What Factors Drive Consumer Preference of Dairy Products with Education as Moderator? An Empirical Approach

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ABSTRACT

The primary goals of this study are to determine the key variables that lead consumers to favour milk products and to assess the degree of consumer knowledge in India. In this study, convenience sampling under the non-probability sampling approach is used to collect data from Indian customers using a structured questionnaire. A multiple-regression model is used to explain consumer choice, and then an analysis of variance (ANOVA) is performed to reveal any significant differences between the factors influencing customer preference for dairy products. An analysis of the variables influencing customers' purchasing decisions about milk and its products is conducted. The findings indicated that the main variables affecting the decision to purchase milk products are availability, price, quality, and health consciousness. Age, monthly income, and family size were significantly correlated with the amount of milk consumed. This study aids marketing managers in formulating marketing plans that take into account customer preferences, availability, quality, affordability, and health consciousness. The research conclusion addresses consumer likelihood in addition to being beneficial for the entrepreneurial viewpoint. Even if the study presents Indian consumers' opinions, it restricts the likelihood of the west. Numerous dairy products remain undiscovered due to resource limitations, potentially expanding the area of future study.

Keywords: Dairy Products, Education, Customer Preference, Attributes, Marketing, Quality
JEL Classifications: M1, M3

1. INTRODUCTION

One of the most crucial concerns for marketers is the effective and efficient management of the client connection (Barone et al., 2000). The goal of the marketing plan is to determine and satisfy customer preferences, as these factors influence what customers decide to buy. In order to understand consumer behaviour, preferences work in conjunction with their traits and requirements (Spacey, 2016). By comprehending customer behaviour towards unique and superior items, marketing managers may ensure their company's long-term survival and boost its competitiveness (Hanaysha, 2018; Canavari et al., 2010).

A consumer is someone who purchases or makes use of products or services. The people that offer these services are known as marketers. Why consumers act in certain ways (or not act at all) is one of the hardest topics for marketers to answer. Such information is vital for marketers, as a deep comprehension of consumer behaviour will reveal essential consumer factors and point to significant impacts on consumer decision-making. The purchase decisions of customers are influenced by a plethora of intricate factors. It has a strong foundation in psychology and is flavoured with a little sociology to provide intrigue (Huang et al 2019).
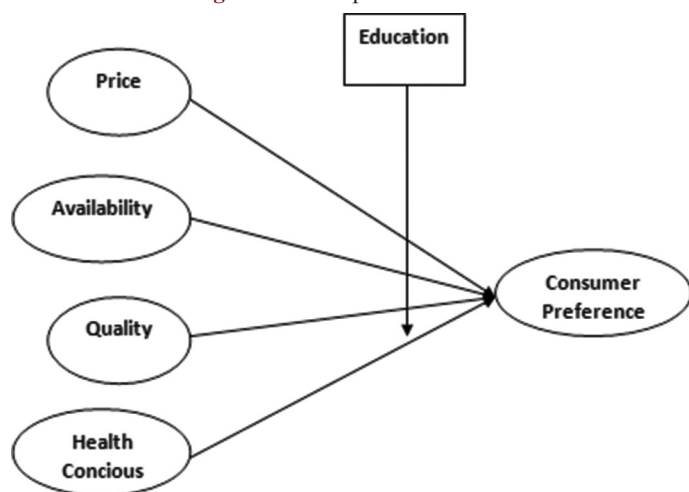
It describes how social groupings including friends, family, and the larger community may have an impact on a customer. Customers' purchasing decisions are influenced by a variety of factors, including their firmly held beliefs and attitudes, how they see the world and their role in it, common sense, instinct, and simple take.

There are significant differences in the behaviour, preferences, and attitudes of consumers towards the consumption of dairy products between nations (Hsu & Lin, 2006; Richardson-Harman, 2000; Robb & Abdel-Ghany, 2007; Yee & Chin, 2007; Bus & Worsley, 2003; Francesconi, Heerink & DHaese, 2010). According to Grunert et al. (2000), consumers' judgements of the quality of dairy products are nuanced and encompass factors beyond only sensory characteristics. They argue that when consumers form opinions about the quality of dairy products, they take into account four factors: (1) hedonic (i.e., sensory attributes like taste or smell); (2) health-related; (3) convenience-related; and (4) process-related (i.e., production processes such as organic, animal welfare or genetic modification). Because of this, producers, distributors, and marketers need to be aware of how each of these factors influences consumer demand for dairy products and be aware that customers' tastes and perceptions of what makes a high-quality dairy product could vary widely.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

India is acknowledged as the world's leading producer of milk, accounting for at least 18.50% of global milk output. According to Parasuraman et al. (2021), the primary determinants of consumer behaviour are the nutritional value and quality of dairy products. Socio-demographic variables including income and education level influenced consumer preferences for dairy-based products (Kallas, 2019). In addition to examining the effects of identified socioeconomic variables on customer brand preference for dairy products, Kumar and Babu (2014) also investigated the factors that influence consumer choice for dairy products in the research region. The most significant and essential elements that influence a brand's choice include availability, product quality, packaging, price, ingredients, product popularity, product flavour, and so forth (Kumar and Babu, 2014).

Using a discrete choice experiment, consumer preferences for functional dairy product characteristics and willingness-to-pay estimations were examined in Germany (Bechtold and Abdulai, 2014). The results showed that attitudes towards functional meals are a key factor in class-specific preference variability. According to Lopes et al. (2020), the food defence programme also considers employee satisfaction and the identification of end goods and raw materials to be significant factors. The categories of sustainable, natural, nutritious, ethical, and trustworthy have some cognitive overlap when it comes to dairy products, but consumers utilise them in various ways (Schiano et al., 2020).

The findings of Cazacu et al. (2015) lend credence to the theory of planned behaviour model, which holds that people's intentions to buy water buffalo milk products (WBMPs) in Thessaloniki and the surrounding areas are positively influenced by product knowledge, nutritional benefits, attitudes, and social contacts. The study found that the same factors that have been shown to positively influence the desire to purchase WBMPs also have an effect on the intention to purchase dairy products, management methods, and a significant relationship between farm performance and management techniques. The research indicates that management factors have little effect on efficiency and performance. The possible effects of the results on technology transfer programmes and the advancement of decision-support systems in the future are examined.

Figure 1: Conceptual framework

Source: Author

Table 1: Descriptive analysis

	Frequency (f)	Percentage	Valid (%)	Cumulative (%)
Education				
School-level	62	18.3	18.3	18.3
UG	144	42.6	42.6	60.9
PG	132	39.1	39.1	100.0
Total	338	100.0	100.0	
Gender				
Male	191	56.5	56.5	56.5
Female	147	43.5	43.5	100.0
Total	338	100.0	100.0	
Marital status				
Single	36	10.7	10.7	10.7
Married	232	68.6	68.6	79.3
Divorced	70	20.7	20.7	100.0
Total	338	100.0	100.0	

Table 2: Reliability test outcome

Item name	Alpha value (a)
Quality	0.776
Health consciousness	0.876
Price	0.771
Availability	0.827

Table 3: Model summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R^2 change	F change	df1	df2	Significant F change
1	0.205[a]	0.042	0.039	0.460	0.042	15.008	2	341	0.000

[a]Predictors: (constant), quality

According to Cornelsen et al. (2016), each family member in a typical home bought 48 grammes of fresh milk per week. While flavour was the main driver of consumption, price was the barrier to consumption that people reported experiencing the most. Perceived quality has been shown to influence perceived price (Solakis et al., 2022). It is unexpected given the competition that co-creation can lead to poorer profitability, especially if businesses are better able to turn an investment into lower consumer participation costs

Figure 2: Research methodology
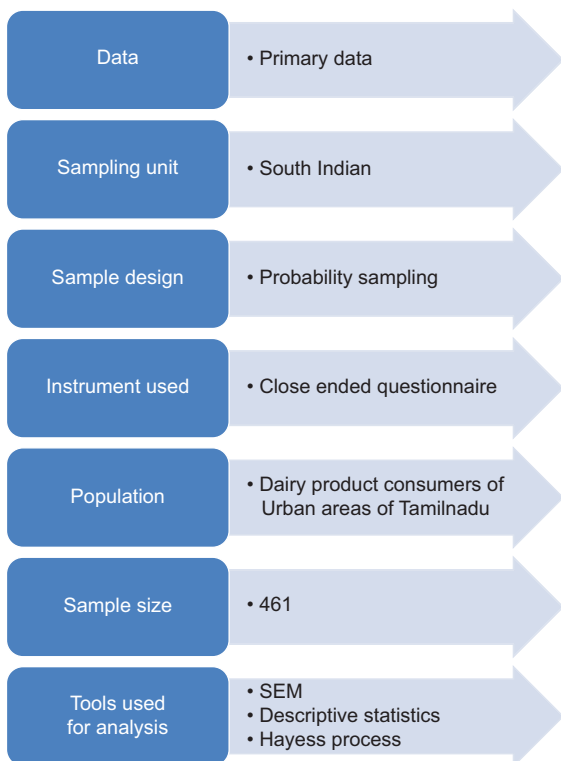
Source: Author

Table 4: Analysis of variance[a]

Model 1	Sum of squares	df	Mean^2	F	Significant
Regression	3.180	2	3.180	15.008	0.000[b]
Residual	72.249	341	0.212		
Total	75.429	343			

[a]Dependent variable: Consumer preference, [b]Predictors: (Constant), quality

Table 5: Coefficients[a]

Model 1	Un-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significant
	B	SE	Beta		
Constant	1.081	0.068		15.871	0.000
Product mean	0.081	0.021	0.205	3.874	0.000

[a]Dependent variable: Consumer preference, SE: Standard error

Table 6: Model summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R^2 change	F change	df1	df2	Significant F change
1	0.072[a]	0.005	0.002	0.469	0.005	1.780	2	341	0.183

[a]Predictors: (Constant), price

(Kumar and Sharma, 2017a; Yang et al., 2021; Jha et al., 2022). The conjoint choice experiment survey by Kapaj et al. (2013) was designed to determine consumer preferences about the milk sector in a particular market. The study's conclusions may help the milk business and its marketers by enabling them to target different audiences with targeted milk advertisements.

Agrawal and Rahman (2015) study the responsibilities and resources of consumers in value co-creation. They came to the conclusion that, as a result of customer empowerment and the development of interactive technology, customers have been acknowledged as both resource and resource integrators in the company's value creation strategies and processes. According to Zhang et al. (2020), one crucial co-creation strategy for enhancing organisational performance is structural linking, which is based on social media and fosters structural, cognitive, and relational connections. The need of aligning digital solutions with consumer incentives is growing in tandem with the growing reliance on technology (Nöjd et al., 2020). The author placed a strong emphasis on leveraging consumer experiences through digitization to enhance the appeal of physical retail places. Sillence et al. (2016) described a tiered approach to online trust in which consumers evaluate a website quickly using heuristics before delving further into the content. The findings are discussed in relation to the development of trustworthy web tools for food safety.

According to Hambardzumyan and Gevorgyan (2022), there hasn't been a major shift in milk production and selling prices in Armenia throughout the period of restriction. According to Maitiniyazi and Canavari (2020), a high frequency of food safety events lowers customers' confidence in food safety. The influence of several challenges and governance concerns on food safety was highlighted by Kiambi et al. (2020). Customers choose aroma milk because of its superior quality. Moreover, it cannot be disputed that customers are concerned about the items they purchase on a regular basis in terms of their health (Dhanya and Palanichamy, 2019). When buying milk products, the most important factors were quality, price, and taste; flavour, colour, and packaging had the least impact (Koduru and Sree Krishna, 2021). Skim milk consumption is more common in smaller populations, elderly people, and higher income groups (Siqueira et al., 2020). Price increases correspond with brand strength (Ngo et al., 2019). Lack of eating habits and the taste and smell of the product are the main reasons why people don't buy goat milk and dairy products (Paskaš et al., 2020). When it comes to expensive and quickly sold consumer items, packaging has been demonstrated to have a major influence on consumer purchase behaviour (Sultan, 2016). The respondents' ages range widely, and there is no clear correlation between their pleasure with different dairy products and their monthly income (Iris et al., 2018). Young respondents emphasised the significance of flavour and quality in dairy products, as well as

the limited impact of packaging on product selection (Gaworski et al., 2021).

2.1. Research Gap

The majority of the research on consumer preference is carried out in western and industrialised countries, with emerging nations remaining mostly unexplored, according to an analysis of the published work and literature that is currently available. In particular, studies on consumer preferences for dairy products have received very less attention in India, despite the country producing more than 18.50% of the world's milk (Auf et al 2018). India is the world's largest producer of milk. In addition, the literature that is now accessible ignores customer perception in favour of focusing more on the entrepreneurial perspective. This study aims to close the gap between the current body of knowledge and the industry's concurrent need. Additionally, the respondents' education is included in this study as a moderator to determine whether or not consumers pick the proper brand when they are well-informed. The theoretical framework is depicted in Figure 1 and the following assumptions are presented below based on the talks above:

2.2. Conceptual Framework

H1. Quality has a significant impact on consumer preference toward dairy products in the urban areas of Tamil Nadu.

H2. Health consciousness has a significant impact on consumer preference toward dairy products in the urban areas of Tamil Nadu.

H3. Price has a significant impact on consumer preference toward rural dairy products in the urban areas of Tamil Nadu.

H4. Availability has a significant impact on consumer preference toward dairy products in the urban areas of Tamil Nadu.

H5. Education of the respondent moderates the impact of Quality, Availability, Price and health conscious on consumer preference toward dairy products in the urban areas Tamil Nadu.

Table 7: Analysis of variance[a]

Model 1	Sum of Squares	df	Mean^2	F	Significant
Regression	0.392	2	0.392	1.780	0.183[b]
Residual	75.037	341	0.220		
Total	75.429	343			

[a]Dependent variable: Consumer preference, [b]Predictors: (Constant), price

Table 8: Coefficients[a]

Model 1	Un-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significant
	B	SE	Beta		
Constant	1.247	0.065		19.245	0.000
Place mean	0.034	0.026	0.072	1.334	0.183

[a]Dependent variable: Consumer preference

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In this study, a quantitative survey-based research approach was applied. The sampling, data gathering, questionnaire design, and mathematical foundation are all presented in this part. In order to gather information on opinions and impressions from the stakeholders of different destinations, a closed-ended structured questionnaire was created and evaluated for comprehensiveness and comprehension. The research design overview is provided in Figure 2.

4. DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The study was conducted on 338 datasets. The first section of the study included descriptive datasets with simple percentages, means, and standard deviations as well as reliability tests using Cronbach alpha tests; the second section involved the analysis of variables using regression statistical analysis techniques, and the third section involved moderators using Hayes' Process-Macro analysis. The outcomes are as follows:

4.1. Descriptive Analysis

By concentrating on age, gender, and income, the research aims to analyse the variables and investigate how the moderators affect the variables. The ratio of gender to educational attainment, marital status, age, and income is calculated using a straightforward percentage analysis. These are the outcomes (Table 1).

Results from the analysis of the descriptive datasets are displayed in Table 1, where the majority of respondents (56.5%) were male. where the majority (42.6%) have less education than a graduate degree. According to the respondents' marital status, the majority—68.6%—were married.

4.2. Reliability Test

The dependability of the variables in this study has been examined and measured using the Cronbach alpha (a) reliability test. The result achieved is a good fit when the internal consistency is close to 1, and it is not a good fit when it is closer to 0, according to the test 3 standard measurements. A 0.9 indicates excellent, a 0.8 indicates good, a 0.7 indicates acceptable, a 0.6 indicates dubious, and a below 0.5 indicates undesirable, according to the situation.

Table 2 shows that the values obtained are reasonable and well-suited to the study. The variables are therefore appropriate and trustworthy.

4.3. Hypothesis Testing: Regression Analysis

The hypotheses are tested and the results are obtained where:

H1: Quality has a significant impact on consumer preference toward dairy products in the urban areas of Tamil Nadu.

Table 9: Model summary

Model	R	R^2	Adjusted R^2	Standard error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R^2 change	F change	df1	df2	Significant F change
1	0.232[a]	0.054	0.051	0.457	0.054	19.447	2	341	0.000

[a]Predictors: (Constant), health consciousness

Table 3 displays R, R2, and adjusted-R2 values of 0.709, 0.503, and 0.502, respectively. The R2 indicates that the correlation between the variables is 50% greater. The P-value (i.e., P < 0.005) from ANOVA Table 4 is determined to be significant with 0.000. In a similar vein, Table 5 forecasts the correlation between customer preference and quality. It may be deduced from the regression calculation's result that hypothesis 1 is correct.

H2: Price has a significant impact on consumer preference toward dairy products in the urban areas of Tamil Nadu.

Table 6 shows that the R, R2, and adjusted-R2 values are 0.144, 0.021 and 0.018 respectively, with the R2 indicating a lesser 5% correlation between the variables. The P-value, or P = 0.120, is determined to be negligible with ANOVA Table 8. The expected connection of factors from Table 7 is not true.

It is concluded from the regression calculation's result that hypothesis H2, according to which price significantly influences customer preference, is untrue.

H3: Health consciousness has a significant impact on consumer preference toward dairy products in the urban areas of Tamil Nadu.

Table 9 and 10 displays displays R, R2, and adjusted-R2 values of 0.232, 0.054, and 0.051, respectively. The R2 indicates a 54% higher correlation between the variables. The P-value (i.e., P < 0.005) from ANOVA Table 12 is determined to be significant with 0.000. Likewise, Table 12 projects the relationship between customer desire and health consciousness.

Based on the results of the regression analysis, it can be concluded that hypothesis H3, according to which customer choice for dairy

products in Tamil Nadu's cities is significantly influenced by health consciousness, is valid.

H4:

Availability has a significant impact on consumer preference toward dairy products in the urban areas of Tamil Nadu.

Table 12 displays R, R2, and adjusted-R2 values of 0.205, 0.042, and 0.039, respectively. The R2 indicates a 42% higher correlation between the variables. The P-value (i.e., P < 0.005) from ANOVA Table 13 and 14 is determined to be significant with 0.000. Table 14 also forecasts the relationship between availability and customer preference.

It is concluded from the regression calculation's result that hypothesis H4, according to which availability significantly influences consumers' preferences for dairy products in Tamil Nadu's cities, is correct.

4.4. Hayes Process-Macro Analysis for the Moderators

The Hayes Process-Macro method was used to examine the moderators. These are the analyses of the theories:
H2: Age moderates the association between the variables purchase intention and online marketing strategies.

Table 15 explains the correlation between customer preference and its qualities is moderated by education, as indicated by the P = 0.0000, which was determined to be significant.

5. DISCUSSION

Numerous pieces of study have highlighted the preferences of urban consumers for dairy products. The current study has

Table 10: Analysis of variance[a]

Model 1	Sum of squares	df	Mean²	F	Significant
Regression	4.070	2	4.070	19.447	0.000[b]
Residual	71.359	341	0.209		
Total	75.429	343			

[a]Dependent variable: Consumer preference, [b]Predictors: (Constant), health consciousness

Table 11: Coefficients[a]

Model 1	Un-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significant
	B	SE	Beta		
Constant	1.752	0.100		17.602	0.000
Promotion mean	0.126	0.029	0.232	4.410	0.000

[a]Dependent variable: Consumer preference. SE: Standard error

Table 12: Model summary

Model	R	R²	Adjusted R²	Standard error of the estimate	Change statistics				
					R² change	F change	df1	df2	Significant F change
1	0.205[a]	0.042	0.039	0.460	0.042	15.008	2	341	0.000

[a]Predictors: (Constant), availability

Table 13: Analysis of variance[a]

Model 1	Sum of squares	df	Mean²	F	Significant
Regression	3.180	2	3.180	15.008	0.000[b]
Residual	72.249	341	0.212		
Total	75.429	343			

[a]Dependent variable: Consumer preference, [b]Predictors: (Constant), availability

Table 14: Coefficients[a]

Model 1	Un-standardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Significant
	B	SE	Beta		
Constant	1.081	0.068		15.871	0.000
Price mean	0.081	0.021	0.205	3.874	0.000

[a]Dependent variable: Consumer preference. SE: Standard error

Table 15: Analysis of age as moderator

Model: 1
Y: Consumer preference
X: Attributes of consumer preference
W: Education
Sample Size: 338
Outcome variable: Purchase Intention

DV1	Analysis					
1.00	0.00					
2.00	1.00					
Model summary						
−2LL	**ModelLL**		**df**	**P**		
418.1395	15.2029		3.0000	0.0000		
Model						
Model	**coeff**	**SE**	**Z**	**P**	**LLCI**	**ULCI**
Constant	−2.7998	1.2652	−0.2129	0.0269	−5.2797	−0.3200
IVMean	0.4797	0.4135	1.1599	0.2461	−0.3308	1.2901
D3	0.1888	0.4945	0.3819	0.0000	−0.7804	1.1580
Int_1	0.0334	0.1684	0.1986	0.8426	−0.2966	0.3634

pinpointed a few variables that may work as catalysts to influence customer preferences for dairy products. The customer replies clearly show that they have a good understanding of dairy products. Four independent variables have been established based on a pilot survey that gathered expert opinions and a variety of literature evaluations from prior research to identify the factors impacting dairy product buying decisions. The following strategies can be used to develop a marketing framework for the wider acceptance of dairy products among urban consumers, with the main goals being the creation of jobs, economic growth, higher living standards, and financial stability (Amudha et al 2016). Training of labourers will also help to create a pool of skilled labourers for the marketing of dairy products.

The current situation makes it clear that organisations are unable to achieve their goals due to a shortage of competent workers. The marketing division should concentrate on the areas with poor sales in order to increase them. Through suitable inquiry in a particular area, they should be able to collect current market trends and changes in demand in order to provide stock and meet demand. The goal should be to give customers more convenience and to increase the number of dairy parlours in locations with greater market potential. The facility that produces milk should generate and keep reasonably priced, high-quality goods. The marketing department should expand the product's reach by introducing a door delivery system in order to maximise sales performance. Another important factor in extending the product's reach is advertising. The most effective way to boost sales in this situation would be to run a successful advertising campaign across print and electronic media. Placing banners and signboards in public spaces encourages people to become more aware of one another. Sales of milk will increase when smaller, 250 mL milk pouches are introduced because lower-class consumers will be encouraged to purchase the product. Marketing campaigns ought to focus on enthralling new customers. Last but not least, as part of its corporate social responsibility efforts, the marketing division ought to support certain social welfare initiatives. Doing so will boost product sales in the long run.

The very important aspect in this study is the study used education as a moderator in choosing the right product. This variable makes the study unique and it is also considered to be very important aspect of the study. Nutrition counseling aims to help the community change behavior related to nutrition or health to improve the quality of the client's health, including changes in knowledge, attitudes, and actions (Demilew et al., 2020; Masthalina and Agustina, 2018). The counselor provides positive information and direction that can transform negative information. Te counselor also directs clients to be able to determine attitudes and decisions to overcome nutritional problems experienced (Demilew et al., 2020; Worku et al., 2020). The goal of the counsellor is to assist clients in making dietary and lifestyle changes that will enhance their health and well-being (Abiyu and Belachew, 2020).

5.1. Theoretical Implications and Managerial Contributions

This study aids marketing managers in formulating marketing plans that take into account customer preferences, availability, quality, affordability, and health consciousness. Managers will be able to make judgements based on the feature that most appeals to customers after it has been identified. Additionally, the customer will receive the desired goods in accordance with their expectations. When producing dairy goods, the production manager will also pay attention to the factors that consumers anticipate. The research finding thus addresses consumer likelihood in addition to being beneficial from an entrepreneurial standpoint.

6. CONCLUSIONS, RESEARCH LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE SCOPE

Numerous variables influence a consumer's decision to regularly choose one product over another. The impact of many marketing elements on brand choice, including pricing, product quality, advertising, brand availability, and brand name awareness, was examined in this study. This study's primary goal was to determine the degree to which Fitche town consumers' brand preferences

for dairy products are influenced by marketing influences. The elements that were found and examined in order to determine what influences consumers' preferences for brands. These dimensions included sub-elements that are sent to the chosen respondents via a straightforward sampling approach and are shown on a likert scale. Multiple regression analysis, correlation analysis, and descriptive statistics are used to analyse the collected data.

The analysis of the questionnaire findings indicated that the two main factors influencing customers' brand preference are price and product quality. The influence of the other factors on customers' brand preference is negligible. According to the report, butter and fluid milk are the most often used brands of dairy products.

The analysis of the elements influencing the preferences of the consumers revealed that their age, income, family size, education level, and living expenses all had a significant influence on their choices and preferences. Health issues and the expense of living may be connected to this effect. The degree of education affected the selection of low-fat yoghurt and milk (Solano et al 2006). Actually, a desire for low-fat diets has been connected to higher levels of knowledge. The product's brand name was one of the most significant and influential factors influencing consumers' desire to purchase certain dairy products. Based on customer preferences, marketing managers may utilise these results to enhance their goods.

The response's population consists of Indian customers' preferences, namely those from the state of Coimbatore, which is a diverse trait in and of itself. Even if the study presents Indian consumers' opinions, it restricts the likelihood of the west. Numerous dairy products remain untapped due to resource limitations. The study data is analysed using ANOVA, one of the many statistical procedures that are accessible, while there is room for analysis using a variety of additional statistical tools. The study participants may belong to several demographic groups with varying inclinations and predilections. Analogous studies might be conducted with other unexplored dairy products in addition to the shift in the demographic composition. Other statistical software that is now available with various tools might be used to analyse the provided data. The aforementioned remark makes it clear that there is a great deal of room for more study with regard to modifications in the product, location, and customer behaviour as well as analytical techniques.

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