

Conscious Consumption and Its Impact on Consumer Behaviour: A Desk Research

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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 their consumption impact on themselves, society and the environment as a whole. 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.

Keywords: *Consumer Behaviour, research, Conscious Consumption.*

1. Introduction

At the end of the twentieth century, there had been a shift in people's attitudes towards life and their education level (Rana & Paul, 2017).¹ Purchasing is an integral and inevitable part of our lives that include everything from food, clothing, vehicles, and other products. While purchasing is an integral part of our life, mindless consumption should not be. There is an entire process in bringing a product from the raw material stage to be displayed on shelves and further with the end of its useful life. Earlier only price and quality influenced the consumers' purchasing decisions but today the consumer is concerned about the social and environmental impact of products in different stages of the product life cycle. We can say that 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).² Companies cannot ignore the fact that consumers are becoming more proactive, mindful and motivated by their 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 estimated to be one of the rapidly-growing markets in health and food. The sector is forecasted to reach \$30 billion by 2026, a report by a research firm said. There would be an estimated increase in the number of health-conscious consumers in India from 108 million in 2020 to 176 million in 2026 (Economic Times, 2022).³ 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).⁴

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 multiple factors that have an impact on consumer behaviour toward organic/local food and their findings revealed a growing preference for organic food over conventional among health-conscious consumers.¹ 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 self-centred and public-spirited motivations behind the domestic organic food purchasing behaviour of consumers.⁵ Conscious consumers make their consumption decisions by balancing both motivations. Self-centred motivations mean self-interest i.e. what is favourable for me whereas public-spirited motivations mean concern for the community as a whole i.e. what is for the betterment of us. Soos and Biacs (2018) reviewed product-related information and its role in influencing consumer attitudes and decisions during food shopping. The authors studied the relationship between various consumer characteristics and behaviour patterns in Hungary.⁶ Vainio (2019) explored the difference in the behaviour of consumers with meat-based diets as against plant-based diets. The study revealed that meat-consuming consumers are not assured by research-based proofs and both types of consumers respond to commercial information in different ways. The study further revealed that individuals may respond favourably to a piece of commercial information if they feel motivated to choose sustainable and viable food alternatives.⁷ Galati et al. (2019) investigated that the growing demand for natural food and drinks such as natural wine is attributed to growing health and environmental sustainability concerns. According to the author, consumers pay more attention to the labelling and packaging information exhibited on the product to lessen the risk accompanying their consumption on the environment and society in general.⁸ 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.⁹ 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.¹⁰ Chebrolov and Dutta (2021) addressed the questions about the existing unsustainable production and supply chain set-up towards a well-connected structure of responsible farming during the covid-19 pandemic. Institutional Innovation and new approaches are required to transform our existing system toward sustainability.¹¹ Kim et al. (2022) studied consumer consciousness and behavioural changes in the context of restaurants during covid-19.¹² 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 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 data from the period 2000-2022.

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

- a. **Locally produced food preference:** There has been a shift in health-conscious consumers' preference for locally-grown organic products^{1,5,13} (Rana & Paul, 2017; Birch, Memery & Kanakarathne, 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 ingredients⁷ (Vainio, 2019), nutritional

information¹⁴ (Mattioni & Caraher, 2018), packaging and shelf life^{15,16} (Monnot et al., 2019; Mai, Symmank & Seeberg-Elverfeldt, 2016), word of mouth and pricing¹⁷ (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 the different phases of acquiring, stockpiling and plating food. The study focussed on the ways how marketers and organisations can help consumers minimize food waste.¹⁸ If consumers waste less, they tend to enjoy more by getting more value from their products for a long period. Less waste means more savings for a cost-conscious consumer. Similarly, for profit-conscious marketers, wasting less means making more profit. "Food wastage is a significant problem in the hotel industry"¹⁹ according to Antonschmidt and Lund-Durlacher (2019) and must be reduced. Aschemann-Witzel, Gimenez and Ares (2018) investigated food and kitchen practices among individuals and found that kitchen waste was higher in the consumers for whom price and convenience are more important than the consumers who are value-conscious.²⁰

Zero food/kitchen 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 regularly 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. Collaboration with other organisations like non-profits is sometimes necessary to build 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 and 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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