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Satisfaction Analysis of Indian Sweets Consumers in Varanasi: Perspectives and the Road Ahead

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India, the land of festivals, had always been a home to a variety of sumptuous sweets. Owing to several factors like increased disposable income, time-starved dual-income households etc., the demand for fast food has witnessed anuptrend. Besides freshly prepared traditional Indian sweets,cakes, pastries, packaged sweets had also been on upsurge. The present research attempts to analyze the conventional sweets market.Therefore,the consumer's profile, decisional variables, and satisfaction with sweet sellers in Varanasi, one of the major cities of Uttar Pradesh, were studied. The study was conducted on the customers of major sweet sellers in Varanasi, which includedKsheersagar, Rajbandhu, Rajshree, and Bengal Sweet House. The sellers were selected for the study based on criteria of highest number of branches and customer base in Varanasi city. The study was an exploratorystudy based on primary data collected from 480 respondentswho were selected on a random basis through a structured questionnaire. Study concluded that consumers were satisfied with the sweet Consumers were satisfied with the sweet sellers in Varanasi on parameters of quality, taste, availability, price, and cleanliness. It was concluded that consumers had positive perception towards the sweet shops on all parameters under study, like product offered, service delivery and facilities which definitely raises high barriers to entry for new players. But it's imperative that the sweet sellers should continue to add value to their customers as its key to sustained loyalty.

Keywords : festivals, income households, perception, customers, loyalty.

Introduction

Delectable sweets are an essential component of India's diversified and rich food culture. Food market is witnessing the commercialization of traditional foods with consumer's focus on safety and healthalong with rich taste in food.Since time immemorial, a major part of milk

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has been used in India for preparing a wide variety of dairy delicacies, an unending array of sweets and other specialties from different regions of country following set processes. Over the millennia, these processes have largely been unaltered being in the hand of Halwayis, the traditional sweets makers who form the core of this cottage industry.

The food service industry is broadly divided into two sectors – the unorganized, and the organized sector. The former includes a food court, retail food chain etc. while the later includes *dhabas* and roadside stalls. The organized sector is mainly recognized by its ambience, hygiene and quality of food and services. In organized sector franchising is reckoned as the fastest and cheapest route of brand popularization. High and frequent customer traffic is a unique characteristic of food franchising. The consumer loyalty in food sector oftendepends on the taste ambience, quick service etc. A small fraction of consumers choose the outlet based on locational convenience while a major chunk of the market choose a food outlet on the basis of their past experience.

Sweets sector which has long been under the dominion of traditional Halwayis are witnessing new set of competitors from organized food sector. As the changesare sweeping in food as well as dairy sector alike, sweets market will definitely be affected by changing tastesand new players in offline and online market. The players in organized sector like Mother Dairy (milk cake, peda, gulab jamun etc) and Amul (kajukatli, doda barfi, rasmalai, gulabjamunetc) are already competing with traditional sweet sellers and lately online sweet sellers have joined the battle. The online sweet sellers include Big Basket, Zomato etc.More international players may make inroads in the lucrative sweets market as the players like Danone who are already operating in dairy market may diversify in related items so it becomes all themore imperative for the indigenous players to profoundly understand their customer and design the strategies for ensuring loyalty which will definitely act as a barrier to entry for new players.

The present study aims to understand and analyze the consumer profile, decisional factors and satisfaction of customers as regards sweet sellers in Varanasi.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Consumer decision making is a complex process, and consumer preferences are baffling (Esmerino et al., 2017). Food consumption being influenced by sensory and non-sensory properties is inarguably intricate. Comprehending consumer decisions and preferences is imperative for marketers. Consumers perceive dairy products based on sensory attributes such as taste or aroma, health aspects, comfort attributes, and process attributes like organic, animal welfare, or genetic modification. (Kumar and Babu, 2014). Kubicova and Kadekova (2012) held that food quality can only be assessed post consumption. Singh and Kathuria (2016) said that low-quality, unhealthy and non-branded food is purchased by lower income groups. Marketers can deliver beyond customer expectations, but the precondition is that they must know their customers inside out. Familiarity with the preferences of their customers will definitely give them an edge over competitors. Recognizing the multiplicity of consumer preferences is fundamental to designing effective market strategies. According to Hille et al. (2019), knowledge of consumer characteristics assists in product and service differentiation that matches consumer needs. Kaenzig et al. (2013) established that the product portfolio could be 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 consumptionincreased around the world, especially in China, India and the EU. Jia *et al*. (2021) in their study observed heterogeneities in dairy 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. Based on literature reviewed and recent transformation in dairy industry as well as food industry, a need was felt to comprehend the consumer behavior as regards their profile, factors influencing their decisions and consumer satisfaction and perception towards existing sweet sellers as it will help the sellers devise marketing strategy to combat the indigenous as well as new rivals.

Results and Discussions

Profile of the Indian Sweets Consumers

Knowing your customer is the first step to marketing success, especially when the industry is witnessing a major transformation in terms of new entrants and changing customer needs and priorities. The first step to design effective marketing strategy to ace the competition is to be familiar with the customer. To understand the profile of consumers the information was collected as regards average monthly expenditure on Indian sweets, gender, age, marital status, education level, family size, occupation, and source of information.

Monthly expenditure of Respondents on Sweets

Consumer monthly expenditure on a product when viewed in light of average monthly income indicates the importance attached to purchase related decisions. According to Belch & Belch (2009), consumers spend minimal effort on alternative search and evaluation for low-ticket items. The higher the importance, the more complex is the decision making for the consumer. As per Hoyer (1984) consumers are not willing to engage in much decision making when the product is insignificant.

The respondent's monthly expenditure on dairy products was recorded in six expenditure ranges. It was inferred that 60 percent of respondents were spending less than Rs.1000, 12.5percent of respondents' expenditure was ranging between Rs. 1001-Rs3000 per month, 7.5percentof respondents spent money in the range of Rs. 3001- Rs. 6000 per month, 0.83percent of respondents' expenditure was Rs. 6001 to Rs. 9000 per month and 3.3percent of respondents spent Rs. 9001 to 12000 per month and 15.8percentof respondents' expenditure was not defined.

The figure clearly indicates that 40 percent of customers spend more than 1000 on sweets on a monthly basis and those who spend less than 1000 revealed that they mostly consume home cooked sweets as they had limited budget.

Table : Monthly expenditure on sweets by the respondents

Expenditure	**Frequency**	**Percentage**
up to 1000	288	60
Rs 1001-3000	60	12.5
Rs 3001-6000	36	2.5
Rs 6001-9000	4	0.83
Rs9001-12000	16	3.3
Not sure	76	15.8
Total	480	100

Table : Gender-Wise Distribution of the Respondents

Out of the respondents surveyed 78.3percent were males and 21.7percent were females. It can be inferred that majorly males purchased the sweets but gender wise consumption pattern was not identified.

Table : Classification of respondents based on Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage
Male	376	78.3 %
Female	104	21.7 %
Other	0	0
Total	480	100 %

Table : Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Out of the respondents surveyed 10 percent respondents were below 20 years and 81.7 percent belonged to the age group of 20-30 years. Respondents in the age group of above 30 years were meager 8.3 percent. Age distribution of sweet purchasers is skewed to below 30 years as in Indian households' young boys are assigned the task of purchasing groceries and daily household items, that is also the reason behind high number of male buyers.

Table : Age of Respondents

Age group	Frequency	Percentage
Under 20	48	10
20-30	392	81.7
Above 30	40	8.3
Total	480	100

Table : Marital Status

Out of the respondents surveyed 92.5percent respondents were unmarried, and only 7.5percent respondents were married. The figure can be attributed to the fact that 91.7 percent respondents were below 30 years of age.

Table: Marital status of the respondents

Status	Frequency	Percentage
Unmarried	444	92.5%
Married	36	7.5%
Total	480	100%

Table: Education level

From the data it is clear that most of the respondents hold master's degree 50.9percent (244 in number), 30percent hold bachelor's degree, 7.5percent were high school passed, 6.7percent hold the diploma degree, and only 5percent were having doctorates. This clearly manifests that people irrespective of their education level purchased and consumed sweets.

Table : Educational qualifications of the respondents

Education	Frequency	Percentage
High School	36	7.5
Diploma	32	6.7
Bachelor's Degree	144	30
Master's Degree	244	50.9
Doctoral Degree	24	5
Illiterate	0	0
Total	480	100

Family Size

From the table it is clear that family arrangement has no role over sweets purchase and consumption, only impact can be seen in terms of quantity purchased as number of members are less in nuclear families.

Table : Family of the respondents

Family	Frequency	Percentage
Nuclear Family	240	50
Joint Family	240	50
Total	480	100

Occupation

Occupation plays a very important role in deciding a person's consumption pattern. It was revealed that 78.3percent of the respondents were students, 10percent respondents belonged to service category, 4.2percent were involved in business, 2.5percent were unemployed, and 0.83percent were housewives. It indicates that most of the respondents who purchased Indian sweets were students, but that is not attributable to occupation rather to the fact that families'sign-up grown-up kids for general household works. Hence, it was found that in sweet consumption occupation has no role to play.

Table : Occupation of the respondents

Employment	Frequency	Percentage
Student	376	78.3
House wife	4	0.83
Unemployed	12	2.5
Business	20	4.2
Service	48	10
Other	20	4.5
Total	480	100

Consumer Decision Dynamics

Source of Information

Out of 400 respondents 52.5percentselected sweet sellers based on recommendations of their friend and relatives, followed by 10percent respondents who were influenced by newspaperadvertisements, 9.2percent respondents took purchase decision being influenced bythe window display, 5.8percentwere influenced by selling efforts of shopkeeper, 5percent from the television and 0.16percent were influenced towards purchasethrough radio advertisements. Therefore, it was found that word of mouth largely influenced the consumer purchase of sweets.

Table : Source of Information

Source	Frequency	Percentage
Television	24	5
Radio	8	0.16
Newspaper	48	10
Magazine	28	5.8
Friend/Relative	252	52.5
Shopkeeper	28	5.8
Window display	44	9.2
Other	48	10
Total	480	100

Ranking various factors affecting the purchase decision of the consumers

The consumers were asked to rank the factors affecting their purchase decision. It was found that quality acted as the prominent decisive factor effecting the purchase decision of sweets for almost 75.8percentrespondents, closely followed by taste which effected the purchase decision of around 74.8 percent of the respondents.As per the consumer rankings other factors were nutritive value for health, service, environment, packaging, quantity, brand, location, offer and discount, advertisement, and price

Table : Factors influencing respondents' purchase decision

Factor	Percentage					Mean
	Very imp.	**Some what imp.**	**Un-decided**	**Somewhat unimp.**	**not imp at all**	
Price	19.1	24.1	3.3	20	33.3	2.75
Brand	31.6	18.3	4.2	32.5	13.3	3.22
Quantity	31.6	16.6	15.2	20	15.8	3.28
Quality	55	12.5	2.5	16.6	13.3	3.79

Taste	55.7	8.3	5.8	10.8	18.3	3.74
Advertisement	10.8	25	16.6	27.5	20	2.79
Packaging	25	27.5	10	17.5	20	3.2
offer & discount	20.8	21.6	18.3	20.8	18.3	2.85
Location	28.3	16.6	11.6	20.8	22.5	3.0
Environment	37.5	20	7.5	16.6	18.3	3.41
Service	41.7	20.8	4.2	18.3	15	3.55
Nutrition value	44.2	18.3	5	15	17.5	3.56

Customer Satisfaction Analysis

Customer satisfaction is the difference between consumer expectation and perception of performance. The satisfaction level of Indian sweets customers was measured by analyzing their expectation and perception of sweet shops**.**

Expectation of consumers from Sweet Shops

The researcher tried to find out what consumers expected from the sellers of Indian sweets.The following table depicts the consumer expectation from sweet shops based on weighted average mean. It was found that 89 percent of respondents expected good taste from sellers obviously as sweets and confectionaries are consumed for taste which was followed by freshness for 87percentof respondents. Other factors in order were the Availability of product, attractive packaging and reasonable price. Packaging took a backseat as generally people purchase sweets for self-consumption except on festivals and occasions. Also, it was found that consumers attributed higher price as an indicator of high quality so price was not much of an issue in sweets.

Table : Expectation of respondents towards various aspects of the Sweets Shop

	Expectation Level					Mean
	Strongly agree	**Agree**	**Neutral**	**Disagree**	**Strongly Disagree**	
Taste	56.7	37.5	4.1	.83	.83	4.48
Freshness	49.2	39.1	9.16	2.5	0	4.35
Availability of Product	30.8	40.8	25	1.7	1.7	3.97
Attractive Packaging	25	44.17	20.8	7.5	2.5	3.81
Reasonable Price	20.8	46.7	18.3	10	4.1	3.7

Perception of Consumers towards Sweet Shops

The consumer perception about Indian sweets sellers in Varanasi was measured on a 5-point scale where the consumers were asked to evaluate sweetshops on certain parameters. 91.2 percent consumers found "The facilities are very attractive and comfortable" at the sweetshops selected for the study. 81.8 percent of the respondents said "I will recommend this place to my friend and family" and"sweet is excellent at this place". 81 percent of the respondents said "I will continue going to this place in the future", followed by 80.4 percent respondents with opinion that "I receive exactly what I ordered in the way I placed the order", and "service is very prompt". 79.6 percent respondents said that "employees readily answer my question and concerns".

It was found that consumers had positive perception towards the sweet shops on all parameters under study, which definitely raises barriers of entry for new players yet it is imperative for the indigenous sellers to keep adding the benefits provided to their customer

Table: Perception of respondents towards Sweet Shops

Rate the following factor	Percentage					
Factor	Strong Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strong Disagree	
The facilities are very attractive and comfortable.	38.3	40	21.7	0	0	4.56
Service is very prompt.	28.3	50	17.5	4.17	0	4.02
Employees are readily available to answer my question and concerns.	33.3	41.7	16.7	6.7	1.6	3.98
I receive exactly what I placed the order.	39.1	40	10	5.85	5	4.02
Sweet is excellent at this place	39.1	40	12.5	5.8	2.5	4.07
I will can to going this place is the future.	39.1	34.2	20.8	4.2	1.7	4.05
Iwill recommend this place to my friends and family.	35.8	44.1	13.3	6.7	0	4.09

Satisfaction level of consumer from sweet sellers

Consumer Satisfaction from sweetshops was measured based on sixparameters. Majorly customers were satisfied with quality and taste.88.6 percent of the respondents were satisfied with the quality and 80percentof respondents were satisfied with the taste. 79.8 percent of the consumers were satisfied with the availability, 76 percent with priceand quantity, and 72.4 percent respondents were satisfied with the packaging. Consumers were least satisfied with the packaging of the sweets.

Table: Satisfaction level of consumer for Sweet Shop

Rate the following factor	Percentage (percent)						Mean
Factor	**total**	**Strongly satisfied**	**Satisfied**	**Neutral**	**Unsatisfied**	**Strongly unsatisfied**	
Quality	120	50	43.3	6.7	0	0	4.43
Quantity	120	16.7	63.3	11.7	.83	7.5	3.80
Price	120	22.5	43.3	26.7	6.7	.83	3.8
Packaging	120	30	48.3	15	6.7	0	3.62
Availability	120	29.2	46.7	21.7	0	1.7	3.99
Taste	120	53.3	37.5	6.7	.83	1.7	4.0

Conclusion

The study explored the dimensions of consumer profile, decision dynamics and satisfaction of consumers to discern the kinetics of dairy industry that is undergoing major transitions as regards indigenous players, new entrants and product categories as well. Sweets are pivotal to rich food culture on India. The results were consistent with the assumption that Indian households consume sweets irrespective of their monthly income. Households spent on readymade sweets and those who were low in income consumed homemade sweets.However, the demographic factors like gender, age, marital status, education level, and occupation had no impact on purchase and consumption pattern of Indian sweets consumers except the family size which merely influenced the quantity purchased.

The consumers of Indian sweets selected the seller primarily based on commendation of friends and relatives; hence word of mouth had a prominent role in influencing the purchase decision which is an outcome of consumer satisfaction. The respondents unanimously attributed highest importance to quality and taste amongst the factors affecting the purchase decision of consumers regarding sweet sellers. While selecting sweet seller majority of consumers expected good taste and freshness of sweets while packaging and price took a backseat.

It was found that consumers had positive perception towards the sweet shops on all parameters under study, like product offered, service delivery and facilities which definitely raises high barriers to entry for new players. the sweet sellers should continue to add value to their customers as its key to sustained loyalty.

Consumers were satisfied with the sweet sellers in Varanasi on parameters of quality, taste, availability, price, and cleanliness.

Implications

The study confirms some assumptions about sweet consumption and also brings to the fore some new findings that may influence the business strategies of the sweet sellers in Varanasi. The study imply that consumers spend regularly on sweets commensurate with their income, but at the same time high price of sweets is taken as an indicator of high quality. So sweet sellers may go for a two-way stretch to tap the customers across the income levels. The demographic variables hardly influenced the sweet consumption but behavioral factors specially loyalty, occasion, usage rate etc. influenced the consumer purchase and consumption. Hence sweet sellers should adopt the strategy of behavioral segmentation.

Sweet sellers need to connect with customers through word of mouth as it flagrantlyinfluenced the purchase decision of the consumers as against traditional modes of advertising. The sweet seller should design their marketing mix with a focus on quality, taste, and freshness as these parameters were assigned greater importance by customers.

The study also imply that although consumers had positive perception towards the sweet shops on parameters like product offered, service delivery and facilities which definitely raises high barriers to entry for new players, the sweet sellers should continue to add value to their customers as its key to sustained loyalty. They should try to diversify their product offering and price ranges to cater to most of the market and raise the barriers for new national and international competitors.

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