

Do consumers really look for convenience food especially semi-processed vegetables?

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ABSTRACT

Fresh and minimally-processed vegetables are ready to use foods and are products which have been freshly-cut, washed, packaged and maintained with refrigeration. Fresh-cut products are in a raw state and even though processed they remain in a fresh state, ready to eat or cook, without freezing, thermal processing or treatments with additives or preservatives. Nowadays consumers' interests are shifting from raw vegetables to semi-processed and packed vegetables. The purpose of the present study was to identify the significant factors which influenced the consumers' preference for semi-processed and packed vegetables. Descriptive research design was used in the study with a sample of 120 consumers who preferred to buy processed vegetables from the supermarkets of Coimbatore. It was found that easy way of cooking, reduced wastage and time reduction were the major attributes which influenced the consumers' preference.

Keywords: Consumers' preference; semi-processed vegetables; packed vegetables; cut vegetables

INTRODUCTION

Vegetables are the important and cheapest sources of minerals, vitamins and protein. There is a general trend of increase in fresh vegetable consumption mainly due to the health awareness especially in urban cities. Fruit and vegetable intakes are associated with reduced risk of cardiovascular disease, cancer and all-cause mortality. This supports public health recommendations to increase fruit and vegetable intake for the prevention of cardiovascular disease, cancer and premature mortality (Aune et al 2017).

But in a busy scheduled life not everyone would get enough time to have healthy food habits which includes fresh vegetables, fruits, cereals etc. At this juncture the demand for fresh-cut vegetables arises in the form of ready to use convenience foods. Most of the singles and working couples being cramped on time many reach out to the neatly packaged trays of evenly-

cut vegetables for the right manner (easy consumption) rather than the drudgery of peeling vegetables, shelling peas and trimming greens, herbs and vegetables and then combining these ingredients for preparing foods. Fresh-cut produce is defined as any fresh fruit or vegetable or any combination thereof that has been physically altered from its original form but remains in a fresh state. Regardless of commodity, it has been trimmed, peeled, washed and cut into 100 per cent usable product that is subsequently bagged or prepackaged to offer consumers high nutrition, convenience and value while still maintaining freshness.

There is a general trend to increase fresh vegetable consumption mainly due to their health properties. Different organizations like WHO, FAO and USDA EFSA recommend the increasing vegetable consumption to decrease the risk of cardiovascular diseases and cancer. Consumers' increasing concern about food and health associated with reduced time to prepare meals has given the need to search for

convenient products with fresh-like quality. So purchase of fresh-cut produce from supermarkets is an easy and interesting alternative for convenience, freshness, nutrition, safety and the eating experience (Bhattacharjee et al 2012).

As per Baselice et al (2017) although there is a long-term decrease in the consumption of fruits and vegetables, fresh-cut products, because of their convenience, represent a valid alternative to counteract this negative trend. In fact the fresh-cut sector is showing positive figures and innovation in product quality and safety attributes which are generally valued by consumers.

Earlier Jafersadhiq (2014) reported that consumers buying behavior is influenced by the traditional way of manufacturing process, traditional ingredients and the availability of products next to their shops. The study revealed that consumers were not ready to change over their brand.

Pollard et al (2002) reviewed a rigorous investigation on the factors that affect the choice of fruits and vegetables and their intake. Sensorial appeal, social interactions, costs, time constraint, personal ideology and advertising are all factors capable of influencing the choice. There is an inverse relationship between the family income and the consumption of fruits and vegetables (Marshall et al 1994, Cassady et al 2007). Consumers social environment, working time, time outside home and consumption of food in restaurant are also the factors (Buckley et al 2007).

de Boer et al (2004) analysed Irish convenience food consumers through a comparison of the regression results across four convenience food categories and found that in the category with the highest level of consumption, the frequency of purchase was positively correlated with lifestyle (social events, eating alone, breakdown of mealtimes and novelty) and time pressure while in a negative way with interest in cooking and importance of freshness.

The strongest drivers for convenience food consumption are age, concern about naturalness, nutrition knowledge and cooking skills (Brunner et al 2010).

The present study examined the major factors influencing the consumers' preference for semi-processed and packed vegetables in Coimbatore.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive research design was used in the study with a sample of 120 consumers who preferred to buy processed vegetables from the supermarkets of Coimbatore. Multiple linear regression was carried out to identify the significant factors which influenced the consumers' preference for processed vegetables. Time saving, easy to cook, less wastage, quantity, quality, more number of varieties, availability of exotic products, non-seasonal availability, product display, price and packaging are some of the major attributes of processed cut vegetables which have a significant effect on consumers' preference. These eleven factors were considered as the independent variables.

RESULTS and DISCUSSION

The model summary in Table 1 indicates that the independent variables accounted to have about 61 per cent influence on the preference of consumers over the semi-processed vegetables. This proved that independent factors played a significant role in determining the factors influencing consumers' preference.

Table 1. Model summary

Model	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	Standard error of the estimate
1	.784 ^a	.615	.576	.487

Table 2 indicates that the factors such as time saving ($\beta = .311$, $t = 2.890$, $p < 0.01$), easy to cook ($\beta = .238$, $t = 2.347$, $p < 0.05$) and less wastage ($\beta = .162$, $t = 2.005$, $p < 0.05$) were positively related to the preference of consumers as all the three factors were significant. The other variables did not have a significant influence on consumers' preference towards semi-processed or fresh-cut vegetables.

CONCLUSION

The analysis revealed that time saving, easy to cook and less wastage were the significant factors which had direct positive influence on the consumers' preference of semi-processed fresh-cut and packed vegetables.

Table 2. Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized coefficient		Standardized coefficient (beta)	‘t’	Sig
	Beta	SE			
(Constant)	-.535	.615	-	-.870	.386
Time saving	.240	.083	.311	2.890	.005**
Easy to cook	.241	.103	.238	2.347	.021*
Less wastage	.197	.098	.162	2.005	.048*
Quantity	.105	.085	.077	1.239	.218
Quality	.159	.096	.119	1.652	.101
Variety of products	.017	.154	.014	.112	.911
Availability of exotic products	-.044	.097	-.043	-.454	.651
Non-seasonal availability	.032	.111	.024	.286	.775
Product display	.220	.145	.254	1.510	.134
Price	-.030	.138	-.035	-.217	.829
Packaging	.075	.059	.081	1.262	.210

Dependent variable: Consumer preference, SE: Standard error, *Significant at 5% level, **Significant at 1% level

Hence semi-processed and packed vegetables play an important role in the consumers’ diet as they would take only a minimum time to cook at ease without much wastage as compared to raw vegetables. Retailers could improve their promotional activities towards the sale of semi-processed and packed cut-vegetables like packaging, display, price, exotic choice, unseasonal availability, quality, nutritional value which are important in the consumption of fresh-cut vegetables.

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