Linking Socio-Demographic Profile and Attribute Preference of Branded Dairy Consumers with Communication Effectiveness of Branded Dairy Products

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ABSTRACT

Companies adopt standardized product and communication strategies, largely ignoring the need for customer profiling and understanding consumer preferences. The present paper seeked to understand the socio-demographic profile of dairy customers, their attribute preferences, and sources of brand awareness to enable dairy marketers to design an effective communication strategy. A multi-method research approach was adopted in the present study conducted in Uttar Pradesh. The study concluded that the companies' communication efforts were inadequate and the awareness level of consumers was dismal. The pull generated by the dairy companies in the market was deficient. Examination of the socio-demographic profile of dairy consumers presented significant implications for marketers. The study of preference of attributes regarding the purchase of dairy products indicated that dairy being a food item, attributes validating the aptness of consumption were given preference over price, place and promotion. Quality taste, freshness, and flavour were the most sought-after attributes for all dairy items under study.

Key words : Socio-demographic profile, attribute preference, branded dairy consumers, communication effectiveness, branded dairy companies

INTRODUCTION

The incessant efforts under cooperative structure since 1970 have contributed towards making India the leading producer of milk globally. The hitherto tranquil dairy sector in India is characterized by fierce competition escalating with the entry of multinationals, Indian corporate giants, and new local and national startups that are hyperactively launching innovative products. The milk and dairy products category has witnessed the most frenzied activity over the past couple of years. Only strong brands can pull through the current socio economic conditions (Huo and Zhang, 2017).

According to industry estimates, about half of all milk produced in the country is consumed by producers or sold to non-producers in rural areas. The balance 52% of the milk is marketable surplus sold mainly to consumers in urban areas. The Indian cooperatives, although they had their presence in the Indian market since 1970, overlooked value-added products and of late mainly been focusing on basic milk, butter, processed cheese slices, and ice cream up till recently until the gap in the market lured the new indigenous and multinational players in the sector. Moreover, the affluent and time-starved urban consumers demand value-added products on account of the phenomenon of working couples and single men and women with high disposable income.

Lately, consumers across the country have been mindful of the quality and nutrition offered by food products on account of the panic ushered in by the appalling COVID pandemic. It has thrown in consumer preferences towards packaged milk and milk products vis-a-vis loose milk supplied by the local vendors. Regardless of all encouraging factors, the organized dairy sector has not scored well in production and marketing. The marketing strategies of dairy companies are grossly poor evident from insufficient product mix, unseemly segmentation, poor brand awareness, little consumer knowledge, and ineffective communication strategies.

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communication strategies, largely ignoring the need for customer profiling and understanding consumer preferences. The present paper seeked to understand the socio-demographic profile of dairy customers, their attribute preferences, and sources of brand awareness to enable dairy marketers to design an effective communication strategy. The paper seeked to explain inefficiencies witnessed in mass communication efforts of organized dairy players.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

According to Valaskova *et al.* (2015), consumer behaviour is a vital and continuous decision-making process that involves searching, purchasing, using, evaluating, and disposing of products and services. To understand the consumer behaviour study of individual factor was imperative (Solomon, 2016). There was a plethora of researches on factors influencing consumer behaviour. The factors were classified as internal (psychological) factors such as attitudes, beliefs, motivation, or emotions; and external (socio-cultural) factors originating from the external environment such as culture social groups, or household structure. Some studies segregated factors influencing consumer behaviour into interpersonal (cultural and social groups) and intrapersonal (drives, perceptions and attitudes). According to Kotler *et al.* (2019), the personal factor had its influence on the daily as well as specific products. Kotler and Keller (2016) opined that consumer behaviour was influenced by their occupation. Ali and Ramya (2016) held that consumer buying behaviour was a resultant of psychological factor (internal factor). Kotler and Armstrong (2018) categorized factors influencing consumer behaviour into cultural factors, social factors, personal factors and psychological factors. Scholars alienated factors influencing consumer behavior into situational factors, like store's environment, social situation, time, the reason for purchase and mood; personal factors, such as personality, self-concept, gender, age, stage of family life and lifestyle; psychological factors, like motivation, perception, learning and attitude; and societal factors, such as culture, sub-cultures, social class, reference groups, opinion leaders and family.

The studies confirmed the determinant of consumer behaviour as personal, social, cultural and psychological factors. It's evident that to understand customers their profile needs to be analyzed. Hence, the socio-demographic analysis of organized dairy consumers was proposed to gain an apparent understanding of dairy consumers facilitating the marketers to design strategies that suited the consumers.

Consumer knowledge was an important construct in consumer behaviour understanding. Consumer knowledge assisted in gaining understanding about information search as well as information processing by the consumer. Comprehension of the consumer information search was imperative to designing effective communication strategies. Hence, a qualitative study was conducted with 100 consumers of organized dairy products in an attempt to understand their brand awareness, sources of brand knowledge, and impact of brand advertisement on consumers. Notably the techniques of data analysis for quantitative and qualitative data were dissimilar (Krippendorff, 2019).

Marketers can deliver beyond customer expectations, but the precondition is that they should know their customers inside out. Familiarity with the preferences of their customers will definitely give them an edge over competitors. A tremendous shake up characterized the dairy sector post entry of new entrants to fill the market gaps with value-added products. Recognizing the multiplicity of consumer preferences was fundamental to designing effective market strategies. According to Debbie (2016), consumer knowledge was an important phenomenon of interest to marketers as it had multifaceted effects on consumer purchasing behaviour and the marketing strategy designed to entice chosen market segments. According to Hille *et al.* (2019), knowledge of consumer characteristics assisted in product and service differentiation that matched consumer needs. Kaenzig *et al.* (2013) established that the product portfolio mapped to consumer preferences through a superior understanding of consumers. Rapid change in demand and cut throat competition necessitated direct interaction of the company with the customers (Kosciejew, 2020).

Borawski *et al.* (2020) in their study concluded

that milk and dairy products consumption increased around the world, especially in China, India and the EU. In Polish self-employed households, milk and dairy products consumption decreased over the last five years. However, the consumption of ripened and processed cheese was on the rise. Ortez *et al.* (2021) in their study found that households with children bought fluid milk and yogurt more frequently than other households. Labelling information of interest to the largest proportion of respondents was price followed by expiration date. Jia *et al.* (2021) in their study observed heterogeneities in dairy product consumption between genders and across educational levels. Females consumed more dairy products than males. Guine *et al.* (2020) in their study of dairy consumption in Brazil and Portugal found that the level of consumption for all dairy products studied was low. Regarding milk consumption, semi-skimmed milk was never consumed by half of the participants. Cheese were also consumed by only small parts of the population, with the least consumed being imported cheese in both the countries followed by soft paste cheese in Brazil and Portugal and whey cheese in Portugal. Frequency of cheese consumption was low : once a week or sometimes (2-3 times per week). Yogurt consumption followed the same low consumption trend with the most frequently consumed yogurt types being liquid yogurts and natural yogurts in Portugal and creamy fruit pulp yogurt, liquid yogurt and Greek type yogurt in Brazil.

A multi-method research approach was adopted in the present study. The area of the study was Uttar Pradesh. Based on theoretical insights, a qualitative study was conducted with 100 consumers of organized dairy products in an attempt to understand their brand awareness, sources of brand knowledge and impact of brand advertisement on consumers. In the second stage, a questionnaire was designed to understand the socio-demographic profile of branded dairy consumers with a sample of 1000 consumers. The preference of attributes in multiple dairy products amongst 100 dairy consumers was studied through rank-order analysis.

A multi-item questionnaire including 33 close-ended questions measuring responses on 5 points Likert- scale was employed to capture consumer responses from the customers selected who consumed branded dairy products.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A qualitative analysis of 100 respondents revealed the knowledge and awareness of consumers regarding dairy brands in the organized sector. Consumers were subject to depth interviews that lasted for 20 min, and responses were recorded in the schedule designed for the purpose. The main findings of this analysis are discussed as follows :

More than 50% of consumers were not aware of the brands present in the organized dairy sector. The leading players in the dairy sector in India are Amul, Mother Dairy, Parag Milk Foods, Danone Food and Beverages India, Nestle India, ITC Foods', Nandini, Prabhat Dairy, Sarda Dairy Farms, Gyan Dairy, Paras Dairy, Shyam Dairy Products, Umang Dairy product, Bliss fresh, Murginns, and multinational groupe Lactalis SA.

Consumers were sentient to local brands available in their geographical area and were not even aware of the national brands like Mother Dairy. It indicated that the awareness level of the consumers was subpar, reflecting that the mass communication strategies of the companies were deficient.

When consumers were enquired about the portfolio of products being marketed by dairy companies, the responses recorded yet again were disconcerting. Partial awareness was documented as the consumers displayed limited knowledge about the product portfolio of their known brands. Majority of consumers knew about the milk, curd and paneer but were ignorant for instance about ice cream products of mother dairy and Paras besides the Amul's mithai range and other value-added products like Danone's Yogurt. This again signified the insufficiency of communication with the target consumers.

Furthermore, consumers were exposed to print and electronic advertisements of dairy companies, and their recognition was recorded; findings were disheartening as not many consumers were familiar with the advertisement, with Amul being excluded.

Those who recognized the companies' advertisements were probed further and were asked, "Do you think the advertisement of the company has a major influence on your buying

decision?" It was found that only 6% out of the total 100 respondents strongly agreed on the influence of advertisement while the maximum respondents (56%) agreed on the statement. But 17% of consumers were neutral while 8% disagreed with the statement, and 14% strongly disagreed about the advertisement's influence. This further emphasized that advertisements were marginally effective in influencing consumer decisions.

The responses of dairy consumers led the interviewer to enquire about how dairy consumers choose the dairy products category. It was enquired, "How do you typically find out about brands in this product category? It was inferred that maximum consumers (42%) found dairy products to be purchased while shopping in the stores. It was followed by 30% of consumers who typically found out through TV commercials, 13% of consumers became aware through online commercials, and the least of 3% consumers typically found through social media.

The personal interviews with dairy consumers revealed important insight. The majority of dairy consumers purchased from the local milkman and were least conscious about the hygiene and purity of the milk purchased. Also, it was inferred that consumers' awareness and knowledge level was on a lower side regarding dairy brands reflecting inadequate promotion efforts by the companies. Further, 62% of consumers revealed that the company's advertisement influenced their buying decision, but 42% of the consumers gained knowledge about the brand while shopping in the stores. This led the researcher to enquire about the reasons for the low reach of mass communication campaigns. The researcher

tried to examine the socio-demographic profile of dairy consumers. Additionally, consumer preferences of attributes distinctive to different dairy products were evaluated to better understand dairy consumers.

Socio-Demographic Analysis of Dairy Consumers

Several scholars have noted that the availability of demographic information, the relative ease of analyzing the data, and the lack of awareness of other approaches to behavioural prediction used in the social sciences were the primary reasons for the wide use of demographic data. Socio-demographic characteristics played a crucial role in consumer behaviour because these factors play a vital role in the purchase, consumption, and expenditure behaviour of customers for dairy products. Information was collected from a total of 1000 respondents through Google forms. Socio-demographic profiles of the respondent dairy buyers were studied based on gender, age, marital status, education qualification, family type, employment status and income (Table 1).

The analysis of dairy consumers revealed that male-dominated the choice of brand and product source of dairy products. The observation was quite dissimilar to a commonly held belief that women decide on food items and brands. Out of the total responses collected, it was found that only 28% were females, while 72% males had decisive roles in the brand selection of dairy products. It was drawn from the data analysis that the consumers dominating the purchase decision regarding dairy products were concentrated in the age group of 25-34 (48%), followed by the

Table 1. Analysis of the socio-demographic profile of the dairy consumers

Gender	Age	Marital status	Education	Family size	Employment	Monthly income
Male (72%)	15-24 (44%)	Single (81%)	High School (3%)	Nuclear family (56%)	Student (21%)	Less than Rs. 10,000 (17%)
Female (28%)	25-34 (48%)	Married (19%)	Diploma Bachelor's (3%)	Joint family (44%)	Housewife (15%)	Rs. 10,001-Rs. 20,000 (15%)
Others (0%)	35-44 (4%)	Others	Degree (27%)		Unemployed (16%)	Rs. 20,001-Rs. 30,000 (16%)
	45 and above (4%)		Degree Master's (65%)		Business (20%)	Rs. 30,001-Rs. 40,000 (19%)
			Degree Doctoral (3%)		Service (24%)	Rs. 40,001-Rs. 50,000 (16%)
			Illiterate (0%)		Others (4%)	More than Rs. 50,000 (17%)

age group of 15-24 (44% of the respondents). At the same time, a meager 8% of the respondents influencing purchase decisions were in the age group 35-44 and the age group of 45-54. Therefore, it was inferred that consumers in the age group of 15-34 had a major say in the choice of dairy source.

Out of the respondents who influenced the purchase decision, 81% were unmarried while 19% were married. This can be understood from the perspective of the age factor discussed in the previous paragraph. The maximum percentage of decision-makers was in the young age group. Two factors played a role over here. Because of shifting normal marriage age towards later years and second, education and awareness of the young consumers, won them a clean sweep as a decision-maker in dairy products.

Out of the respondents, none of them was found to be illiterate. The highest numbers of respondents were found to have Master's degree qualifications. They constituted 65% of the sample, and 27% of respondents held a degree level of educational qualification, followed by 3% for high school and diplomas. Purchasers and users of branded dairy products were the educated lot. The less educated people still prefered to rely on local vendors.

Family type did not exhibit any noticeable impact on the choice of branded dairy products. But marginally, respondents belongings to nuclear families purchased more of the branded milk products mainly because of the convenience in purchased milk and other products like dahi, yogurt, sweets, etc. While observing the socio-demographic structure of branded dairy purchasers, employment did not influence the purchase of dairy products in the organized sector.

Income was reported to be a crucial variable for socio-demographic analysis. But regarding the purchase of branded dairy products, income had no apparent influence. The income did not emerge as an important variable influencing the choice of buyers in this category, which can be attributed to dairy being a necessary food item in India among consumers irrespective of their age, income, occupation and culture.

The analysis of the socio-demographic profile of the consumer gave essential implications for the marketers. The males should be targeted in the communication as they were

the decision-makers in dairy products. The advertisement copy should be designed keeping in mind the young consumer groups. The advertisement appeal should be chosen with the objective of enticing these consumers. Unmarried consumers had heavy say in brand choices and selection of dairy products; hence, the traditional use of married couples in the advertisement copy should be revived. Educated consumers prefered the branded dairy, seemingly apparent from high awareness and hygiene and purity concerns. Nuclear and small families preferred branded dairy because of the ease and convenience of using readymade dairy products as they were time-crunched, and typically both the spouses were working. Also, the dairy consumption in nuclear households was less comparative to joint and big families. Hence, the ratio of aggregate expenditure on branded v/s non-branded dairy products was lower in small and nuclear families.

Importance of Attributes While Purchasing Dairy Products

Product attributes were determinant of brand loyalty and brand identity (Nishitani and Itoh, 2016). In the last part of the study, an effort was made to understand consumers' attribute preferences while making purchase decisions (Table 2). Common dairy items were included for attribute listing. Two hundred consumers of each dairy item were selected and were asked to rate the attributes in order of their preferences. Ranked order analysis was used to analyze the responses.

Consumers were asked about the importance of 11 different attributes of milk within the five levels of importance that consisted of most important to most unimportant category and ranked accordingly. It was concluded that quality had the highest rank, followed by freshness in the second rank, taste in the third rank and flavour in the fourth rank. The brand image occupied the sixth position and product safety in the seventh position. The bottom ranks were occupied by colour with the tenth position and the eleventh position by advertisement.

It was inferred that quality of butter had the highest rank, followed by taste, freshness, flavour and reasonable price. Bottom ranks were occupied by colour with the tenth position

Table 2. Consumer's attribute preferences in purchasing dairy products

Factor	Dairy milk		Butter milk		Curd		Paneer		Ghee	
	Weighted average	Rank	Weighted average	Rank	Weighted average	Rank	Weighted average	Rank	Weighted average	Rank
Quality	14.80	1	14.53	1	14.60	1	14.86	1	14.00	1
Flavour	13.40	4	13.40	4	14.20	3	13.33	4	13.70	3
Freshness	13.80	2	14.06	3	13.86	4	3.28	2	13.46	4
Colour	11.70	10	11.93	10	12.46	9	12.80	8	12.66	8
Taste	13.73	3	14.40	2	14.33	2	13.26	5	13.80	2
Brand image	11.20	6	12.60	8	12.53	8	13.13	6	13.13	5
Reasonable price	13.00	5	12.93	5	13.10	6	12.60	9	12.80	7
Availability	12.40	8	12.93	5	12.93	7	13.60	3	12.26	10
Advertisements	10.93	11	11.86	11	11.73	11	11.93	10	12.13	11
Product safety	12.60	7	12.73	7	13.40	5	13.13	6	13.06	6
Attractive packing	12.06	9	12.13	9	12.26	10	11.60	11	12.40	9

followed by advertisement. Similarly, curd quality had the highest rank, followed by taste, flavour, freshness, reasonable price, availability, attractive packaging and advertisement. It was concluded that paneer quality had the highest rank, followed by freshness, availability, flavour, product image, brand safety, advertisement and attractive packaging. The ghee quality had the highest rank, followed by taste, flavour, freshness, product safety, reasonable price, availability and advertisement.

The study of preference of attributes regarding the purchase of dairy products revealed that majorly quality taste, freshness and flavour were the most sought-after characteristics for all dairy items under study viz., milk, buttermilk, curd, paneer and ghee. The least preferred attributes were packing, colour and advertisement. It's evident that dairy being a food item attributes confirming the suitability of consumption were given preference over price, place, and promotion.

The study concluded that despite rising fervour in the dairy sector with the entry of multinational and national players' augmenting cooperatives' presence, the companies' communication efforts were inadequate. The awareness level of the consumers was on the lower side, limited to local dairy companies and the oldest dairy cooperative of India, Amul. Further, the consumers had very little information about the new range of value-added products, new variants in existing product items, and new product innovations defining the face of today's dairy industry in India viz., sweets, yogurt, etc. More than 60-62% of dairy consumers revealed

that the company's advertisement influenced their buying decision, but a whopping number of consumer gathered information about the brand while shopping in the stores, evidently illuminating the deficient pull generated by the dairy companies in the stores the market. Examination of the socio-demographic profile of the dairy consumers presented significant implications for the marketers (Table 2). Male and young consumer groups emerged as the decision-makers in dairy products. The advertisment copy should be designed to appeal to these customers. The study seeks to reverse the traditional use of married couples in the advertisement copy in favour of unmarried consumers. They were found to intensely impact the brand choices and selection of dairy products. Educated consumers favoured the branded dairy, seemingly apparent from high awareness level and hygiene and purity concerns. Nuclear and small families preferred branded dairy, practically matching the requirements of double-income households. Moreover, the dairy consumption in nuclear households was less comparative to joint and big families. Hence, the ratio of aggregate expenditure on branded v/s non-branded dairy products was lower in small and nuclear families.

The study of preference of attributes regarding the purchase of dairy products indicated that dairy being a food item attribute validating the aptness of consumption was given preference over price, place and promotion. The quality taste, freshness and flavour were the most sought-after attributes for all dairy items under study, and the least preferred attributes were packing, colour and advertisement.

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