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MARKETING FRUITS AND VEGETABLES THROUGH CO-OPERATIVES AN ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR

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Marketing is one of the important economic functions of a nation and proper marketing of agricultural produce is of

great importance. Marketing is a comprehensive term covering activities involved at various stages in the flow of products from the primary producer to the ultimate consumer. Agricultural marketing is as important as agricultural production. The fruits and vegetables in particular are characterised by high perishability, seasonality and bulkiness which makes them distinctive from other agricultural produces like cereals, pulses and nuts.

Co-operative marketing is a process of marketing through co-operative organisations formed to perform one or more of the marketing functions in respect of the produce of its members. In general, where these societies are functioning effectively, the member producers are benefited by marketing their produces through them. As an alternative channel of marketing which will reduce the number of intermediaries and benefit both producers and consumers, the promotion and development of co-operative marketing societies are generally advocated.

Faculty members

With the prime objective of controlling the market conditions by means of orderly and regulated supply of fruits and vegetables, the Trichur Fruits and Vegetables Marketing Co-operative Society was registered on 06-02-1957 and started functioning from 27-02-1957. One of the main functions of the society is marketing fruits and vegetables through its retail outlets. The society also intends to enter the wholesale vegetable market in a big way by establishing a chain of cold storages. Hence an understanding of consumer preference will facilitate the society to plan and implement its business more effectively and efficiently.

Objective of the study

The objective of the study is to analyse the buying behaviour of individual consumers and their preference towards the society.

Methodology

The data needed for the study were

collected from a sample of 80 individual consumers selected at random from four sales outlets run by the Trichur Fruits and Vegetable Marketing Co-operative Society within the Trichur Municipal Corporation area. The data were collected by administering a pre-tested structured interview schedule to the consumers and getting their response marked on a five-point scale. The items on the scale were given weights of +2 to -2 in the descending order. The consumer preference index was calculated using the summated rating method.

Buying Behaviour

Consumer behaviour and attitude are important factors that influence the marketing mix of an organisation. The buying behaviour of vegetable consumers in relation to the socio-economic profile is analysed in the first instance.

Tabel 1 Occupation-wise distribution of individual and their buying behaviour

It is evident from Table 1 that 73 per

Buying Behavior

Occupation	Regularly	Occassionaly	Rarely	Total
Agriculture	2	1	0	3 (3.75)
Business Government Service	5 7	6 29	1	12 2 38 (47.50)
Professionals	10	10	0	20 (25.00)
Others	4	3	0	7 (8.75)
Total	28 (35.00)	49 (61.25)	3 (3.75)	80 (100)

HORTICORP
The Vegetable People



Government of Kerala
Department of Agriculture

*took 30 days to become
and we took 35 months more to grow much more than this*

☞ Haritha Stalls and supermarkets	from 10 to 750
☞ Regional Procurement Centres	from 1 to 12
☞ Cold Storage 500 tonne capacity	from 0 to 2
☞ Sales per year	from 5 Lakhs to 5 Crores
☞ Vegetables & Fruits handled per day	from 5 to 200 tonnes
☞ Exclusive festival fairs	from 1 to 14
☞ Beneficiaries of beekeeping & Orchid clubs	from 0 to Thousand
☞ Employment for youth	from 40 to Thousand
☞ Our profit	from (-)90 lakhs to (+)10 lakhs
☞ Our customers	In millions
☞ Satisfaction of customer & farmer	SORRY we would have to try global tenders to quantify this

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cent of the consumers were government employees and professionals; 15 percent were business men and hardly four percent were agriculturists. The large number of government employees and professionals in the sample was due to the location bias of the outlets selected. Regular consumers accounted for 35 percent of the total respondents. Among the regular buyers the professionals were 36 percent. It is heartening to observe that only four percent of the respondents were buying 'rarely' from the society. As high as 61 percent of the respondents were 'occasional' buyers. Among the 'occasional' buyers, the Government employees accounted for 59 percent. Hence the society must take steps to move 'occasional' buyers into 'regular' buyers. The society must seek why the government employees are not buying regularly from the society?.

Table 2 Education wise classification of individual consumers and their buying behaviour.

Buying behaviour				
Education	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Total
Primary	1	2	0	3(3.75)
S.S.L.C.	8	5	1	14(17.50)
Pre-Degree	0	7	1	8(10.00)
Graduate	10	18	1	29(36.25)
Post-graduate	9	7	0	26(32.50)
Total	28(35.00)	49(61.25)	3(3.75)	80(100.0)

Figures in paranthesis show percentage to total.

It can be seen from Table 2 that there existed some correlation between the level of education and consumers patronage of the society. Graduates and Post-Graduates constituted almost 70 percent of the customers of the society. Customers with primary education were hardly four percent of

the sample respondents. This implied that the society was patronaged mainly by the educated class of the society. It may also be noted that 73 percent of the consumers were Government employees and professionals.

According to Table 3 only 14 percent

Table 3 Income wise distribution of individual consumers and their buying behaviour.

Buying behaviour				
Monthly income (Rs.)	Regularly	Occasionally	Rarely	Total
Below 2000	5	6	0	11(13.75)
2000-5000	12	32	2	46(57.50)
Above 5000	11	11	1	23(28.75)
Total	28(35.00)	49(61.25)	3(3.75)	80(100)

Figures in paranthesis show percentage to total

of the consumers belonged to the lower income group. As high as five percent were in the middle-income group and the remaining 29 percent belonged to the higher income group. The reason for this may be that majority of the respondents were

comparison with private traders. The consumer preference towards the society and the private traders was measured on seven parameters. The parameters selected were quality of vegetables, price of vegetables, availability of all sorts of vegetables,

accuracy of weights and measures, absence of malpractices, provision of credit facilities and convenience of working hours.

The low composite consumer preference index secured by the society and private traders suggested that the consumers did not differentiate much between these institutions while purchasing vegetables. However this is only an aggregate picture and hence it does not imply that the consumers rate the society and private traders equally on all parameters influencing choice of shop. Therefore, an attempt was made to analyse the repose of the consumers on each selected parameter.

Quality of vegetables.

The index value for the quality of goods supplied by the society was 53.13 as against the index value of 1.88 for private traders. It clearly indicated that the consumers perceived the quality of vegetables supplied by the society are superior to that of the private traders. However it must be noted that the actual quality of the vegetables made available in the market was

employees and professionals.

Consumer Preference

Having studied the buying behaviour of individual consumers an attempt was made to examine the consumer preference towards the society in

Table 4: Consumer preference index

Sl.No.	Parameters	Co-operative Society (Index value)	Private traders or agencies (Index value)
1.	Quality of vegetables	53.15	1.88
2.	Price of vegetables	51.88	3.75
3.	Availability of all sorts of vegetables	-14.38	53.13
4.	Accuracy of weights and measures	74.38	-31.88
5.	Absence of malpractices	75.63	-51.25
6.	Provision of credit facilities	-77.50	83.13
7.	Convenience of working hours	-30.63	72.50
8.	Composite index	18.93	18.75

much below the quality perceived by the consumers.

Price of Vegetables.

The index value for price was 51.88 for the society and 3.75 for the private traders. It implied that the society was charging a low price and the private traders a high price from the consumers. Still the consumers were not satisfied with the the price charged by the society.

Availability of all sorts of vegetables

Availability of all sorts of vegetables at a single point is an important consideration in the choice of a shop. Consumers in general do not wander from shop to shop to procure all their requirements.

The index for this parameter was negative (-14.38) for the society and positive (53.18) for the private traders. Private traders stocked a variety of vegetables to attract the consumers. The index also suggested that even the private traders had not been able to live up to the expectation of the consumers. The low percentage of regular customers in the society shops may be attributed to this weakness. This is an area where the society has to improve its performance to increase the volume of business and to build up regular customers.

Accuracy of weights and measure.

Vegetable markets are notorious for underweights and measures. There

would be hardly any consumer who had not complained about inaccurate weights and measures. The high index of 74 scored by the society on this parameter indicated that the consumers were quite satisfied with the weights and measures of the society. On the other hand, the negative index of 32 scored by the private traders expressed the high degree of dissatisfaction among the consumers.

Absence of malpractices

Vegetables retailing is prone to a lot of malpractices since vegetables are perishable in nature. This can go to the extreme level of applying poisonous chemicals that may extend the shelf life of vegetables by preventing decay. The relatively high index scored by the society on this parameter demonstrated the consumers faith in the healthy trade practices of the society. The negative index value of 51 scored by private traders reiterated the general belief that private traders indulge in unscrupulous trade practices.

Provision of credit facilities

For many consumers credit facility is one of the factors that determined the selection of shops. Vegetables, being a daily consumption item, are to be purchased frequently for cash or credit. Credit facility is a convenience for the salaried class of consumers. The society is not extending any credit facility to its consumers, while private

traders do provide such a facility. This has resulted in the society obtaining a deplorably low index value of -78 on this parameter and the private traders scoring a very high index value of 83. The implication is that credit facility can be selectively used as a strategy to win and retain the customers.

Convenience of working hours

It is an accepted principle that the marketers should time their working hours to suit the convenience of the consumers. The score of the society on this variable is -31 indicating inconvenient working hours in the eyes of the consumers. On the other hand the private traders keep their shops open from early morning to late night to facilitate convenient shopping. This is well evident from the high index value of 73 scored by private traders on this parameter.

Conclusion

It can be safely said that neither the society nor the private traders had succeeded to cultivate a strong preference towards them. The society had succeeded in offering quality vegetables at fair prices in correct weights and measures and following healthy trade practices. However, it failed to provide all sorts of vegetables together with credit facility at convenient working hours. The private traders, on the other hand, had wooed the consumers by stocking all sorts of vegetables, extending credit facility and offering convenient working hours though they supplied inferior quality vegetables at higher prices, and adopting unhealthy trade practices. The society can make a dent in vegetable retailing by emboldening its strengths and mitigating its weaknesses identified by the consumers.





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