

CONSCIOUS CONSUMPTION AND ITS IMPACT ON CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR: A DESK RESERACH

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Abstract

Conscious consumption can be understood as the buying practices that encourage consumers to make purchase decisions with a positive economic, social and environmental impact. There has been growing consciousness among consumers while buying and consuming food and health-related products in the last decade due to the rise in lifestyle diseases. Also, consumers are becoming more conscious about the impact of their consumption on themselves, society and the environment. This study explores the recent trend and shifts in health-conscious consumer behaviour based on the findings and suggestions by the various researchers in their studies. Further, the study also highlights food waste management issues. The study is based on secondary data.

1. Introduction

In the late twentieth century, the world witnessed a paradigm shift in the reach of education and the attitude of people towards life (Rana & Paul, 2017). From food and clothing to electronics and vehicles, purchasing is an inevitable part of our lives. While purchasing is an integral part of our life, mindless consumption should not be. There is a whole process that takes a product from the raw material stage to be displayed on shelves, and even after it comes to the end of its useful life. Along with price and quality, the social and environmental impact of products from production to disposal is influencing consumers' purchasing decisions. In other words, conscious consumerism is on the rise. Conscious consumers are also known as ethical consumers or green consumers.

In the present study, the focus is on conscious consumers' behaviour in terms of health and food. The rise in lifestyle diseases and obesity has led to consumers adopting health consciousness in their behaviour. Consumers are becoming more mindful about what they buy and eat. Further, post-pandemic there had been a significant change in behaviour, habits and thoughts regarding grocery buying, food wastage, price sensitivity etc. Consumers are more empowered than before and health is a non-negotiable priority (Arabian Business, 2022). Companies can no longer afford to ignore how consumers engage with their self-care as they become more proactive, mindful and motivated by well-being. A new breed of ethical

and health-conscious consumers looking beyond brands and labels is rising. Research in this field in the past decade spread out into various issues of food safety, environment consciousness, public health, sustainability, and mindfulness. Today consumers are becoming aware of the consequences of their consumption patterns on themselves, the community as a whole and the environment.

India is the world's fastest-growing health foods market and is forecasted to become a \$30 billion sector by 2026, a new report by an investment banking services firm said. The number of health-conscious consumers in India would increase from 108 million in 2020 to 176 million in 2026 (Economic Times, 2022). The report also estimated that there will be twice the per capita income spending on healthy foods by 2026. There has been growing interest in natural, organic, ayurvedic products and dietary supplements in Indian consumers (EY India, 2022).

This study explores the various trends in health-conscious consumer behaviour based on findings from various researchers. It also highlights issues of food waste and its management. Further, it focuses on how companies can make the best use of this shift in behaviour to find new business opportunities and to make themselves more competitive. This paper is divided into various sections: literature review, research methodology, findings and conclusion.

2. Literature review

Rana and Paul (2017) reviewed the factors that affect change in consumer behaviour toward organic food and their findings revealed a growing preference for organic food over conventional among health-conscious consumers. The factors include quality, safety, environmental friendliness, ethical consumerism, fashion trends etc. Organic foods tend to fulfil the changed expectations of modern consumers with less/no use of hazardous pesticides and fertilizers. This change provides a huge implication for the retail, marketing and distribution of organic foods. Birch, Memery and Kanakarathne (2018) examined the motivations behind local food purchasing behaviour, particularly the balance of egoistic motivations against altruistic motivations. Mindful consumers base their consumption decisions on both egoism or self-interest (what is good for me) and altruism or concern for the community (what is good for us). Soos and Biacs (2018) examined the role of product-related information and the factors impacting consumer attitudes during health-conscious food purchases. The authors studied the relationship between various consumer characteristics and behaviour patterns in Hungary. Vainio (2019) explored why consumers of meat-based diets are not convinced by scientific evidence and examined whether consumers of meat-based and plant-based diets attend to commercial information in different ways. The individuals are likely to attend to scientific evidence about food if they are motivated to make healthy and environmentally sustainable food choices, and have sufficient motivation and ability to assess the quality of information about healthy and environmentally sustainable eating. Galati et al. (2019) investigated that issues of health and environmental sustainability

contributed to the growing demand for natural food and drinks such as natural wine. According to the author, consumers who are aware of the social and environmental impact of their consumption choices pay more attention to the information displayed on the label as a tool to reduce the risk associated with their purchase. McCarthy, Kapetanaki and Wang (2020) investigated food waste issues using a value-added surplus product strategy. The social, economic and environmental consequences of food waste have become an urgent issue for all stakeholders. Cvirik (2021) examined people's health consciousness level against the coronavirus spread during the first and second waves. The author concluded that health consciousness changed due to the acuteness of the situation at that time. Chebrolu and Dutta (2021) addressed the questions about our existing unsustainable production and supply chain systems towards healthier and more connected systems of conscious consumers and ecologically oriented farmers during the covid-19 pandemic. Institutional Innovation and new approaches are required to transform our existing system toward sustainability. Kim et al. (2022) studied consumer consciousness and behavioural changes in the context of restaurants during covid-19.

Various aspects like eco-labelling, green supply chain, packaging, food safety and online food platforms have been explored recurrently by various researchers.

3. Research Methodology

This paper is primarily based on secondary data. The sources of data include past research, journal articles, etc. The present study is based on the findings from the various studies in the field. Relevant papers have been downloaded from Scopus using the keywords mindful consumption, conscious consumption, and responsible consumption. A total of 50 articles related to health and food were further studied thoroughly. The present study is based on the data from the period 2000-2022.

4. Findings: Emerging trends in health-conscious consumer behaviour

- a. **Local food preference:** There has been a shift in health-conscious consumers' preference for locally-grown organic products (Rana & Paul, 2017; Birch, Memery & Kanakaratne, 2018; Gineikiene, Kiudyte & Degutis, 2017). The terms local, natural, organic, fresh and pure are used interchangeably. The locally grown products strengthen the local economy and community relationships. Organic food is believed to be eco-friendly and safe thus fulfilling the well-being and safety aspects of consumers as well as the environment. Consumers are drawing their attention to plant-based foods.
- b. **Variety of information:** There has been a huge increase in the number of commercial sources and quantum of information available on food namely ingredients (Vainio, 2019), nutritional information (Mattioni & Caraher, 2018), packaging and shelf life (Monnot et al., 2019; Mai, Symmank & Seeberg-Elverfeldt, 2016), word of mouth

and pricing (Hong et al., 2020) etc. Information is readily available in print, social media, and by word of mouth. Consumers while making product choices tend to pay attention to these attributes. The choice made by consumers depends upon factors like existing knowledge and education about the purchase, willingness to pay, income, health issues, convenience and environmental consciousness etc.

- c. **Zero Food Waste:** There has been an urgent need to address the consequences of food waste as a part of sustainability. Many researchers focused on the importance of food waste in their studies. Wansink (2018) focussed on the consumers' food waste in three stages shopping, storing and serving and how marketers can help consumers reduce food waste and thereby help them get more value from their products by enjoying them more and wasting them less. For cost-conscious consumers, wasting less means saving more. For profit-conscious marketers, wasting less means making more profit. Food wastage is a significant problem in the hotel industry (Antonschmidt & Lund-Durlachar, 2019) and must be reduced. Aschemann-Witzel, Gimenez and Ares (2018) investigated food waste behaviour and found that food waste was higher among price and convenience-oriented but lower for value-conscious consumers.

Zero food waste also implies using food properly without waste of edible parts.

5. Conclusion

There has been always scepticism toward health claims. Companies must try to provide honest information about the food ingredients and associated health benefits. There must be information on ingredients, their nutritional value, procurement of raw materials, and other safety issues. Organic products must be chemical-free, have no animal harm, and be environmentally friendly. There should be proper labelling and certification. Health claims should be reliable. There is a need to balance the demand and supply of healthy food and products. On the demand side, a unique marketing strategy should be adopted by marketers to create demand and satisfy it with a wide assortment of products. Consumers are willing to adopt new products if there is ease and convenience in purchasing and using them on a regular basis thus enhancing consumer loyalty. There should be proper distribution and retailing channels to make products available. Companies should promote themselves as environmentally friendly, zero-waste organisations. Sometimes collaboration with other organisations like non-profits is necessary to build up an image.

There has been a rise in conscious consumerism movements across the globe. The studies related to health-conscious consumers and food waste were explored. Today's conscious consumer pays attention to personal well-being as well as the environmental impact of their consumption. Further, companies must behave ethically and promote conscious business for long-term growth and sustainability.

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