

A study on the influencing factors of consumer perception of dairy products in al Musannah region of Oman

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ABSTRACT

Dairy products form an essential part of everyday consumption for individuals and families and understanding consumer behavior in this segment is crucial for producers, retailers and marketers. This study examines the purchasing behavior of consumers toward dairy products in a selected market area. The main objective was to analyze consumer preferences, factors influencing buying decisions, brand choice, consumption patterns and the role of marketing elements such as price, quality, freshness and availability. A structured questionnaire was used to collect primary data from a sample of 80 respondents representing different age groups, income levels, education levels and family sizes. The study adopted a quantitative descriptive research approach to identify trends and patterns in consumer attitudes and purchasing behavior. The findings indicate that taste, freshness and quality are the most influential factors driving the purchase of dairy products. Many consumers prefer branded products due to perceived safety and consistency, while others prioritize affordability and local availability. Among the dairy items examined such as milk, butter, cheese, yogurt and ghee milk emerged as the most frequently purchased product. The study also found that supermarkets and retail stores remain the primary purchasing locations. Most consumers buy dairy products weekly, with preferences shaped largely by consumption habits, family needs and health considerations. Overall, the study provides practical insights for dairy producers, retailers and marketers to develop customer-centered strategies. The paper concludes with recommendations on pricing, packaging, promotional strategies and product positioning to better align with evolving consumer expectations.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Dairy products form an important part of the daily diet for people of all ages. Items such as milk, cheese, butter, yogurt and ghee are consumed regularly in households due to their nutritional value, taste and essential role in various food preparations. As day-to-day food habits continue to evolve, understanding how consumers make decisions regarding dairy products becomes increasingly important for companies operating in the dairy industry. Consumer behavior is influenced by a combination of personal preferences, cultural habits, lifestyle factors, health awareness, family size and income level. These factors shape purchasing patterns and determine which brands and products consumers select during their regular shopping routines. In today's competitive market, dairy producers and retailers face increasing pressure to differentiate their products based on quality, freshness, packaging, price and health benefits. Consumers are more aware and selective than before, especially as they are exposed to a wider range of products both locally and internationally. The emergence of branded dairy items, ready-to-use packs, flavored variations and low-fat alternatives has made the dairy sector more dynamic. At the same time, traditional preferences continue to influence purchasing behavior, particularly in households that prioritize freshness and affordability. This study focuses on exploring the purchasing behavior of consumers toward dairy products in a selected market area. It aims to analyze the factors that influence consumer decisions, the level of brand loyalty, the frequency of purchase and the type of dairy products preferred by different consumer groups. The study also examines how demographic factors such as age, income, occupation and education affect buying patterns. Understanding these insights can help marketers design effective strategies to meet consumer needs, improve product availability and enhance customer satisfaction.

The study is particularly relevant because consumer choices in the dairy market are shaped by several variables, including product attributes such as quality and freshness, marketing elements such as packaging and labeling and psychological aspects such as belief, taste, habit and trust. By analyzing these elements, this research provides a comprehensive view of the dairy market scenario in the study area and highlights the key areas where producers and retailers can focus their efforts. The introduction of this article sets the foundation for a detailed examination of consumer purchasing

behavior. The next section presents the literature review, which discusses previous studies and theoretical concepts related to consumer behavior in dairy products and similar markets.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Consumer behavior is a well-studied area in marketing and several researchers have highlighted that buyer do not make their decisions randomly. Instead, their choices are shaped by a combination of psychological, cultural, personal and social factors. When it comes to dairy products, these factors become even more significant because such items are consumed regularly, have shorter shelf lives and often involve preferences related to taste, freshness, health and price. This section reviews existing literature related to consumer buying behavior, particularly focusing on the dairy sector and summarizes the key themes relevant to the present study.

2.1 Consumer Behavior and Food Purchases

Consumer behavior refers to the process individuals and households use to select, buy, use and dispose of goods and services. According to Kotler's definition, consumer behavior is influenced by both internal characteristics (such as attitudes, motivations, personality and beliefs) and external factors (such as culture, family, social groups and economic conditions). In the context of food purchases, consumers tend to make decisions based on convenience, nutritional value, freshness and previous experiences with the product. Several studies have shown that food buying behavior is often habitual. Since dairy products are purchased frequently, consumers tend to follow patterns that repeat weekly or even daily. As a result, once consumers develop trust in a particular brand or store, they often continue to make repeat purchases unless there is a compelling reason to switch.

2.2 Buying Behavior Toward Dairy Products

Research on dairy purchasing behavior highlights that consumers consider multiple attributes before finalizing their purchase. Quality is one of the leading factors influencing dairy selection, as consumers associate dairy items with health and nutrition. Freshness, taste and safety also play

critical roles in shaping choice. Items like milk, butter, cheese, yogurt and ghee differ in their usage and frequency of purchase. Milk is often purchased more regularly than other dairy products, while products like butter and cheese may be purchased based on cooking frequency or family habits. A study by Sharma and Singh (2019) found that families with young children tend to buy more milk and yogurt due to health requirements, while households with older members may prioritize low-fat or specialized dairy items. The dairy market has become increasingly competitive, with branded products gaining more popularity due to better packaging, superior hygiene standards and consistent quality. At the same time, non-branded or local dairy products remain attractive in some regions because of affordability and perceived naturalness.

2.3 Role of Price and Income

Price sensitivity is a major factor in food-related purchases. Literature shows that lower-income families tend to evaluate prices more carefully and may prefer economical brands, bulk purchases, or smaller-sized packs. Conversely, middle- or higher-income households often prioritize brand image, quality and convenience. Scholars have also found that consumers evaluate the price-to-quality ratio differently for dairy products compared to luxury goods. Since dairy products are necessities, consumers are willing to pay slightly higher prices for fresher or safer options. However, sharp price increases can still discourage purchase frequency or lead to brand switching.

2.4 Importance of Brand Preference

Brand preference plays a central role in dairy purchases. Research indicates that consumers are more likely to buy from brands they trust, particularly when food safety and quality are key concerns. Branded dairy products often emphasize hygiene, safety and packaging standards which directly influence consumer trust. Brand loyalty in the dairy industry is strong. Consumers tend to stick to familiar brands unless they face dissatisfaction or find better value elsewhere. Multiple studies highlight that attractive packaging, clear labeling and nutritional information also improve customer confidence in dairy brands.

2.5 Packaging and Labeling as Influential Factors

Packaging serves both protective and promotional purposes in the dairy market. Scholars argue that visual appeal, convenience and clarity of information all contribute to consumer decisions. Packaging that ensures freshness, prevents leakage and clearly lists manufacturing and expiry dates helps build trust. In many studies, consumers reported that they check labels to confirm fat content, expiry dates, ingredients and the presence of preservatives. This highlights the increasing importance of health consciousness in dairy product purchases.

2.6 Frequency of Purchase and Consumption Patterns

Dairy products are typically purchased on a weekly basis, though the frequency may vary depending on household size and product type. Research shows that families with children purchase dairy items more frequently, while smaller households may buy dairy less often or in smaller quantities. Consumption habits — such as daily tea, coffee, or traditional dishes requiring ghee or curd also shape buying patterns. These routine habits often drive stable demand for dairy products in most households.

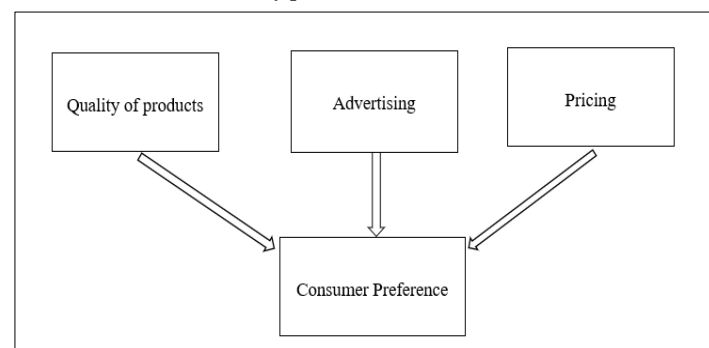


Figure 1. Conceptual framework

The conceptual framework illustrates that consumer preference for dairy products is primarily influenced by three key factors: quality of products, advertising and pricing. Quality includes attributes such as freshness, taste, safety and overall product reliability, which directly shape how consumers evaluate dairy items. Advertising plays a major role in

creating awareness, shaping perceptions and influencing attitudes toward specific brands or products. Effective promotional messages help highlight product benefits and differentiate offerings in the market. Pricing also has a significant impact, as consumers often compare costs and choose products that offer the best value for money, especially for items purchased frequently. Together, these three factors—quality, advertising and pricing—interact to determine overall consumer preference and guide purchasing decisions for dairy products.

2.7 Research gap

Despite extensive literature on consumer behavior, limited research specifically examines dairy-related buying patterns in the selected local context. Existing studies often focus on general food items, lack updated insights on health-oriented preferences and treat factors like price, brand, or quality in isolation rather than within an integrated framework. Additionally, there is little research offering practical guidance for dairy retailers and producers or addressing how household size and routine consumption habits influence purchase decisions. This study fills these gaps by providing a comprehensive and localized understanding of dairy buying behavior.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

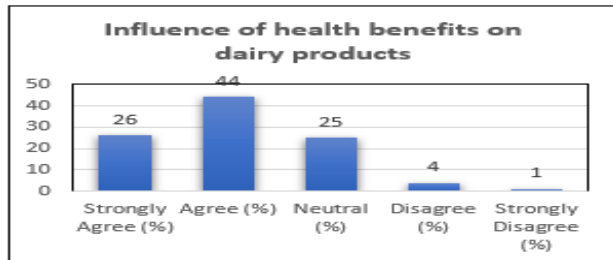
This study adopts a quantitative descriptive research design, which allows the researcher to measure consumer purchasing behavior toward dairy products in a structured and systematic manner. The design helps to identify patterns related to preferences, buying frequency, influential factors and brand choices without manipulating any variables. A total of 80 respondents from the selected study area were included using a convenience sampling method, chosen due to accessibility and practicality. Although this method may limit generalization, it provides useful insights into local consumer trends. Both primary and secondary data were used for the study. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire, which consisted of two sections: demographic details (age, gender, education, occupation, income and family size) and consumer purchasing behavior (preferred dairy products, frequency of purchase, shopping location, factors affecting choice, brand loyalty and satisfaction levels). The questionnaire used simple, close-ended questions to ensure clarity and consistency. Secondary data came from research articles, textbooks, industry reports and credible online sources that helped establish the theoretical background. Data collection was carried out through personal interactions and digital formats, ensuring voluntary participation and confidentiality. Respondents were given sufficient time to complete the questionnaire, ensuring accuracy in their responses. After collecting the data, simple statistical tools such as frequencies, percentages, bar charts and pie charts were used to interpret consumer preferences, influential factors and demographic variations. The scope of the study focuses on understanding dairy product preferences, pricing sensitivity, brand awareness and consumption routines within the selected locality. However, the methodology has certain limitations: the sample size is relatively small, convenience sampling reduces representativeness, responses may carry personal bias and the findings apply specifically to one geographical area. Despite these limitations, the adopted methodology provides a clear and practical foundation for analyzing consumer buying behavior in the dairy market.

4. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

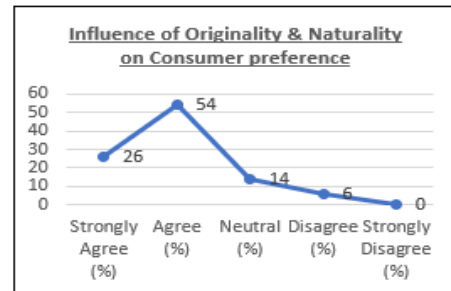
The study findings show clear patterns in how consumers choose and purchase dairy products, shaped by their demographic background, lifestyle habits and perceptions of product quality. Younger and middle-aged consumers were generally more open to trying different dairy brands, while older consumers tended to prioritize quality, freshness and health-related attributes. Female and educated respondents showed stronger involvement in household purchasing and paid closer attention to nutritional labels, expiry dates and packaging information. Income levels and family size also influenced buying behavior, with larger families purchasing dairy items more frequently and higher-income groups opting for premium or branded products. Milk emerged as the most regularly purchased dairy item, reflecting its essential role in daily household consumption. Curd and yogurt also showed strong preference, particularly among families and health-conscious individuals. Products like cheese, butter and ghee were bought less frequently, usually for occasional cooking or based on price considerations. Weekly purchasing was the most common pattern, especially for basic dairy items, indicating that consumption habits are tied closely to routine household needs. Consumers preferred purchasing dairy products from supermarkets and hypermarkets, mainly because they offer better storage, wider choices and stronger assurance of freshness. Local shops remained popular for convenience, while online platforms were used by a smaller segment of consumers who valued digital ease and home delivery. Across the

findings, taste, freshness and overall quality stood out as the strongest factors influencing purchase decisions. Price was also important, especially for middle-income consumers who compared brands and were willing to switch when price differences were noticeable. Packaging, hygiene and brand reputation contributed significantly to trust and loyalty, with branded products being favored for their consistency and safety perceptions.

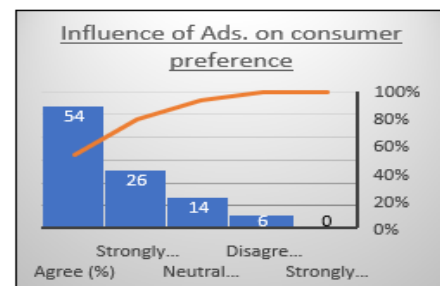
Showing the classification of consideration of health benefits while buying dairy products.



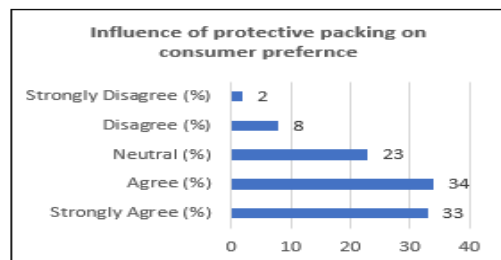
Showing the classification about the influence of naturality & originality on the consumer preference of dairy products.



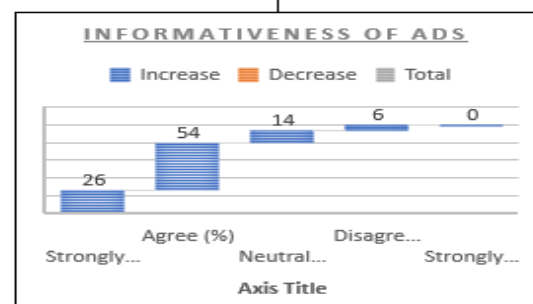
Showing the classification about the influence of advertisements on consumer preference of dairy products.



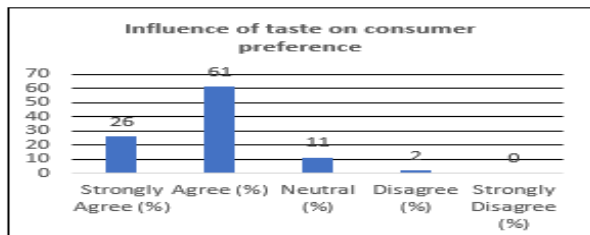
Showing classification about the influence of protective packing on consumer preference of dairy products.



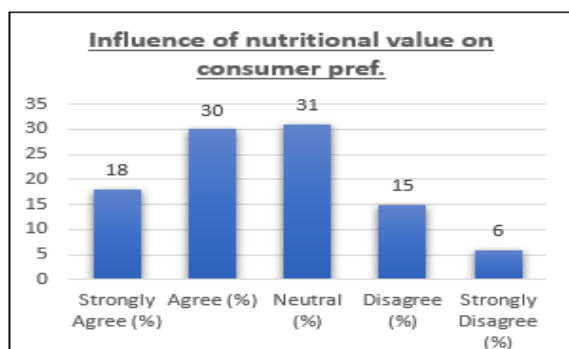
Showing the classification of the informativeness of advertisements in influencing consumer preference of dairy products.



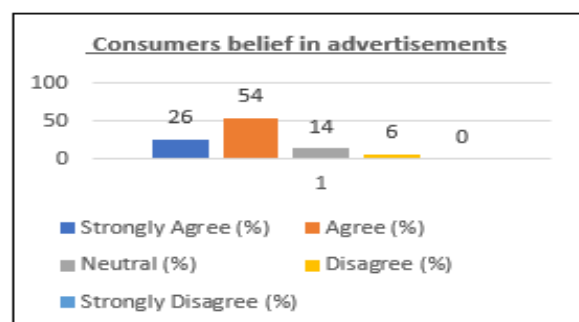
Classification showing the influence of taste on consumer preference of dairy products.



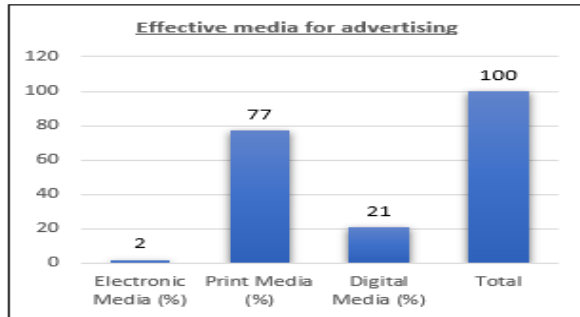
Classification showing the influence of nutritional value on the consumer preference of dairy products.



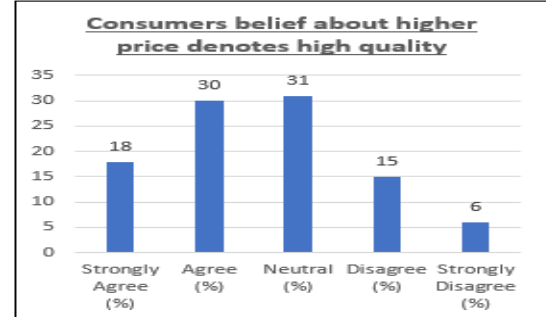
Classification showing the consumers' belief in advertisements on dairy products.



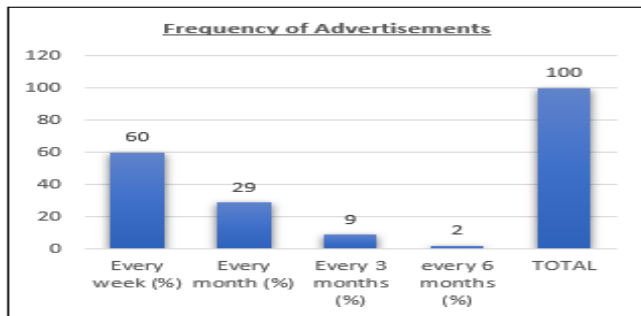
Showing the classification of different media being effective in advertising for dairy products.



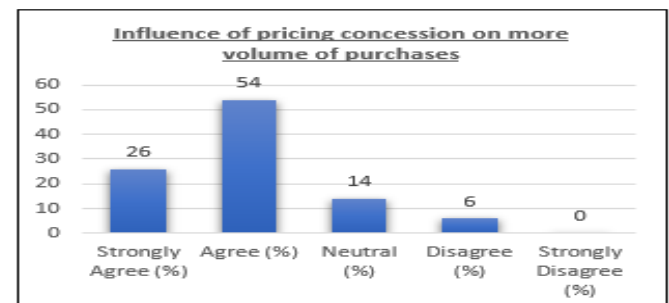
Showing the classification of the consumers' belief of high price high quality of dairy products.



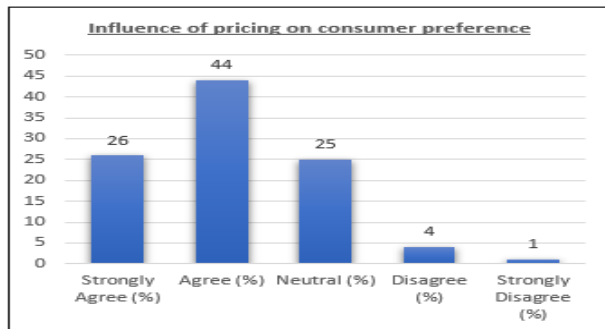
Showing the classification of the frequency of advertisements to be shown in various media.



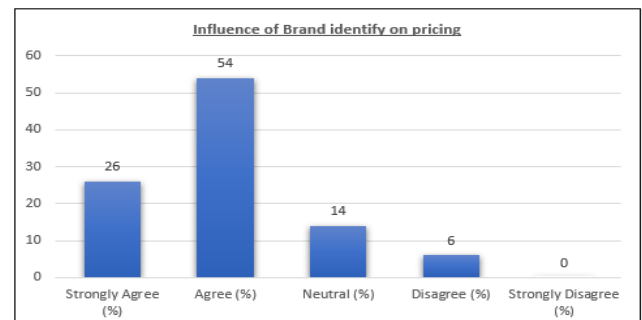
Classification showing the influence of pricing concessions on buying more quantity of dairy products.



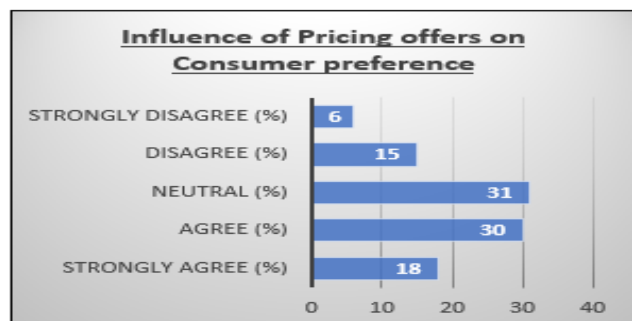
Showing the classification about the influence of pricing on consumer preference of dairy products.



Showing the classification of the influence of brand identity on pricing of dairy products.



Classification showing the influence of pricing offers in the preference of dairy products.



Label-checking behavior was common among educated and health-aware consumers, who frequently evaluated nutritional values and expiry details before purchasing. Overall satisfaction levels were high for essential dairy items such as milk and yogurt, while consumers expected improvements in price stability, packaging durability and greater availability of low-fat or health-focused options. These findings collectively show that dairy purchasing behavior is shaped by a blend of personal preferences, economic considerations, household routines and trust in product quality, forming a predictable pattern in consumer decision-making.

5. DISCUSSION

The study shows that consumer purchasing behavior toward dairy products is shaped largely by the importance given to taste, freshness and overall quality. Since dairy items are consumed daily and directly affect health, consumers tend to choose products that appear safe, nutritious and consistently reliable. This explains the strong preference for trusted brands and the careful checking of expiry dates, nutritional information and packaging integrity. While price remains an important factor, especially for middle-income households, consumers generally balance affordability with quality and are willing to pay slightly more for products they trust. Brand reputation plays a significant role, with most consumers preferring well-

known branded dairy items because of perceived hygiene, consistent taste and safer packaging. However, non-branded or local dairy products are still selected when freshness or lower pricing becomes the priority. Demographic factors also influence behavior: younger consumers experiment more with new brands, higher-income groups opt for premium or organic options and larger households purchase more frequently due to higher consumption needs. Educated and health-conscious buyers are more attentive to labels and ingredients, reflecting growing awareness about nutrition and food safety.

Shopping preferences further affect consumer choices. Supermarkets and hypermarkets are favored for their better storage conditions, wider range of brands and convenience, while local shops serve as quick and accessible options for routine purchases. Purchase frequency is largely shaped by household routines, with milk and curd being bought regularly due to their essential use in daily meals, beverages and cooking. The consistency in weekly or frequent purchases highlights the habitual nature of dairy consumption in many families. Overall satisfaction with dairy products is generally high, driven by freshness, pricing, availability and reliable brand performance. However, some consumers expressed the need for better packaging, stable prices and more health-oriented options such as low-fat or sugar-free variants. These patterns align closely with earlier research, confirming that dairy consumers prioritize quality, trust, convenience and value for money. In summary, dairy buying behavior in the studied area is shaped by a combination of product attributes, demographic factors, economic considerations and convenience-driven habits, offering practical insights for producers and retailers aiming to meet evolving consumer expectations.

5.1 Implications of the study

The findings of this study offer meaningful implications for both theoretical understanding and practical decision-making in the dairy sector. From a theoretical perspective, the results reinforce established consumer behavior concepts by showing that purchasing decisions for essential food items are shaped by psychological factors such as trust and perceived quality, personal factors including age and income and economic considerations like price sensitivity. The strong emphasis consumers placed on taste, freshness and packaging supports existing theories that highlight the importance of product attributes in perishable goods. The high levels of brand loyalty observed in the study further validate the idea that habitual household purchases are often driven by cognitive trust, with consumers relying on brands that consistently meet their expectations. Additionally, the role of demographic variables such as family size, occupation and income aligns with earlier research showing that these factors significantly influence food consumption patterns. The frequent checking of labels and nutritional information also indicates rising consumer awareness, reflecting modern theories that emphasize informed decision-making.

From a managerial viewpoint, the implications are equally significant for dairy producers, marketers and retailers. Since freshness and quality emerged as the most important purchasing factors, companies must maintain strict control over production, packaging and distribution processes to ensure product safety and consistency. Affordable pricing remains crucial for middle-income consumers, suggesting the need for balanced pricing strategies and diverse pack sizes to match different household budgets. The strong preference for branded products highlights the importance of building a trustworthy brand image through consistent quality, clear labeling, attractive packaging and effective promotional activities. Packaging design should prioritize durability, hygiene and clear nutritional information, as consumers rely on these cues when assessing product reliability. Ensuring consistent availability across supermarkets and local shops is essential, as stock-outs can quickly lead to brand switching. Companies may also benefit from introducing product variants such as low-fat options, flavored yogurt and different pack sizes to meet diverse consumer needs. Promotions, combo offers and loyalty programs can further strengthen customer engagement and encourage trial of new products.

Overall, the study provides valuable insights that help bridge academic theory with real-world marketing strategies, highlighting how dairy companies can enhance consumer satisfaction and respond more effectively to evolving market expectations.

6. CONCLUSION

This study provides a clear understanding of how consumers make decisions regarding dairy products and what factors shape their purchasing behavior. The results show that consumers place strong emphasis on freshness, taste, quality and price when choosing dairy items, reflecting the importance of safety and nutritional value in daily food consumption. Branded products continue to dominate preference due to their consistency, hygiene and reliable packaging, while affordability remains important for

many households. Purchasing patterns are influenced by family size, lifestyle habits and routine consumption needs, with milk being the most frequently bought item. Supermarkets and retail stores are preferred shopping points because they offer variety, proper storage and ease of access. The findings also indicate that consumers are becoming increasingly informed, often checking labels and evaluating the nutritional content before making a purchase. While overall satisfaction is high, consumers still expect improvements in packaging quality, pricing and product variety. These insights suggest that dairy producers and retailers should focus on maintaining freshness, ensuring reasonable pricing, strengthening packaging and offering diverse product options. By aligning with evolving consumer expectations, companies can enhance trust, strengthen loyalty and stay competitive in the dairy market.

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