

SMART

JOURNAL OF BUSINESS MANAGEMENT STUDIES

Vol.3

No. 1

January - June 2007

ISSN 0973 - 1598

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SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT AND ADVANCED RESEARCH TRUST
(SMART)

TIRUCHIRAPPALLI (INDIA)

<http://www.geocities.com/smartbard>

CHANGING TREND OF HOUSEHOLD FOOD CONSUMPTION: A CASE STUDY OF KOCHI, KERALA

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Abstract

Kerala, one of the southern states in India, is known for its consumerism. The development experiment of Kerala, which is popularly known as Kerala Model, indicates a higher level of consumption. In the recent years, there has been a mushrooming growth of the so-called Super Market or Margin Free Markets throughout the state. The city of Kochi is not an exception to this. These Super Markets are flooded with various kinds of materials, including food items which are ready to eat or can be eaten with minimal efforts. A study was conducted among 200 households in the City of Kochi with an objective to examine the consumption pattern of ready made food items by households. In the study, it was found that all the households under the study consumed these ready made food items. Though the consumption is not influenced by the number of members in the family, occupation and income, the choice of the type of product is determined mainly by the income level. The changing pattern of consumption not only provides more leisure time to women but will bring radical change in the market.

Introduction

Kerala, one of the southern states in India, is known for its consumerism. The state has many unique features. Consumption expenditure, which is above the state domestic income, is a noteworthy phenomenon. This has to be read along with the fact that the state has only 7 % of the total state domestic income from manufacturing. The development experiment of Kerala, which is popularly known as *Kerala Model*, suggests that a higher standard of living and higher level of consumption can be attained at low level of industrialization and stagnation in agriculture. This trend, which is visible in every nook and corner of Kerala, can be largely attributed to the *demonstration effect*.

As the economy develops, the nature of consumption too undergoes changes. After meeting the basic requirements, people go for comforts and a larger share of their income is diverted in this direction. These comforts include consumer durables. Some of these like refrigerators, washing machines, grinders and other home appliances are aimed at making the daily household work easy. Many firms have gained an entry and popularity in the market

mainly because they have reduced the physical labour, which is related to cooking.

Statement of the Problem

In the recent years there has been a mushrooming growth of the so-called Super Market or Margin Free Markets throughout the state. The city of Kochi is not an exception to this. These Super Markets are flooded with various kinds of materials, including food items which are ready to eat or can be eaten with minimal efforts. Though a number of studies are done on the consumption pattern of the people, not much effort was taken to analyze the consumption of the readymade food items in Kerala, mainly because these are of recent origin. This study is proposed to cover this vacuum in marketing research.

Objectives of the Study

The major objectives of the study are

1. To examine the consumption pattern of ready made food items by households.
2. To examine the nature and type of readymade food items purchased and consumed from the Supermarket by the households.

Methodology

The study was carried out among 200 households of the City. The selection of the households was based on Stratified Random Sampling Method. Ten wards of the corporation were chosen randomly and 20 households from each ward were chosen using Lottery Method. Information was collected using a structured questionnaire. In addition to this, a number of Super Markets were visited by the author and various products available in these markets were examined. Non-participatory observation technique was also used.

Study Area

Kochi (Cochin), the Queen of the Arabian Sea, is situated on the West Coast of India in the State of Kerala. Kochi can be regarded as the commercial and industrial capital of Kerala and the second most important city after Mumbai on the western coast of India. Roughly speaking, Kochi is 10 ° North and 76 ° East. It has a total area of 125 Sq.kms and has a population of 13.5 lakhs. The economy of the City can be classified as a business economy with concentration on the service sector. Major business areas are gold and textile retail, seafood and spices export, information technology, tourism and allied services, health services, banking, shipbuilding and allied activities and fishing.

Analysis of the Study

Income Distribution

The monthly income of the household under study was assessed. In the sample, it was found that most of the families have income above Rs. 5,000 per month as it is evident from the **Table -1**. The average monthly income of a family as per the data collected comes to Rs. 8343 per month or Rs.1,00,125 per year and the per capita income comes to Rs. 19,670. This is much below the per capita income of the state, which is Rs 24,000 for the year 2003-04. The possibility of under reporting of income is a

major reason for this low level of per capita income.

Family Size

The number of members in the family was examined. The concept “family” is defined as a group of people who live under the same roof and take food from the same kitchen. It was found that most of the families have five or six members. This large size family is not due to Keralites not practising family planning. Almost all families practise two-child norm but most of these households consist of parents, one or two children and close relatives of either of the parents (refer **Table-II**).

Occupational Status

The occupational status of the person who is mainly entrusted with the task of cooking is considered. As per the Indian custom, women take care of cooking, though it is found that others in the family also help her, especially if she is employed. It was found that eight families employed servants for cooking. These families are excluded while analyzing the occupational status.

According to the present study as seen in **Table - 3**, 56 % of persons who were entrusted with cooking in the family were not engaged in any other economically productive activity. It is not surprising that only 44 % of the women under study were employed, considering that employment of women in Kerala is only 15 %.

Major Place of Purchase of Food Items

The major place of purchase of food items was examined. It was found that families were unable to specify a place where they purchased various items required for food requirements. But it was found that all the 200 families under study went to the Super Markets. Learning from the success of some of the Super Markets in the city, the retail shops, however small it may be, at present try to attract their customers by adopting the supermarket style and never forget to name their shop as supermarket or

hypermarket. In addition to these Super Markets, there are specialized shops, say vegetable shops, confectionery, shops for fish, meat etc. From observation, it was found that people tend to depend on these specialized shops for the particular product, even though these are available in the Super/ Hyper Market at the same price.

Nature of the Food Items

The main purpose of this study was to examine the consumption of ready-made food items by the households in the city of Kochi. The traditional suppliers of ready-made food items such as hotels, restaurants, and confectioneries were excluded from the study. Further, the traditionally available ready-made foods such as biscuits, bread, etc were not considered in the present study. In the recent years, markets are flooded with readymade food items, which are packed and are ready for consumption or need just few minutes of cooking for consumption. These items are available at different prices whether these are branded or produced locally.

Types of Items

The ready made food items can be classified under three categories.

1. **Ready for consumption:** A number of items which are available in the markets are ready to consume without any preparation. To manufacture these at home, tremendous efforts and two to four days of preparations are required. At present, these items include those which are indigenously manufactured or used only by certain segment of the society.
2. **Instant foods:** These are goods which need minimal cooking before consumption. These goods are available in packets with all the necessary ingredients in it.
3. **Ready-made ingredients:** A number of ingredients are available in the market. These, which are used for different dishes, are available in a ready to use manner. It is

enough for the consumers to get different ingredients, mix them in the right proportion and cook it for use.

Size of the product: These products are available in a wide variety of sizes in the markets targeting different types of consumers. These items vary from that which can be used for a single person to a family of five to six members.

Price: The prices of these products vary depending on the type, nature, use and ingredients of the good. Goods, which are branded, cost 20 % to 30 % higher compared to the locally manufactured items.

Suppliers: The products' suppliers include local manufacturers, cottage and small-scale manufacturers, and large firms. Local manufacturers often supply perishable products, which last for a day and maximum period of one week in some cases. But large firms supply the same products which can be stored for one month and even more.

Consumption of the ready made food items

While examining the consumption habits of these food items by the households, certain noteworthy findings have been recorded

1. All the families under investigation were consumers of these ready made food items. Further it was found that 60 % of the family depended on these ready made items for their breakfast. They either purchased ready made food or instant makes on most of the days while 55 % depended on the instant mix and other items for preparation of their lunch and dinner.

2. Monthly income plays a dominant role in determining the choice of the product. It was found that higher the monthly income, the more they preferred the branded items. The correlation between monthly income and choice of the branded items is + 0.86.

3. The employment status of the person, who was entrusted with cooking, had little impact on the consumption of ready made food items. It was found that 97% of the employed and 64 % of the unemployed persons were

regular consumers of the ready made food items. The families, who engaged servants, were also not an exception to this.

4. The number of members in the family had little impact on the nature of consumption. Only the volume of the product consumed varied. The number of members in the family did not have any impact on the type of products they consumed.

5. It was further found that 78 % of the respondents were of the opinion that these readymade items were less tasty than the food items they prepared at home. More interestingly, 72% were aware of the fact that various preservatives in these items could be harmful to their health.

Implications of the Study

The changing nature of consumption is not without consequences. Though this impact is not visible at present, they are of great consequence in the days to come. Some of the possible impacts are:

As people shift to the readymade and instant food products, the consumption of the intermediary products tends to decrease. As consumption decreases, the manufacturers of such products may be forced to exit from the market unless they switch over to other products.

The increasing trend in the consumption of readymade food products has increased employment opportunities mainly for women. At present, the women Self Help Groups have found this as an opportunity for self employment. As the type and the consumption of readymade perishable products increases, employment opportunities will also be on the rise.

At present manufacturing and marketing of utensils has a prominent place in the economy. The production and marketing has provided large employment opportunities. But this will be affected if the consumption of readymade food increases.

This change has great impact on the life of women. At present, women spend a greater part of their life in cooking. In many cases, they have to begin the preparation two to three days ahead. But with this change, they will have more time left for themselves and for the family.

But the health of the consumers is a matter of concern. It can be assumed that as competition increases, producers take care to maintain quality of the product. But in this process, various kinds of ingredients which are at times harmful to health, may be added to make the product more attractive and last longer. When these are produced by untrained people, consumers face higher risk. The possibility of mass food poisoning cannot be ruled out.

Conclusion

The changing nature of consumption is not limited to the city of Kochi alone. These trends are visible even in the rural areas. Since Keralites are known for their consumerism, this culture will spread within a very short span of time. This change, which has already taken roots in the advanced countries, will soon spread to the developing countries. This will affect the life style and consumption habit of people. The fair sex, who are often left out or gain only marginal share of changes, stand to benefit maximum from this change. This radical change is a silent revolution with multidimensional impact and implications.

Reference

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2. JS Duesenberry , an American Economist suggests that individuals or households try to copy the consumption levels of their neighbors or other families in a particular community and it is known as demonstration effect. (Macro Economics, Theory and Policy: HL Ahuja, S Chand and Company , New Delhi, 2006 page 122.
3. www.en.wikipedia.org
4. Economic Review 2004, Planning Commission, Government of Kerala,
5. Ibid

Table -1
Distribution of Households According to Monthly Income

Sl. No	Monthly income (in Rs)	No of families	% Of families
1	2500 or less	4	2.00
2	2500 – 5000	16	8.00
3	5000-7500	56	28.00
4	7500-10,000	87	43.50
5	10,000-15,000	31	15.50
6	15,000 and above	6	3.00
7	TOTAL	200	100.00

Source : Primary data

Table -2
Distribution of households according number of members

Sl No	Number of members in the family	No of family	% of family
1	2 or less	4	2
2	3	14	7
3	4	41	20.5
4	5	67	33.5
5	6	59	29.5
6	7 and above	15	7.5

Source: Primary data

Table- 3
The Occupational Status of Persons Entrusted With Cooking

Sl. No	Occupation	No. of persons	%
1	Casual labour	23	11.98
2	Private sector	27	14.07
3	Government sector including PSUs	35	18.23
4	Unemployed	107	55.72
5	Total	192	100.00

Source: Primary data