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Study on factors influencing the consumer preference towards branded and unbranded masala products in Theni District

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Abstract

This article explore that the food industry has undergone significant changes due to evolving consumer preferences and an increased focus on convenience and quality. Spices and masalas, crucial elements in Indian cuisine, play a vital role in enhancing flavor and nutritional value. This study explores consumer behavior towards branded and unbranded masala products, using the Relative Importance Index (RII) to analyze and rank influencing factors. Conducted in the Theni district of Tamil Nadu, the research focuses on a region emblematic of shifting consumer dynamics driven by urbanization. The study draws insights from previous research by Rajanbabu and Ganesan (2015), Indumathi *et al.*, (2020) and Kavinkesinikethan *et al.*, (2019) to examine consumer perceptions and preferences. RII scores highlighted top factors influencing branded masala preferences: accessibility (0.923), packaging (0.890), quality (0.760), taste (0.724), and advertising (0.723). Unbranded preferences focused on affordability (0.787), masala freshness (0.680), taste (0.673), quality (0.667), and family approval (0.643). Through the RII, factors impacting choices for branded and unbranded masala products are evaluated, unveiling accessibility, attractive packaging, quality, taste, and advertisement as prominent influencers for both. These findings offer valuable insights into consumer behavior in the realm of masala products, shedding light on the complex interplay between tradition, innovation, and preferences in the culinary market.

Keywords: Consumer behavior, consumer preference, masala products, branded, unbranded, Relative Importance Index (RII), accessibility, packaging, quality, taste, advertisement

1. Introduction

Recent years have seen a substantial transition in the food sector as a result of shifting customer tastes and a focus on convenience and quality. Spices have a unique position in Indian cuisine since they are essential to the cuisine's complex and varied flavour. An essential ingredient in Indian cuisine is a spice mixture known as masala. Spices and masala, a mixture of ground spices, are of utmost significance in the Indian context since they not only improve the flavour of food but also its nutritional content, boosting the flavour and scent of numerous foods. The flavour, perfume, and overall sensory experience of many cuisines throughout the world are significantly improved by spices and masalas.

These culinary ingredients have been used for centuries to add depth, complexity, and a distinct character to dishes, making them an integral part of traditional and contemporary cooking. In recent years, the masala industry has witnessed a significant shift, with the emergence of both branded and unbranded masala products in the market.

Consumer preferences and decisions in the food sector are intricate phenomena that are impacted by a wide range of variables. This study explores the complex world of consumer behaviour in the context of masala goods, a staple of Indian cooking. Theni district in Tamil Nadu, an area of considerable size and significance, serves as the setting for this study. This area is representative of how the consumer environment is changing because of urbanization, which has increased people's awareness of their health and willingness to spend money on high-quality food goods. Researchers from diverse geographical and cultural backgrounds have given the choices consumers make between branded and unbranded spices a great deal of attention in the field of culinary preferences.

The exploration into these preferences offer a window into the intricate dynamics that guide consumer behaviors in the marketplace.

This introduction delves into a trio of studies conducted by Rajanbabu and Ganesan (2015) ^[1], Indumathi *et al.*, (2020) ^[2] and Kavinkesinikethan *et al.*, (2019) ^[3] each shedding light on the captivating interplay between consumer perceptions and preferences for branded and unbranded spices. In their investigation, Rajanbabu and Ganesan (2015) ^[1] the study underscores the significance of comprehending consumer behavior in the dynamic processed spice products market. Firms must swiftly adapt strategies to meet changing preferences, enhancing market share. By deciphering consumption patterns, this research empowers businesses to tailor offerings effectively. A deeper grasp of evolving consumer tastes fosters informed decisions and sustains competitiveness. This study contributes essential insights, guiding firms to navigate the complex landscape and ensuring their ability to cater to evolving consumer preferences successfully.

Indumathi *et al.*, (2020) ^[2] their study focused on consumers' preferences for processed spices in Bangalore and Chennai. Globalization's impact on consumer behavior towards convenience, health, and value is noted. Ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat products gained popularity. Educational backgrounds, family type, and income were considered for preference analysis. In Bangalore, Brand-2 dominated, while in Chennai, Brand-1 was preferred. Factors influencing choices included brand loyalty, quality, flavor, taste, product variety, and more. The Mann-Whitney test assessed consumption differences between cities. This study contributes to understanding changing consumer trends in processed foods.

Kavinkesinikethan *et al.*, (2019) ^[3] their research findings reveal a substantial preference among respondents for branded spice powders over homemade alternatives. Factors like the arduous nature of preparing homemade spices, time constraints, appealing packaging, ready availability, limited knowledge, individual preferences, product quality, current trends, and cost-effectiveness were examined to gauge their impact on consumer choices. The study suggests that players in the spice industry could enhance customer engagement through strategies such as offering discounts, diversifying flavors, prioritizing quality and aroma, and optimizing packaging convenience. The study underscores the vital role of advertising and promotional efforts in heightening consumer awareness and product visibility. Furthermore, the study highlights the significance of demographic factors, including age, education, family size, and income, in shaping consumer preferences for branded spice powders.

The heart of the analysis lies in the application of the Relative Importance Index (RII), a tool widely employed to rank attributes based on their perceived significance. By assigning numerical values to responses on a Likert scale, the RII provides a quantifiable measure of consumer sentiment. The factors driving preferences for both branded and unbranded masala products are meticulously assessed through this index. The subsequent sections of this article present and interpret the findings, offering a comprehensive understanding of the factors that sway consumer choices in this particular domain. The investigation's implications extend beyond mere consumer behavior, shedding light on the evolving dynamics between traditional practices and modern preferences in the realm of food consumption. As the global market for culinary products continues to evolve, insights from studies such as this one contributes to a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between tradition, innovation, and consumer behavior.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Selection of Study Area

Due to Theni district's size as one of Tamil Nadu's major districts, the study was restricted to it. Due to their higher income levels and altered lifestyles, city dwellers were becoming more health aware and were prepared to spend more for wholesome goods.

2.2 Sampling Design

Simple random sampling techniques had been used to choose the sample respondents in the Theni area. The district is naturally divided into two parts: the hilly areas, which are comprised of up of portions of the five taluks Theni, Bodinayakanur, Periyakulam, Uthamapalayam, and Andipatti and are covered in dense vegetation and perennial streams from the hills on the western side, and the Cumbum valley, which is located in Uthamapalayam taluk. There were 120 participants in the research as a whole. One hundred and twenty of them (60) were consumers of branded masala goods alone, sixty (60) were consumers of unbranded masala products only.

2.3 Method of Data Collection

To achieve the objective of the study, both primary data was collected for the study.

2.4 Primary Data

A well-structured interview schedule was used to obtain primary data via in-person interviews. The questionnaire was designed to collect data on consumer demographics, purchasing habits, masala consumption patterns, and factors that led consumers to buy masala products. It also sought to learn how satisfied consumers were with their purchases and consumption of spice mixture as well as any challenges they encountered.

2.5 Tools of analysis

The gathered data were processed, looked over, and tallied to produce relevant conclusions and interpretations. These methods were used to analyze and interpret the data.

2.6 Relative Importance Index (RII)

Relative Importance index used for ranking consumer satisfaction attributes in service operations. Whereas in this study Relative Importance Index (RII) was used to figure out the relative importance of each factors influencing consumer's preference for branded masala products and unbranded masala products. It was measured using 5 point Likert scale. Weightage was given in such ways that strongly agree carries 5 points and strongly disagree carries 1 point (Sao *et al.* (2017) ^[4]

RII was calculated using the following equation.

$$RII = \frac{5n_1 + 4n_2 + 3n_3 + 2n_4 + 1n_5}{A * N}$$

N₁ - Number of respondents for Strongly Agree

N₂ - Number of respondents for Agree

N₃ - Number of respondents for Neutral

N₄ - Number of respondents for Disagree

N₅ - Number of respondents for Strongly Disagree

A (Highest weight) = 5

N (Total No. of respondents) = 60

Relative importance of each item was calculated and ranks were assigned based on the RII score.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Factors influencing the consumer preference for branded masala products and unbranded masala products

The usage of branded masala goods and unbranded masala products was impacted by fourteen key factors. The data was analyzed using the Relative Important Index, which ranked the variables influencing customers to purchase both branded and unbranded masala products.

Table 1: Factors influencing the consumer preference for branded masala products (n = 60)

S. No	Factors	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
1.	Liked by family members	13 (21.67)	18 (30.0)	7 (11.67)	12 (20.00)	10 (16.66)	60 (100.0)
2.	Accessible	0 (0.0)	2 (3.33)	2 (3.33)	7 (11.67)	49 (81.67)	60 (100.0)
3.	Tastes good	2 (3.33)	9 (15.0)	16 (26.67)	16 (26.67)	17 (28.33)	60 (100.0)
4.	Masala freshness	16 (26.67)	4 (6.67)	20 (33.33)	10 (16.66)	10 (16.66)	60 (100.0)
5.	Quality	3 (5.0)	12 (20.0)	4 (6.67)	16 (26.67)	25 (41.67)	60 (100.0)
6.	Hygienic product	2 (3.33)	29 (48.33)	7 (11.67)	16 (26.67)	6 (10.0)	60 (100.0)
7.	Certified masala	5 (8.33)	16 (26.67)	13 (21.67)	19 (31.67)	7 (11.67)	60 (100.0)
8.	Attractive packaging	0 (0.0)	6 (10.0)	0 (0.0)	15 (25.0)	39 (65.0)	60 (100.0)
9.	Flexible quantity	20 (33.33)	5 (8.33)	4 (6.67)	7 (11.67)	24 (40.0)	60 (100.0)
10.	Habitual masala	7 (11.67)	21 (15.0)	3 (6.67)	20 (25.0)	9 (30.0)	60 (100.0)
11.	Advertisement	4 (6.67)	4 (6.67)	10 (16.66)	27 (45.0)	13 (21.67)	60 (100.0)
12.	Brand reputation	19 (31.67)	8 (13.33)	19 (31.67)	8 (13.33)	6 (10.0)	60 (100.0)
13.	Door delivery	14 (23.34)	24 (40.0)	5 (8.33)	17 (28.33)	0 (0.0)	60 (100.0)
14.	Affordable	12 (20.0)	17 (28.33)	7 (11.67)	10 (16.67)	14 (23.33)	60 (100.0)

(Figures in parenthesis indicates percentage total)

From the above Table 1 it could be inferred that most of the respondents strongly agreed that affordable, masala freshness, attractive packaging, liked by family, flexible quantity,

accessibility and flexible quantity were the important factors influencing the consumer’s preference for branded masala products.

Table 2: RII for factors influencing the consumer preference for branded masala products (n=60)

S. No	Factors	RII	Rank
1.	Accessible	0.923	I
2.	Attractive packaging	0.890	II
3.	Quality	0.760	III
4.	Tastes good	0.724	IV
5.	Advertisement	0.723	V
6.	Flexible quantity	0.633	VI
7.	Certified masala	0.633	VII
8.	Habitual masala	0.610	VIII
9.	Hygienic product	0.583	IX
10.	Masala freshness	0.580	X
11.	Liked by family	0.560	XI
12.	Affordable	0.530	XII
13.	Brand reputation	0.513	XIII
14.	Door delivery	0.483	XIV

The RII values presented in Table 2 indicated that accessible, attractive packaging, quality, tastes good and advertisement were the relatively important factors which comes under the

first five ranks with RII score of 0.923, 0.890, 0.760, 0.724, 0.723 respectively for influencing consumer preference for branded masala products.

Table 3: Factors influencing the consumer preference for cross unbranded masala products. (n = 60)

S. No	Factors	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree	Total
1.	Affordable	5 (8.33)	6 (10.0)	4 (6.67)	19 (31.67)	26 (43.33)	60 (100.0)
2.	Accessible	11 (18.33)	21 (15.0)	9 (15.0)	13 (21.67)	6 (10.0)	60 (100.0)
3.	Tastes good	5 (8.33)	11 (18.33)	13 (21.67)	17 (28.33)	14 (23.33)	60 (100.0)
4.	Masala freshness	5 (8.33)	15 (25.0)	8 (13.33)	15 (25.0)	17 (28.33)	60 (100.0)
5.	Quality	5 (8.33)	13 (21.67)	13 (21.67)	15 (25.0)	14 (23.33)	60 (100.0)
6.	Liked by family members	8 (13.33)	18 (30.0)	5 (8.33)	11 (18.33)	18 (30.0)	60 (100.0)
7.	Certified masala	10 (16.66)	25 (41.67)	6 (10.0)	16 (26.67)	3 (5.0)	60 (100.0)
8.	Attractive packaging	27 (45.0)	26 (43.33)	5 (8.33)	2 (3.33)	0 (0.0)	60 (100.0)
9.	Traditional masala	13 (21.67)	11 (18.33)	4 (6.67)	15 (25.0)	17 (28.33)	60 (100.0)
10.	Suggested by friends/ relatives	11 (18.33)	14 (23.33)	4 (6.67)	15 (25.0)	16 (26.67)	60 (100.0)
11.	Advertisement	20 (33.34)	17 (28.33)	3 (5.0)	7 (11.67)	13 (21.67)	60 (100.0)
12.	Flexible quantity	6 (10.0)	13 (21.67)	15 (25.0)	19 (31.67)	7 (11.67)	60 (100.0)
13.	Door delivery	15 (25.0)	22 (36.67)	9 (15.0)	9 (15.0)	5 (8.33)	60 (100.0)
14.	Local unbranded reputation	12 (20.0)	14 (23.33)	4 (6.67)	15 (25.0)	15 (25.0)	60 (100.0)

(Figures in parenthesis indicates percentage total)

From the above Table 3 it could be inferred that most of the respondents strongly agreed that affordability, quality, masala freshness, traditional masala and liked by family were the important factors influencing the consumer's preference for unbranded masala products.

Table 4: RII for factors influencing the consumer preference for unbranded masala products (n=60)

S. No	Factors	RII	Rank
1.	Affordable	0.787	I
2.	Masala freshness	0.680	II
3.	Tastes good	0.673	III
4.	Quality (No Adulterants)	0.667	IV
5.	Liked by family members	0.643	V
6.	Traditional masala	0.640	VI
7.	Suggested by family/relatives	0.637	VII
8.	Flexible quantity	0.627	VIII
9.	Local unbranded reputation	0.623	IX
10.	Accessible	0.540	X
11.	Certified masala	0.523	XI
12.	Advertisement	0.520	XII
13.	Door delivery	0.490	XIII
14.	Attractive packaging	0.340	XIV

The RII values presented in Table 3.4 indicated that affordability, masala freshness, taste goods, quality and family members likeliness were the relatively important factors which comes under the first five ranks with RII score of 0.787, 0.680, 0.673, 0.667 and 0.643 respectively for influencing consumer's preference for unbranded masala products.

4. Conclusion

This study examined fourteen significant attributes influencing the consumption of both branded and unbranded masala products, utilizing the Relative Importance Index (RII) to analyze and rank these factors. The RII scores revealed that accessibility, attractive packaging, quality, taste, and advertisement were the top-ranking factors influencing consumer preferences for branded masala products, with RII scores of 0.923, 0.890, 0.760, 0.724, and 0.723, respectively. Similarly, for unbranded masala products, the RII values highlighted affordability, masala freshness, taste, quality, and family approval as the key factors, with RII scores of 0.787, 0.680, 0.673, 0.667, and 0.643, respectively. These findings provide valuable insights into the factors guiding consumer choices in the context of masala products, shedding light on the nuanced dynamics of consumer preferences for both branded and unbranded options.

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