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A study on the import of exotic fruits and factors influencing its consumption

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Abstract

Exotic fruits which is unfamiliar and non-native fruits gaining popular among people. The objective of the study is to provides an investigation of the exotic fruits in the context of imports and consumption, seek to identify the factors which influence consumer to purchase exotic fruits for consumption. This study was conducted in Coimbatore city and an empirical survey was conducted in four retail stores through direct interviews with structured questionnaires from 120 exotic fruit consumers. The data regarding imports of fresh fruits was collected from news websites, official reports, articles, etc. The Garrett's ranking technique was adopted to examine the consumers purchase influencing factors. The finding of this study indicated surge in imports of fresh fruits in India from 2019 to 2022 in terms of both quantity and value. Health is a predominant factor driving the preference for exotic fruits consumption followed by Taste and family preference. Other factors which influenced the consumption were dietary habits and availability of a wide variety of fruits and in-store promotions/discounts. Overall, this article proposed valuable insights for businesses seeking to tap into India's growing exotic fruit market, emphasizing the importance of health, taste, and effective marketing in reaching a diverse and increasingly distinguishing consumer base.

Keywords: Exotic fruits, imports, preference, factors, consumption

1. Introduction

India is the second largest producer of fruits in the world, after Brazil (eagri.org). According to FAO, in 2020, India accounted for 10.9% of global fruit production. India has exported 674,291.70 MT of Fresh Fruits other than Grapes and Mango to the world, worth Rs. 2,736.99 crores/ 339.00 USD Million during the year 2022-23 (apeda.gov.in). In 2023, India's total fruit production was estimated to be around 107 million metric tons (statista.com). The major fruits grown in India include Mangoes, Grapes, Apples, Apricots, Oranges, Bananas, Avocados, Guava, Litchi, Papaya, Sapota, and Watermelons. India's main exports include mango pulp and fresh mangoes. The consumer market in India is showing a growing trend in the consumption of fruits with rising interest in plant-based diets, healthy lifestyles, etc. and it was also reported by ICMR that the per capita fruit intake was 120 grams (ICMR, 2020). The trend has posited growth for both domestic and exotic fruits. Consumption of Imported fruits and vegetables in India has increased from nil in 2002 to 721,493 tones in 2021, and from negligible to over ₹19,700 crore in 2022 (Hindu Business Line, 2022) .

Exotic fruits are fruits that are not native to a region and are cultivated outside of their place of origin (fruitsinfo.com) and defined as fruits with unique sensory characteristics and limited market share (Reis. 2019) ^[15]. According to Volza's India, Indian Importers purchased 57.70 thousand shipments of fresh fruit from 2,373 suppliers during the year 2023. The top three countries importing fresh fruit are China (95,325 shipments), India (57,656 shipments), and the United Arab Emirates (54,488). Consumer preferences for exotic fruits have witnessed a remarkable shift, reflecting a growing craving for diverse culinary experiences and healthier lifestyles. Due to its unique flavours, vibrant colours, and often perceived health benefits, it attracts consumers to explore beyond their familiar choices. According to estimates, the market for exotic fruits is worth Rs. 3000 crores (FAO, 2021).

According to a report released by Asian fruits 2022, Apples and oranges drove the increase, together accounting for more than 80% of total fresh fruit imports. Oranges overtook kiwifruit as the third largest import category, even though kiwifruit imports also grew strongly, rising by 43% year-on-year. Avocados, cherries, and blueberries all recorded strong growth in 2021. The imports of apples, dates, kiwis, oranges, blueberry, rambutan, mangosteen, peach, plum, lychee, Grapefruit, persimmons, and avocados have exhibited consistent growth, indicating shifting preferences towards higher-value varieties.

The surge in exotic fruit imports is driven by changing dietary habits, a young, tech-savvy population, a growing middle class, growth of national and international retail chains, health awareness and showcases a promising trend in India's evolving retail and agricultural landscape. According to the 2021 Global Retail Development Index (GRDI), India is ranked second based on market attractiveness, country risk, market saturation and time pressure. The retail sector contributes about 11-12% of India's GDP employing 35 million people and total retail sales of \$1.163 trillion (Kearney, 2021) [23]. Organized retail includes hypermarkets, supermarkets, substantial privately owned retail businesses, or retail chains etc. On the other hand, unorganized retailing includes a sizeable proportion of small retailers operating their own Kirana, mom-and-pop stores, convenience stores, hand carts, general stores, hawkers, etc. The objective of the study is to examine the import of exotic fruits and to identify the factors influencing the consumer in purchase of exotic fruits.

2. Materials and Methods

2.1 Study area

Four retail store outlets located in Coimbatore city was purposively selected as the study area Primary data was collected from consumers visiting the stores through direct interview method using well-structured and detailed questionnaire. A total of 120 exotic fruit consumers were

interviewed using convenience sampling method, Secondary data was collected from various published reports, journals etc.

2.2 Tool for analysis

Descriptive analysis

Average and Percentage analysis was employed to examine the general characteristics of the consumers, which encompassed aspects such as age, gender, marital status, educational status etc.

$$\text{Percentage analysis} = \frac{\text{Number of respondents}}{\text{Total sample size}} \times 100$$

Garrett's Ranking Technique

It was used to study the most significant factors which influenced consumer's choice while purchasing the exotic fruits.

$$\text{Percent position} = \frac{100 (R_{ij} - 0.5)}{N_j}$$

R_{ij} Rank provided by jth respondents for the ith variable
N_j Number of variable ranked by jth respondents

The percent position estimated is translated into scores using Garrett's Table. After adding up each person's scores for each factor, the total value of scores and mean scores are determined. The most significant factor is thought to be the one with the highest mean value (Garret and Woodworth, 1969).

3. Result and Discussion

3.1 Import of fresh exotic fruits

India's fresh fruit imports has almost doubled and reached record levels of 721,493 tonnes during 2021 from 359,716 tonnes in 2021 (Fresh Intelligence.com). The tremendous increase in demand of exotic fruits in all over the country.



Source: APEDA, Agricultural statistics at a glance 2022

Fig 1: India's fresh fruits imports from 2010-2021

It could be observed from the figure 1 there has been continuous fluctuation in the quantity of fresh fruits imports, with rapid increase in 2012, 2013, 2015, 2017, and 2021. The quantity of imports has steadily grown from 562,190 tones

(2010) to 1,552,490 tons in 2022. The steady increase in growth can be posited towards a rising demand for fresh fruits among Indian consumers. There was a significant surge during 2014 (769,140 tones) to 2016 (900,980 tones),

indicating a period of heightened consumption or shifts in fruit preferences. The subsequent fluctuations from 2019 to 2020 can be attributed to trading restrictions during pandemic followed by a sharp rise in 2021 and 2022 reflecting the responsiveness of the market to factors such as changing consumer tastes, which support a healthy lifestyle. The value of fresh fruit imports also displayed consistent growth. The value of imports has exhibited a steady rise post COVID -19

pandemic, with more prominent growth of imports in the year 2021 and 2022. The value started at Rs. 2,843.47 crore in 2010 and reached Rs. 18,342.09 crore in 2022. This increase in value reflects a combination of factors, including the increased demand for exotic and premium fruit varieties, inflation, changes in global market prices, and the overall growth of the Indian economy.

Table 1: Import data of major exotic fruits in India

Fruits	2020-21		2021-22		2022-23		Major exporting countries
	Qty (in MT)	Rs (in Crore)	Qty (in MT)	Rs (in Crore)	Qty (in MT)	Rs (in Crore)	
Apples	2,72,435.30	1,777.08	4,59,251.82	2866.20	3,73,505.68	2348.68	Turkey, Italy, Chile
Dates	3,42,966.16	1365.37	3,47,319.81	1428.55	3,64,502.56	1657.91	Iraq, UAE, Iran
Kiwi Fruits	49,483.10	393.23	64,779.38	52,7.77	50,920.04	560.95	Chile, Greece, New Zealand
Oranges	53,735.11	256.81	1,65,812.10	717.28	1,30,372.06	545.71	Egypt, South Africa, UAE
Avocados	600.24	13.04	1,223.37	26.44	2,210.54	54.65	Tanzania Rep, Netherland, New Zealand
Plums & Sloes	6,623.09	39.72	4,260.53	33.19	6,139.03	45.55	China, South Africa, Spain
Cranberries, Bilberries & Other Fruits of The Genus <i>Vaccinium</i>	187.83	8.61	493.63	19.10	797.49	43.25	Netherland, Peru, Chile
Grapefruit Including Pomelos,	215.37	0.98	381.2	2.26	715.65	3.79	South Africa, Egypt, UAE
Peaches, Including Nectarines,	212.47	2.21	297.72	2.30	222.55	2.70	Netherland, South Africa, Turkey
Mangosteen	26.41	0.79	47.73	1.23	38.45	1.57	Thailand, Vietnam, UAE
Persimmons	57.27	1.00	39.26	0.75	37.72	0.85	Spain, South Africa

Source: APEDA (2023)

From the above table 1 it could be concluded apples, dates and kiwi fruits were the top three imports in India. Over the span of three years from 2020 to 2023, the export dynamics of various fruits showed a diverse range of increasing trends. Apple exports surged significantly, at 4, 59,251.82 MT in 2021-22 from 3, 73,505.68 MT in 2022-23, with major supplier of Turkey, Italy, and Chile. Dates with quantities soaring around 3, 42,966.16 MT in 2020-21, increasing to 3, 47,319.81 MT in 2021-22, and further reaching 3, 64,502.56 MT in 2022-23, supplied by Iraq, UAE, and Iran. Kiwi fruits imports surged from 64,779.38 MT in 2021-22 to 50,920.04 MT in 2022-23, Chile, Greece, and New Zealand being major exported. Oranges imports surge to 1, 65,812.10 MT in 2021-22 and then decreasing to 1, 30,372.06 MT in 2022-23. Avocado exports risen from 600.24 MT in 2020-21 to 2,210.54 MT in 2022-23, with Tanzania Rep, Netherlands, and New Zealand as major exporters. Plum and sloe exports fluctuated, declining to 4,260.53 MT in 2021-22 and then increase to 6,139.03 MT in 2022-23, from China, South Africa, and Spain.

3.2 Socio economic characteristic of sample consumers

From the above table 2. It could be observed that, majority of the sample consumers were female. The largest segment of respondents fell in the 31 to 45-years (41.67%). According to a report Morbidity and Mortality Weekly Report (MMWR, 2019) released by Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) adults should consume 1.5–2 cup-equivalents of fruits daily.

The highest number of sample consumers had graduation degrees. A higher educational attainment and income were associated with higher fruit intake (Assari, 2018). Majority of the sample consumers were employees (70 percent) with 24.16% were government employees and 35.83% worked in the private sector. According to research conducted by Ronda-Perez 2020, the frequency of daily consumption of

fruit and vegetables in workers was 60% for fruit and 40% for vegetables. The results of the study revealed that 38.33% of consumers had incomes between 5.00-10.00 lakhs, and 32.50% earned more than 10.00 lakhs annually. According to Mustafa, 2021, people with higher income levels were found to consume more servings of fruits. Higher prices of fruits and vegetables can be a barrier for low-income individuals to include them in their diets.

Table 2: Demographic characteristic of exotic fruit consumer

Particular	Total (n=120)
Gender	
Male	50 (41.67)
Female	70 (58.33)
Age (years)	
18-30	21 (17.50)
31-45	50 (41.67)
46-60	36 (30.00)
>60	13 (10.83)
Educational status	
Primary	8 (6.67)
Secondary	15 (12.50)
Graduation	76 (63.33)
Post-graduation	21 (17.5)
Occupation	
Government Employee	29 (24.16)
Business	23 (19.17)
Private Employee	43 (35.83)
House wife	25 (20.83)
Annual Income	
less than 2.50 lakhs	13 (10.83)
2.50-5.00 lakhs	22 (18.33)
5.00-10.00 lakhs	46 (38.33)
More than 10.00 lakhs	39 (32.50)

Note: Parentheses indicate percentage

3.3 Factors influencing the purchase of exotic fruit among sample consumers

Consumers have a wide range of concern that influence their preferences when purchasing fruits, *viz.*, values of safety, nutrition, taste, and price were most important (Lusk and Briggeman, 2009) [7]. Various factors which influenced the consumers towards purchasing exotic fruits were ranked based on their preference and presented in Table 3. Factors covered include sensory appeal, familiarity and habit, social interactions, cost, availability, time constraints, personal ideology, media and advertising and health (Pollard, 2002) [13].

Table 3: Factors influencing the purchase of exotic fruits

S. No	Factors	Mean Score	Rank
1	Health consciousness	61.99	I
2	Taste	55.94	II
3	Family preference	50.73	III
4	New age dietary lifestyle	43.63	IV
5	Availability and Attractiveness of fruits	40.40	V
6	Friends and Media influence	36.93	VI
7	In store Promotion and Discount	28.49	VII

The factors influencing consumers' decisions when purchasing exotic fruits has been comprehensively examined, revealing their respective mean scores and elucidating their relative importance. Health emerged as an important factor influencing the purchase and ranked first by the sample consumers. Consumers placed significant importance on the health advantages that exotic fruits offer and consumers said post covid they are taking major changes in diet. According to Fruit Logistica trend report 2019, health-conscious consumers are looking for fresh, healthy produce that is convenient and connects emotionally. Fruits can lower blood pressure, reduce the risk of heart disease and stroke, prevent some types of cancer, lower risk of eye and digestive problems, and have a positive effect upon blood sugar, which can help keep appetite in check.

Taste of the fruits has a substantial mean score of 56.59, highlighting the taste and flavor of exotic fruits carry significant weight in consumer decisions emphasizing the importance of sensory satisfaction. In general, when choosing fruit and vegetables, consumers were mainly influenced by intrinsic and sensory product attributes such as origin, freshness, and seasonality (Massaglia, 2019) [8]. All internal quality traits that have to do with taste, smell and mouthfeel are important for the consumer. This means that firmness, mealiness, juiciness, crunchiness, sweetness, acidity, aroma and colour are all important quality traits for the consumer (freshknowledge.eu).

Family dynamics and preferences was ranked third with mean score of 49.32, influence the choice of exotic fruits. This suggests that familial considerations, such as the preferences of family members, play a role in determining what fruits are purchased. The decision-making process regarding fruit consumption is influenced by a range of individual and family-related factors, which can either positively or negatively impact the choice to eat fruits.

New Age Dietary Lifestyle with a mean score 43.65 was ranked fourth, consumers move towards fruits that align with contemporary dietary trends, which could include veganism, paleo, or gluten-free diets (Hindustan times, 2023) [33]. This indicates that consumers are considering how exotic fruits fit into their broader dietary choices.

The diversity of exotic fruit available in the store namely appearance, availability, varied taste, texture, colour, etc. signifies the role of having a range of options influenced their decisions. Consumers are more likely to choose venues or stores that provided a diverse selection of exotic fruits, catering to their different tastes and preferences. According to Zenk 2009 [21], the retail food environment played a significant role in fruit and vegetable consumption.

Social media influence with a mean score of 34.98, indicated recommendations and suggestions from friends or family have a moderate impact on purchase decisions. Word-of-mouth influences play a role in consumers' choices, indicating that personal experiences shared by those close to them can sway their decisions. The consumers were influenced by various cuisines, influencers, cooking shows, exhibitions etc. The influence of TV ads and sponsored social media ads has increased, leading to a greater impact on pre-purchase choice. Around 5 in 10 consumers almost always/frequently use their smartphone in-store for price comparison or to view live product reviews via social media before they buy (India Retail Bureau, 2023).

Instore promotions and discounts were ranked seventh with a mean score of 30.42. The consumers appreciate cost savings by discounts, combo deals, offers and are enticed by limited-time deals in supermarkets / hypermarkets. A study in the American Journal of Health Promotion found that marketing may guide people to eat better. According to Ball 2015, a 20% price reduction in fruit and vegetables increased household purchases by 35% for fruit and 15% for vegetables. A 10% price discount at the retail level could increase fruit consumption by 2.1 to 5.2%.

4. Conclusion

The study revealed that the import of fresh fruits in India gradually increased from 2015 to 2018 and post COVID there was a surge in 2021 and 2022. The major fresh fruit imported into India is Apple followed by dates and kiwi fruit in terms of both quantity and value. The majority of the exotic fruit consumers are female (58.33%) a large segment of respondents was aged 31 to 45 and most of the consumers had graduation degree. Health and nutritional value were the main factors which influenced the purchase of exotic fruits, followed by taste and family preference. The change in dietary lifestyle also influence the consumers, social media and promotions can further enhance a different fruit's appeal and visibility to the consumers. The Indian consumers with their rising disposable incomes, exposure to international cuisine and orientation towards healthy lifestyles are interested in exploring varied foods. Fruits that were earlier imported such as dragon fruits, rambutan, etc. were also cultivated in India. This study suggests that by understanding consumers' factor of influence and preferences for exotic fruit, by educating consumers about their health benefits through campaigns and cooking demonstrations, offering a diverse range of fruits, ensuring top-quality sourcing and establishing a strong retail and online presence and consider effective pricing, businesses can effectively tap into the expanding demand for exotic fruits in India.

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