation: Market segmentation describes the division of a market into homogenous groups which will respond differently to promotions, communications, advertising and other marketing mix variable (Cumming, 1994). It is mainly of four types i.e

- Geographic segmentation(geography)
- Demographic segmentation(age, sex, income)
- Psychographic segmentation(lifestyle, personality, attitude)
- Behavioural segmentation(behaviour)

3. Social class: It is defined as the ranking of people in a society into a hierarchy of upper, middle and lower classes based on their power and prestige. Example: In case of fruits and vegetable purchase, rich people prefers organized retailers like supermarkets while poor people prefer unorganized retailers like road vendors.

Social factors

This includes all effects on the buying behaviour that result from interactions between a consumer and the external environment. It consist of family, reference group, roles and status

1. Family: Today more of the decisions that affect the family as a whole are taken by the entire family.
2. Roles and status: It is defined as how we measure our position in society relative to other people. Status symbol is the products that we use as benchmarks in this comparison. For example, the consumption of dried fruits is considered as status symbol by rich people.
3. Reference group: Groups that serve as a reference point for individuals in defining their needs and developing opinions. Generally consumer accepts the reference group influence because of the perceived benefits in doing so. It includes friends group, shopping group, work group etc.

Studies Conducted on Consumer Behaviour towards Fruits and Vegetables

Challenges of fruit and vegetable market:

- To bring the perishable products in the right time to the consumer, without damaging the quality of the products
- To assure the adequate storage conditions in order to keep the quality of the products
- To convince the customers to buy and consume the products in the right time before their natural deterioration

Nicolae and Corina (2015) reported that more than 50% of the respondents analyze the fruits and vegetables while buying them. In order to sell this type of products, it should have a good and appealing aspect irrespective of other factors influencing consumer behaviour. They also have ranked the fruit and vegetable attributes from most to least preferable using the reported degree of the consumer preferences and observed that freshness obtained highest preference ranking followed by taste, hygiene, nutritional value and affordable price.

Wu (2003) revealed that there was a the significant relationship between consumer lifestyle and online shopping behavior

Ragaert *et al.* (2004) reported that consumers buying in a big city perceive the nutritional value and health as more important than respondents buying in smaller cities.

Chikkamath *et al.* (2012) revealed that purchase of vegetable in super market and at local vendor differs significantly whereas, that, at local market and supermarkets were not differing significantly.

Khan and Sharma (2015) differentiated the retail format as organized (hypermarket, supermarket, departmental store etc) unorganized (kirana shops, vendors, hand cart etc). They find out that the demographic attributes like Age, Gender, Education status, income and the choice of retail format were independent to each other. Location and offers are the most important criteria to choose an outlet irrespective to any retail format.

Bulsara and Trivedi (2016) conducted study on the branding of fruits and vegetables and reported that a strong brand represents good quality, brand logo, health related messages and effective packaging and preservation of the products. They also differentiated the products as nonbranded, branded and brand extension.

Vijayan (2015) studied on consumer behavior towards organic vegetables and revealed that majority of respondents (61.67) preferred organic vegetables due to it slower residues, better value for money, hygiene and eco-friendly attitude of consumers. The same study also reported that most of respondents were not fully aware of standards fixed for organic vegetables and it's labeling and partially aware of organic retail outlets and organic certification.

Conclusion

Marketers can segment, the market on the basis of consumer characteristics like age, income, lifestyle and attitude after understanding the factors, motives, approaches and models that influence the consumer behaviour towards fruits and vegetables. They can design appropriate marketing strategies as per these characteristics to attract and sustain consumers. If these objectives of marketers are attained, consumption of fruits and vegetables among people will increase and bridge the gap between production and consumption of fruits and vegetables in India.

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