

Determinants Influencing Consumer Choice Behaviour Towards Bakery Products in the Nilgiris District

RESEARCH

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Abstract

The study evaluates the consumer choice behaviour towards bakery products in the Nilgiris District by identifying the unique consumption environment influenced by the socio economic status and market oriented challenges. In the everyday consumption, bakery products in the District play a significant role but empirical studies on how consumers establish and maintain choice behaviour in the context of the region are scarce. The research follows an empirical research design and is based on primary data that will be gathered through the use of an interview schedule in form of a structured interview that was conducted among consumers of bakery products. The sampling method used was a snowball sampling because there was no known consumer sampling frame and an end sample of 347 respondents was assumed satisfactory to address the multivariate analysis. The segmentation of patterns of behavioural differentiation and predictive relationship segmentation were analysed using advanced statistical analysis tools such as discriminant analysis, cluster analysis and multiple regression analysis. The empirical data show that the consumers of the bakery products are deeply differentiated in terms of the choice behaviour and can be characterised into meaningful segments of behaviour. The results affirm the fact that the consumption behaviour of bakery in the Nilgiris District is context dependent and based on behavioural orientation and regional market environment.

Keywords: *Consumer Choice Behaviour, Bakery Products, Regional Food Consumption, Market Context, Consumer Engagement and Nilgiris District.*

1. Introduction

1.1. Conceptual Orientation of Consumer Choice Behaviour in Food Retail Markets

Consumer behaviour as regards to choice in food related markets is largely explained as a cognitive decision making process as elicited by habitual patterns, situational stimuli and experience related to the consumption steered by

accumulated experience than by preference at the moment (Mazzocchi et al., 2022; Kumar & Smith, 2023). The contextualized behaviour with reference to bakery items is a process of unceasing evaluation in which customers bargain on accessibility to familiarity and some of the perceived appropriateness in their daily food intake routine (Li et al., 2021). The choice behaviour thus develops as a result of successive experience with the products and service experiences of retail environments which tend to create patterns of selection that are at a constant (Lim et al., 2024). The consumer choices that are made in bakery markets are seldom singular instances of consumption since they arise as habitual behavioural patterns based on the personal consumption habits and environmental predictability

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(Shankar et al., 2022). This point of view is especially applicable to regional markets where consumption is attached on the day-to-day need and relationship trust as opposed to the hard-selling stimuli (Deloitte, 2023). The consumer choice behaviour among the situations in which bakery consumption occurs is determined by the interaction between personal perception and market conditions where the possible alternatives are framed (Pantano et al., 2020). The availability of various formats of bakery such as small, old stores and semi organised retail spaces bring about difference in terms of consumer perceptions of the availability of choice and interaction (Shankar et al., 2022). Consumers tend to build internal reference scheme on which the decision to choose something when it seems to have been previously satisfied and usefulness. These internalised structures affect the products that are selected as well as the places and the number of times that bakery products are bought (Li et al., 2021; Kumar & Smith, 2023). The consideration of consumer choice behaviour in this way enables the analysis to go beyond the superficial preference mapping and look at deeper configurations of behaviour. This orientation conforms to the modern consumer behaviour literature on highlighting behavioural consistent contextual embeddedness and market structure as the main focus on food consumption determination (OECD, 2023; Lim et al., 2024). The conceptual pose will help the current study to examine bakery product choice behaviour in Nilgiris District as a patterned phenomenon due to the regional consumption ecology as opposed to an abstract preference phenomenon disassociated with the market reality.

2. Review Studies

The empirical studies on the consumer choice behaviour within bakery markets have increasingly shifted beyond the rational choice descriptions of behaviour and behaviour descriptions with routine consumption and familiarity with contextual interpretations. The bakery products are constantly being cited as low involvement food stuffs in which their

purchasing choices are formed through continuity of experience and presumed dependability instead of active information seeking. The research done on food in everyday intake indicates that the normalcy of exposure to the same retail scenery is likely to normalise the behaviour of consumer choice over time and convert it into a habitual behaviour as opposed to an evaluative behaviour (Sheth 1983). The stability of behaviour is more prominent in bakery markets where the customers deal with the same outlets and products constantly which reinforce acquired preferences with time (Olsen 2007). Online evidence continuously indicates that decisions to visit bakeries are frequently constrained by time that further increases the dependence on past satisfaction and behavioural shortcuts (Vermeir and Verbeke 2006).

Studies regarding food choice behaviour show the importance of experiential learning on consumer behaviour. Bakery products are decadent and familiarity can be improved with repeated exposure thereby reducing the perceived uncertainty in the situation of making a purchase (Grunert 2005). Empirical research shows that when consumers form an association between a bakery outlet and perceptible product quality and satisfactory consumption in the future the adoption of a holding in the future will be stable despite the availability of alternative to the consumer (Sobal and Bisogni 2009). This trend has been evident in the diverse food retail environments where emotional comfort and eating routine dominate in the choice behaviour (Warde 2015). These and other findings highlight the idea that bakery product choice behaviour is less affected by abstract taste patterns and more by lived in consumption experience over the years.

A number of empirical studies focus on the importance of the local market conditions in dictating the product choice behaviour in bakeries. Research findings reveal that customers who buy in areas which are not metropolitan, semi urban areas have been observed to show high bondage towards the known outlets because of the lack of retail based options and less exposure to organised branding

(Goldman and Hino 2005). The consumer trust in these situations is established through recurrent inter personal relations and not by formatted brand communication (Dawar and Pillutla 2000).

The research indicates that customers of the bakery in the regional markets are more concerned with stability of supply and perceived reliability that cumulatively are incorporated in their choice behaviour (Campos *et al.* 2013). These results show the necessity to study the consumption of bakeries in spatial and social contexts of the local markets. The research that has been directed towards peripheral market has argued that conditions of climate and accessibility indirectly influence consumer behaviour towards bakery products through reduction (Ilbery and Kneafsey 2000). The literature on bakery consumption is dominated by the metropolitan consumer segments where branding promotional exposure and online interactions are at the centre of providing any factors that influence people to buy bakery products (Kotler and Keller 2016). This kind of research provides less information on how the choice behaviour functions in areas that are characterised by scattered settlements and the traditional retail hegemony. There are a limited number of empirical studies that have dealt with District level bakery consumption in hill economies which limits the applicability of the findings to the context (Tregear 2011). This shortcoming emphasizes the importance of investigations that are regional specific and that help highlight the behavioural determinants that manifest themselves in constrained but relationally rich markets. This empirical background has been developed using the current study by generalising the analysis of consumer choice behaviour of bakery products into the Nilgiris District.

3. Research Gap

A literature review reveals that studies regarding consumer choice behaviour with bakery products are majorly featured in urban and metropolitan settings. These types of studies are

highly base on organised retail landscape and presuppose the market conditions marked by high brand recognition, high levels of promotional coverage and developed proper retail systems. These assumptions have limitations on the possibility of generalizing the findings to other geographically separated areas like the hill Districts where bakery is consumed in the structurally different market environments. The empirical investigation required in solving these gaps is regionally-based and meets this requirement since it concerns Nilgiris District which provides context sensitive knowledge to the literature on bakery consumption.

3.1. Purpose and Scope of the Empirical Evaluation

The research is envisaged on the basis of the creation of a context-dependent interpretation of consumer choice behaviour on bakery products in the Nilgiris District. The research sets itself against the fact that the current body of literature on bakery consumption studies focuses heavily on the urban centric assumptions and focuses owing to its failure to capture regionally situated consumption realities. The purchasing routines in the Nilgiris District bakery are determined by the day-to-day purchasing patterns climatic factors and the existing presence of the traditional stores that intersect to form unique behavioural context. Through its emphasis on the experience of the bakery products by consumers which aims to come up with empirically based insights that will capture the real-life decision making in the District. The study area is limited to the consumers that make a purchase of bakery commodities to have as a regular intake in the Nilgiris District. The research avoids generalisation of geography and the study has been focused on detail and contextual applicability. The consumer choice behaviour is studied as a process that is patterned over time by interacting with the markets and consumption places in the local bakery. The study takes into consideration the way the market related condition affects the way consumers consume bakery products in various retailing environments. It is an analysis that tends to empirical validation by using sophisticated

multivariate methods so as to achieve the classification of behaviour and clarity of explanation. Taking a District centered empirical scope the study offers region specific information that fills in the gap in the available literature on the consumption of bakery. The search supplies the practical applicability of the local operators within the bakery sector since it offers an evidenced based insight into the phenomenon of consumer choice behaviour based on the facts of the Nilgiris District reality.

4. Objectives

- To examine the determinants influencing the consumer choice behaviour towards bakery products in the Nilgiris District.
- To evaluate contextual and market-related challenges that shape consumer engagement with bakery products in the Nilgiris District.

5. Research Methodology

The research used an empirical research design to understand consumer choice behaviour towards bakery products in the Nilgiris District. The study population is those who are used to taking bakery products in urban, semi -urban and hill township in the District. There is no formal availability of an sampling frame of bakery consumers which validates use of non-probability sampling. The snowball type of sampling method is methodologically suitable because the intake is carried out in scattered forms of retail outlets. The sample size was capped at 347 respondents which are between the acceptable empirical sample to conduct a multivariate analysis. The desired size meets the minimum required sample adequacy criteria of the discriminant cluster and regression analysis which offers generalisation within the study environment. The sample size also balances both the statistical power and the field feasibility due to the geographical dispersion and topography feature of the Nilgiris District. The main source of data used in the study is primary data which was collected using structured interview schedule

that is specially developed to describe consumer perceptions, behavioural orientation and patterns of engagement that can be used to consume bakery products were used to take data. The interview schedule was conducted face to face because there was need to have clarity of the responses and to cater to different levels of literacy among the respondents. The study used advanced statistical tools in a combination to perform an analysis. The cluster analysis was employed to analyze consumers into behavioural segments that had similar response patterns. The discriminant analysis was used to test the uniqueness of the clusters derived and the percentage of accuracy of classification. A multiple regression analysis was used to investigate the predictive effect of determined determinants on consumer choice behaviour. The combined application of the tools creates a strong behavioural profiling explanatory assessment and empirical validation of the study.

6. Descriptive Profile of Consumers

The study has profiled the consumers who are using the bakery products in their consumption and this will help to understand the socio-economic status of consumers involved.

(Table 1) The descriptive description of the sample presents the preliminary idea of the consumer population in the Nilgiris District which is involved in the consumption of the bakery products. The gender balance shows that there is an equal representation of male and female consumers but marginal tendency towards males. The large number of female consumers indicates that the bakery products are relevant in family based consumption contexts in the whole District. The age distribution indicates that consumers between the 25 to 40 years are the largest segment of consumers of bakery products. This age group is a group of economically dynamic individuals whose consumption behavioural pattern is influenced by convenience orientation of work routines and frequent purchase of foods. The place of residence profile depicts the pre-eminence of semi-urban consumers and the

next consumers are urban town residents. This is a kind of distribution of the settlement pattern in the Nilgiris District in which semi-urban centers serve as the centers of consumption by mediating between the rural hill populations and the town markets. Rural consumers validate the fact that the bakery products are penetrated beyond town centres and this is an indication that they depend on the outlets that are nearby and serve the dispersed populations. The purchase frequency show that almost a half of the respondents make purchase of bakery products weekly and over 25 percent purchase daily. The general descriptive picture creates a diverse and behaviourally relevant base of consumers that creates a solid basis upon which the choice behaviour determinants will be empirically analyzed in the Nilgiris District.

Table 1: Descriptive Profile of Consumers

Profile Dimension	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	189	54.5
	Female	158	45.5
Age Group	Below 25 Years	72	20.7
	26-40 Years	143	41.2
	41-55 Years	92	26.5
	Above 55 Years	40	11.6
Place of Residence	Town Areas	118	34
	Semi-Urban Areas	83	23.9
	Rural Hill Localities	146	42.1
Frequency of Bakery Purchase	Daily	96	27.7
	Weekly	173	49.9
	Occasional	78	22.4

(Source: Primary Data)

6.1. Empirical Analysis of Determinants Influencing Consumer Choice Behaviour

6.1.1. Hypothesis 1

H_1 : Determinants influencing consumer choice behaviour significantly differentiate bakery product consumers in the Nilgiris District.

The discriminant Analysis was employed to examine whether bakery product consumers differ significantly based on their choice behaviour patterns. This technique is appropriate for identifying the discriminatory power of underlying determinants and for validating whether consumer groups exhibit statistically distinguishable behavioural structures within the study context.

Table 2: Discriminant Function Statistics for Consumer Choice Behaviour

Function	Eigen value	Canonical Correlation	Wilk's Lambda	Chi-Square	Significance
1	0.672	0.633	0.438	179.46	< 0.001**

(Table 2) The findings of the discriminant analysis reveal that there was statistically significant differentiation between consumers of bakery products in the Nilgiris District by depending on their choice behaviour. The fact that the eigen value of the discriminant function depicts sufficient explanatory power in grouping consumers proves that the determinants underline behavioural variance substantially. The canonical correlation value implies the great association between the discriminant function and consumer group membership that the behavioural dimensions modeled by the model can distinguish the consumers. The Wilks Lambda value supports this conclusion since the

comparatively smaller value is an indicator of considerable discrimination power of the determined determinants. This finding validates the fact that consumer choice behaviour with regard to bakery products does not apply uniformly in the sample, however it varies widely among consumers in the District. The outcome explains that bakery consumers within the Nilgiris District are characterized with unique behavioural orientations which are influenced by interaction with local bakery markets and consumption contexts. The acceptance of the hypothesis proves that consumer choice behaviour determinants have the necessary level of discriminatory power to distinguish bakery product consumers in the study area and thus makes a case to further sub classification of behaviour in future analyses (Hair et al., 2022).

6.1.2. Hypothesis 2

H₂: Bakery product consumers in the Nilgiris District can be meaningfully classified into distinct segments based on their choice behaviour patterns.

The cluster analysis suggests that the bakery product consumers in the Nilgiris District can be meaningfully categorised into three different behavioural segments based on their choice behaviour patterns. This is because the clusters of respondents exhibit meaningful variation in consumer engagement rather than random dispersion, thereby justifying the usefulness of clustering for behavioural analysis (Dolnicar, Grün, & Leisch, 2020). Cluster II emerges as the largest segment, containing over two-fifths of the total sample, indicating the presence of a dominant group of consumers whose decision-making behaviour is relatively uniform. Cluster I represents slightly more than one-third of the respondents, reflecting another significant behavioural orientation, while Cluster III is the smallest segment but remains analytically important because of its unique behavioural characteristics. The formation of multiple clusters confirms that consumers of bakery products in the District are not a homogeneous group. Instead, consumer choice

behaviour is heterogeneous due to differences in consumption routines, levels of engagement, and contextual adaptation (Wedel & Kannan, 2021). This segmentation underscores the fact that consumer choice behaviour is organised into identifiable patterns rather than being uniformly distributed across the population. The hypothesis is strongly supported by the empirical categorisation obtained through cluster analysis. The ability to classify consumers into meaningful segments demonstrates that bakery product consumers in the Nilgiris District exhibit differentiated and patterned buying behaviour. Furthermore, the identified clusters provide a robust foundation for subsequent validation using discriminant analysis and for examining how market-related factors influence consumer engagement across different consumer segments (Dolnicar et al., 2020).

H₃: Determinants Influencing Consumer Choice Behaviour Significantly predict consumer engagement with bakery products in the Nilgiris District.

The multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the predictive influence of consumer choice behaviour determinants on consumer engagement with bakery products. This technique is appropriate for assessing the direction strength and significance of influence exerted by independent behavioural dimensions on engagement outcomes within an empirical framework.

(Table 3) The regression findings indicate that consumer choice behaviour determinants have a statistically significant level of predictive value on consumer interest in bakery products in the Nilgiris District. The independent constructs that comprise the model also have positive beta coefficients that show that the greater the behavioural orientation, the greater the engagement. In its turn, product evaluation orientation proves to be the strongest predictor due to the highest standardised beta value. It is implied that the more consumer engagement, the greater the choice behaviour is based on its consistent assessment and overall experience

with products in the bakery. The result of outlet interaction orientation further demonstrates that there is a significant and statistically significant contribution of engagement which is developed through recurrent interaction in bakery retail settings. The consumption routine orientation also adds similarly but with relatively smaller levels which indicate that the aspect of stabilising purpose of habitual purchasing behaviour towards maintaining involvement. The overall model describes a significant percentage of inputs in consumer engagement according to the R square value. The statistically significant F value is evidence of the joint explanatory power of the constructs of independent variables.

Table 3: Regression Estimates for Consumer Engagement with Bakery Products

Independent Constructs	Unstandardised Beta (B)	Standard Error	Standardised Beta (β)	t Value	Significance
Product Evaluation Orientation	0.318	0.061	0.342	5.21	< 0.001**
Outlet Interaction Orientation	0.274	0.058	0.289	4.72	< 0.001**
Consumption Routine Orientation	0.193	0.052	0.214	3.71	0.001**
Constant	1.126	0.347	–	3.24	0.002**
Statistic			Value		
R Square			0.482		
Adjusted R Square			0.471		
F Value			42.86		
Significance			< 0.001**		

The results of the analysis maintain the fact that consumer consumption of bakery products within the Nilgiris District is not constructed randomly but logically based on the determinants of choice behaviour. This finding strengthens the behavioural model of bakery consumption and empirically

supports the analysis of the results of engagement in terms of a multivariate predictive model.

H4: Contextual and market-related challenges significantly influence consumer engagement with bakery products in the Nilgiris District.

(Table 4) The regression findings reveal that both contextual and market-related issues have a statistically significant impact on consumer interaction in the Nilgiris District when it comes to bakery products. The value of the R square reveals that significant amount of changes in engagement can be attributed to external market conditions that prove that the engagement behaviour is also determined not only by the internal orientation of the choice but also by situational limitations. The adjusted R² supports the strong model and confirms its explanatory stability. The accessibility constraint orientation has a negative statistically significant beta coefficient that denotes that increased access to challenges bakery products with consumers. This result is a sign of the influence of geographical scattering and mobility constraints on hill Districts whereby a physical approach to bakery stores directly influences the degree of engagement. The comparatively availability consistency orientation produces the most positive beta which implies that high accessibility of bakery products is important in promoting consumer engagement. The consumers seem to be fully involved as long as there is ensuring availability to them in a predictable manner through market conditions that are stable. The market convenience orientation exerts a positive and significant effect on engagement that indicates that easiness of transaction and situational appropriateness sustain consumption behaviour. The F value is statistically significant which proves the overall explanatory power of the regression model. The results prove the conclusive role of the contextual and market-related issues in influencing consumer involvement into bakery products in the Nilgiris District (*Lim et al., 2023*).

Table 4: Regression Estimates for Contextual and Market-Related Challenges on Consumer Engagement

Independent Constructs	Unstandardised Beta (B)	Standard Error	Standardised Beta (β)	t Value	Significance
Accessibility Constraint Orientation	-0.284	0.064	-0.301	-4.44	< 0.001**
Availability Consistency Orientation	0.327	0.059	0.348	5.54	< 0.001**
Market Convenience Orientation	0.216	0.056	0.231	3.86	0.001**
Constant	1.492	0.382	_	3.91	< 0.001**
Statistic			Value		
R Square			0.456		
Adjusted R Square			0.445		
F Value			39.18		
Significance			< 0.001**		

7. Summary of Findings and Discussion

The research give definite evidence that the consumer choice behaviour in relation to bakery products in the Nilgiris District is organised patterned and embedded in the context. The discriminant analysis reveals that consumers vary widely in their behavioural orientation that determines that the consumption of the bakery in the District is too different. This distinction is an indication that regular engagement to markets of local bakery gradually develops stable choice arrangement among the consumers. The findings are significant to literature on consumer behaviour because they broaden the scope of the knowledge to encompass not just urban centric models. The study indicates that the consumption of bakery in Nilgiris District is conditioned by the region specific factors which predetermine the choice behaviour and continuity of

engagement. These points in discussion lead to the requirement of bakery operators and stakeholders to be mindful or heterogeneity of behaviour and sensitivity to context when serving consumer markets in geographically different areas. This empirical data therefore justifies the suitability of taking a District focused analytical perspective to comprehend the nature of consumption behaviour of bakery products in a realistic and summative way.

8. Suggestions

- The operators of local bakery must adjust product offerings to the structures of consumer choice that are observed through enhancing consistency in product experience and purchasive continuity.
- The accessibility of the outlets and reliability of availability should also be a concern of the traditional bakeries in the Nilgiris District since the empirical findings reveal that the contextual factors contribute to the direct weakened consumer engagement in the geographically fragmented hill markets.
- Instead of using the homogenous techniques of consumer engagement bakery enterprises must to employ the segmented consumer engagement strategies by identifying different behavioural clusters.
- The small bakeries should be facilitated by stakeholders and local trade associations in the market through infrastructural and logistical facilitation measures to help the small bakeries alleviate the market-related challenges.

9. Conclusion

The research provides a confined area based empirical knowledge regarding consumer choice behaviour in relation to the bakery products in Nilgiris District by considering the consumption decisions in their local market and environmental realities. The results were clear on the fact that

the choice of the bakery products in the District is defined by the organized behavioural patterns developing due to the familiarity in the interaction and continuity in the experiences instead of the formation of spontaneous preferences. The consumers exhibit a differentiated choice behaviour that is an indication of adaptation to traditional retail systems, geographic dispersion and routine based consumption practices that define hill District economies. The research confirms that behaviour of the consumers in the bakery products is behaviour based and also contextual and market-based challenges of the District. The study takes consumer behaviour research into a less exposed regional dimension and brings in an empirically solid literature that would capture real-world consumption lives by taking the District perspective of analysis. The results highlight the relevance of the necessity to consider behavioural heterogeneity and situational sensitivity in the analysis of bakery markets that exist in geographically different environments. The research supports the point of context sensitive empirical research to gain knowledge of food consumption behaviour in regional markets and provides a base on which future studies of the consumption behaviour of bakery will be based in comparable economies of the hill District.

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