Store choice behavior of consumers in evolving market

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is to examine the socio-economic and demographic variables and store attributes together influencing the retail store choice behaviour of fruits and vegetables consumers in urban area of Tamil Nadu. The primary data were collected through Mall intercept survey method in the selected fruits and vegetables retail store outlets in the city of Coimbatore. The consumers were approached randomly to participate in a survey questionnaire. The total sample respondents from the retail stores considered for the study was 400. The finding of the study will through light strength and weakness of the retailers *viz.,* National Corporate Retail Chains (NCRC), Regional Corporate Retail Chains (RCRC), Private Sector Specialized Stores (PRSS), Public Sector Specialized Stores (PUSS) and Traditional Mom and Pop (M&P) Stores in Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. The key findings of the study would help the sample retailers to adopt innovative idea and new marketing strategies to get a strong foothold in the retail market. The originality/value of this paper is but most of the literature has focused neither store attribute nor shopper attribute in the evolving marketplace but this study was attempted to investigate both the retail store as well as shopper attributes in the case of fruits and vegetables.

KEY WORDS : Store choice, Fruits and vegetables, Multinomial logit, National corporate and Retail chain

Traditionally consumers in India were buying fruits and vegetables in local retail outlets, street vendors and kirana stores / mom and pop stores mostly based on familiarity in retailer and retail outlets. After 1990s due to liberalization, privatization, globalization policies retail sector began to grow, more with regard to non-agricultural produce than agricultural produce. However, since 2000 many large corporate firm entered in to organized retailing. Fruits and vegetable sector become a small part of the large malls. Exclusive modern fruits and vegetable retail chains with

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greater emphasis on food safety and quality has not found its place in Indian markets. In some states, the government introduced farmers markets in which the fruits and vegetables were sold directly consumers by the farmers. Regional or city/ town centres small network of retail chains for fruits and vegetables gained prominent in few large cities like Coimbatore. Such developments have given more option in terms of retail formats to the consumers. At this stage, consumers are exploring the available opportunities to get the best value for the money paid by them. The chain store features of farmers market is low price but only domestically produced fruits and vegetables are available.

Store choice is a decision that a shopper is fairly involved in. It is important for a store to understand this behaviour for developing marketing strategies to attract and keep its clientele. Arnold *et al.* (1998), Arnold and Luthra (2000), Sinha and Banerjee (2004), Fox *et al.* (2004), van Waterschoot *et al.* (2008) showed that the store choice is recognized as a cognitive process which is highly influenced by consumers' socio-demographic characteristics. In organized retail outlets,

large variety of imported and domestic fruits and vegetables with mix of three Ps (product, price and promotion) of the four Ps of the marketing mix to attract the consumers. The firm also interested to know the consumers decision process and factors that influence their store choice. Considering all the above aspects, a study was undertaken to analyze the consumers store choice behavior and factor that influence the store choice. The overall objective of the study is to analyze retail store choice behaviour of the consumers with respect to fruits and vegetables.

Lumpkin *et al.* (1985) found that elderly customers behaved differently from younger ones in terms of the type of store patronized. The former group is less price-conscious and proximity of residence to store is not an important factor. They consider shopping as a recreational activity and choose a store that is perceived to be high on "entertainment" value. Dodge and Summer (1969) and Aaker and Jones (1971) found store choice to be dependent on socioeconomic background of consumers, their personality, and past purchase experience. Mitchell and McGoldrick (1996) and Mitchell and Harris (2005) in their view of store choice, gaves more importance to the consumer side, and has looked at the consumer attributes, as well as the situational and tasks associated with shopping. Several studies on consumer store choice behaviour were available for western countries and only very few studies in Indian context and none in the case of fruits and vegetables retail stores. Hence, this pioneering study wills throw light in these aspects. So, the store choice has been seen in the context of the risk reduction strategies of the shoppers. A narrower segment of the store choice research has been devoted to studying individual difference variables, such as demographic, socio-economic, or psychological variables, as the key predictors of store choice reveled by Bellenger *et al.* (1976), Douglas (1976), Monroe and Guiltinan (1975) and Winn and Childers (1976). Bell and Lattin (1998) found that there exists a relationship between a household's shopping behaviour and store preference.

METHODOLOGY

Retailers in the Coimbatore city can be broadly classified into five categories *viz.,* i.) National Corporate Retail Chains (NCRC), ii.) Regional Corporate Retail Chains (RCRC), iii.) Private Sector Specialized Stores (PRSS), iv.)Public Sector Specialized Stores (PUSS) and v.) Traditional Mom and Pop Stores (Kirana Stores) adopting the classification of NABARD (2011). One retail outlet from each of retail store type was selected based on sales volume (maximum) with respect to fruits and vegetables for conducting the study. Accordingly Reliance Fresh was selected for NCRC, Shri Kannan Departmental Store was selected under RCRC, Pazhamudhir Nilayam for PRSS and Uzavar Santhai (Farmers Market). Two kirana stores near each of the four retail store type were

selected by simple random method. In each kirana stores ten customers were selected. The adult consumers irrespective of gender and age who had purchased for at least one year at the same retail outlet were considered as respondents for this study. Among the customers visiting each of the retail outlet, eighty consumers were selected as respondent using simple random sampling. Thus, the total sample respondents selected from the retail stores for the study was 400. The primary data . . . . in the selected sample retail store outlets in the city of Coimbatore. The consumers were approached randomly to participate in the survey. Respondents were contacted at a designated spot outside the main entrance of the retail outlet after their purchases and were requested to participate in the survey (Phau and Teah, 2009). The data were collected in the year 2011 through a well structured and pre-tested interview schedule.

The consumer choice to select a particular store is not limited to either one particular store or one particular characteristic. In such type of problems the following study used the multinomial logit model.The multinomial logit model provides a set of probabilities for more than one choice for a consumer with number of characteristics. The store choice behaviour is specified as the following Multinomial Logit Model following (Greene, 2002) :

$$Prob(Y_1 = j) = \frac{e^{\beta_j' X_i}}{\sum_{k=0}^{4} e^{\beta_k' X_i}}, \quad j = 0,1,...,4. \qquad ......(1)$$

where,

Y_i = Consumer store choice

X_i = Vector of consumer characteristics

B_j = Parameters to be estimated

Dependent variables

NCRC–National Corporate Retail Chains (Reliance fresh)

RCRC–Regional Corporate Retail Chains (ShriKannan Departmental Store)

PRSS–Private Sector Specialized Store (Kovai Pazamudhir nilayam)

PUSS–Public Sector Specialized Store (Uzhavar Santai-Farmers Market) and

M&P–Mom and Pop Store (Kirana Stores)

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The results obtained from the present investigation are summarized below :

General characteristics of the respondents :

In this study general characteristics of the respondents discussed include age, gender, marital status, educational status and occupation. These characteristics are likely to influence the buying behaviour and store choices of the respondents. Besides, the features of the sample households

viz., family type, family size, working members in the family and average annual income of the family were also analysed for better interpretation of the results of the study. In this study general characteristics of the respondents examined include age, gender, marital status, educational status and occupation. These characteristics are likely to influence the buying behaviour and store choices of the respondents. Major share of consumers were from the age group of 20-39. The respondents in the M & P store were mostly old aged people above 50 years. In the case of Public Sector Specialised Stores, consumers were mostly spread across 20- 49 age groups.

Major share of consumers purchasing from NCRC, RCRC, PRSS and PUSS were males. In the case of M&P stores, majority of the respondents were female. The proximity of shops to the household and personal rapport could have made Mom and Pop stores the favoured retail outlet among women. The married respondents constituted the major share of the respondents in all stores. A majority of the respondents were graduates in all stores. All the respondents were literates in NCRC and RCRC stores. Majority of the sample respondents were employed in private sector (36 %) while 26 per cent of the respondents were self-employed / business followed by government sector (13 %). Majority of the sample households were nuclear type (76 per cent) and the rest were joint family (24 %). Family size of the majority of the sample households was 4 to 6 members followed by 34 per cent of the families with less than or equal to three members and only 13 per cent of the respondents had a family size of more than 6.

Most of the families (65.50 %) had one working person in a family and 25 per cent of the families had two working persons. Majority of the households (45.75 %) had an annual family income in the range of 2 lakh to 5 lakh while 28 per cent of the households had an annual family income of Rs. 90000 to 200000 range.

The income of the family is one of the key factors influencing the purchasing power of the family. The average annual income of the family was classified based on National Council of Applied Economic Research (NCAER) Classification. The households were classified into five groups' *viz.,* deprived (less than Rs. 90,000), Aspirers (Rs. 90,000 to 2,00,000), Seekers (Rs. 2,00,000 to 5,00,000), Strivers (Rs. 5,00,000 to 10,00,000) and Global (more than Rs. 10,00,000). Majority of buyers were 'Seekers' (61.25 %) followed by 'Aspirers' (15 %) in the case of NCRC and RCRC stores. In the case of PRSS, major share of buyers were 'Seekers' (46.25 %) followed by 'Strivers' (30 %). In the case of Mom & Pop store, major share of 'buyers' were 'Aspirers' (40 %) followed by 'Seekers (37.5 %). In all about 75 per cent of the consumers were from the two categories *viz.,* Seekers and Aspirers. The average annual family income of the district was Rs. 2.51 lakh (Seekers) (Census, 2011).

This study is to explain the store choice behaviour of consumers of fruits and vegetables (F&V). It is assumed that a linear relationship would exist between the store choice behaviour and predictor variables. Since multiple categories of store outletss were considered, unorganized retail store (Mom and Pop Store) was chosen as the comparison group

Table 1 : Consumers' store choice behaviour: Estimates of multinomial logit regression								
	M1- NCRC		M2- RCRC		M3- PRSS		M4- PUSS	
Variable	Co-eff.	t value	Co-eff.	t value	Co-eff.	t value	Co-eff.	t value
Constant	-4.334	-1.53	-2.262	-0.82	-7.893	-2.64	-5.018	-1.79
Sex	0.723**	0.87	0.442	0.55	0.147	0.17	0.226	0.28
Age	-0.904*	-2.52	-0.41	-1.21	-0.505	-1.39	-0.023	-0.07
Education	-0.572	-1.83	-0.206	-0.67	-0.417	-1.29	-0.15	0.05
Income	1.685***	2.89	1.414**	2.48	2.033***	3.41	1.706***	2.98
Family type	3.477***	2.92	3.420**	2.85	3.320***	2.71	2.860**	2.41
Size of household	2.932***	3.10	1.936**	2.05	2.193**	2.29	1.216	1.31
Purchase frequency	-1.926***	-4.67	-2.571***	-6.24	-2.387***	-5.71	-2.151***	-5.34
Market access	23.637***	40.13	23.927***	41.02	24.736***	42.87	-23.170***	-40.06
Store factors	24.99***	58.77	24.160***	58.90	24.651***	59.98	24.488***	56.86
Product factors	-1.360	-1.84	-0.896	-1.25	0.409	0.53	-0.998	-1.41
Pricing factors	1.458*	1.72	1.841**	2.23	1.906**	2.22	2.910***	3.55
Services factors	1.376*	1.68	0.937	1.17	0.675	0.81	0.449	0.56
Food safety	3.834***	4.63	1.710**	2.08	3.611***	4.28	1.428*	1.73
Food quality	-0.045	-0.06	0.055	0.07	2.471***	3.09	1.361*	1.83
Labelling	-0.230	-0.27	0.357	0.43	0.348	0.39	0.970	1.14

Note: *, ** and *** indicate significance of values at P=0.01, 0.05 and 0.1, respectively.
Log livelihood = –343.328   No of observation = 400
Chisquare value = 600.89   *Pseudo R^2 =0.466*

and the model was predicted for each of the four organised retail stores. The results obtained from the Multinomial Logit Regression are given in Table 1. The model is statistically significant in term of Chi-square (600.89***) criteria.

The variable, 'frequency of purchase' had a significance level of 1 per cent in all the four models. The variables namely, income, family type, pricing factors and food safety had a significant level ranging between 1 and 10 per cent in all the four models. The variables 'store factor' was found to be significant at 1 per cent in three models. Family members' variable was significant in three models except Public Sector Specialized Store and Mom & Pop models. Market access factor variable was significant at 1 per cent in meaningful in two models namely, Regional Corporate Retail Chain - Mom & Pop and Private Sector Specialized Store-Mom & Pop models. Food quality variables were found to be significant at 1 per cent in PRSS-M & P model and 10 per cent in PUSS and M & P model. The variables sex, age and service factors were significant in National Corporate Retail Chain and Mom & Pop only. It is observed that, education product factors and labelling variables are not statistically significant in none of the four models.

Marginal effects of predictor variables of multinomial logit model :

The estimated marginal probabilities of store choice behaviour of consumers are given in Table 2. The marginal probability co-efficients are the probability of changes in the store choice behaviour of consumers resulting from unit change in the specified variables in the model. The results

reveal that, an unit increase in the age of the consumers results in increase in the rate of preferences to Regional Corporate Retail Chains (RCRC) and Public Sector Specialized Stores (PUSS) by 0.0761 and 0.0039 units respectively, whereas, a fall of 0.0994 units is in the likelihood of preferences of consumers towards of National Corporate Retail Chain Stores (NCRC).

The likelihood of the consumers' store choice preferences to Regional Corporate Retail Chain and Public Sector Specialized Stores raises by 0.0727 and 0.0027 units, respectively for one unit rise in the education level of the consumers, whereas 0.0643 unit fall in the rate of preferences was observed in the National Corporate Retail Chains, for every unit rise in the education level.

Increase in the income level of consumers resulted fall in the likelihood of preferences for the Regional Corporate Retail Chain by 0.1027 units and increase the rate of preference for Private Sector Specialized Stores by 0.0893 unit.

One unit increase in the household size of the consumers resulted in an increase in the rate of preferences for National Corporate Retail Chain by 0.1981 unit and a decrease in the rate of preferences by 0.1649 and 0.0076 units in the case of Regional Corporate Retail Chain and Public Sector Specialized Stores, respectively.

The frequency of purchase influenced the store choice. Preferences to National Corporate Retail Chain increased by 0.1250 units for every unit increase in the frequency of purchase. But increase in purchase frequency decreased the likelihood of preferences to Regional Corporate Retail Chain by 0.1114 units.

Table 2 : Marginal effects of predictor variables of multinomial logit model					
Variables	NCRC	RCRC	PRSS	PUSS	M & P
Sex	0.08139 (0.96)	-0.00615 (-0.06)	-0.07359 (-0.94)	-0.00164 (-0.58)	-0.000000624 (-0.52)
Age	-0.09941*** (-2.68)	0.07608* (1.82)	0.01938 (0.64)	0.00393*** (3.20)	0.000000759 (1.33)
Education	-0.06432** (-2.10)	0.07269** (2.05)	-0.01105 (-0.43)	0.00267*** (2.64)	0.000000476 (1.06)
Income	0.01304 (0.27)	-0.10272* (-1.79)	0.08925** (2.19)	0.00043 (0.29)	-0.00000212* (-1.68)
Family type	0.02099 (0.20)	0.00469 (0.04)	-0.02112 (-0.22)	0.00454 (-0.04)	-0.000000186 (-1.11)
Household size	0.19808*** (2.69)	-0.16496* (-1.91)	-0.02553 (-0.39)	-0.00757*** (-2.61)	-0.00000297 (-1.62)
Purchase frequency	0.12499*** (3.75)	-0.11135*** (-3.34)	-0.01483 (-0.61)	0.00118 (1.16)	0.00000299* (1.95)
Market access	-0.13339 (-1.57)	0.08633 (0.95)	0.04233 (0.64)	0.004728** (2.24)	-0.000000204 (-0.18)
Store attributes	0.14902* (1.89)	-0.16255* (-1.94)	0.02318 (0.37)	-0.00041 (-0.19)	-0.0092315 (-1.62)
Product factors	-0.19044*** (-2.56)	-0.06424 (-0.77)	0.25638*** (4.25)	-0.00168 (-0.77)	0.000000911 (0.95)
Pricing factors	-0.08852 (-1.19)	0.04204 (0.49)	0.03683 (0.57)	0.00963*** (2.77)	0.0000210 (-1.48)
Service factors	0.11735 (1.48)	-0.03825 (-0.45)	-0.07542 (-1.26)	-0.003670* (-1.70)	-0.00000116 (-1.21)
Food safety	0.29837*** (4.15)	-0.45084*** (-6.48)	0.16127*** (2.68)	-0.00880*** (-3.35)	-0.00000373* (-1.69)
Food quality	-0.19775*** (-2.82)	-0.23976*** (-3.04)	0.43315*** (6.86)	0.00437** (1.19)	-0.000000753 (-0.85)
Labelling	-0.01350 (-0.16)	0.07786 (0.68)	0.26426*** (2.45)	-0.32862*** (-7.28)	-0.00000756 (-1.59)

Figures in the parenthesis indicate the t-ratio for Multinomial Logit model
*, ** and *** indicates significance of values at P=0.01, 0.05 and 0.1, respectively.

Market access attributes such as location of stores, number of neighbouring stores, distance, hours of operations, etc., increased the likelihood of consumer's preferences to Public Sector Specialized Stores by 0.0047 unit.

Store attributes such as layout, loyalty of store, aeration etc., influenced the likelihood of consumer preferences to National Corporate Retail Chain by 0.1490 unit and decreased the rate of preferences to Regional Corporate Retail Chain stores by 0.1626 unit.

When there is liking for product factors such as wider merchandise, credibility of product availability of exotic varieties, the rate of preferences for Private Sector Specialized Stores increased by 0.2564 unit and a fall in the likelihood of the consumer preferences to National Corporate Retail Chain by 0.1904 unit.

Perception on pricing rises, the likelihood of preferences to Public Sector Specialized Stores increased by 0.0096 unit. When the service factor perception rises, there will be decrease in the likelihood of preferences to Public Sector Specialized Stores by 0.0037 unit.

Increase in the food safety perception increases the likelihood of preferences for National Corporate Retail chain and Private Sector Specialized Stores by 0.2984 and 0.1613 units respectively. But there will be a decrease in the preferences to Regional Corporate Retail Chain and Public Sector Specialized Stores by 0.4508 and 0.0088 units respectively.

Food quality preferences would influence the consumers' likelihood of preference to Private Sector Specialized Store and Public Sector Specialized Stores by 0.4332 and 0.0044 units respectively. But the likelihood of preference to National Corporate Retail Chain and Regional Corporate Retail Chain stores would fall by 0.1978 and 0.2398 units respectively. Preferences for labelling would decrease the likelihood of preference for Public Sector Specialized Stores by 0.3286, whereas the likelihood of preference for Private Sector Specialized Store would rise by 0.2643.

It could be inferred from the marginal probabilities obtained from the research result that, four factors namely, size of household, purchase frequency, store attributes and food safety positively influenced the probability of preference to purchase fruits and vegetable in National Corporate Retail Chain Stores (NCRC). The NCRC in the study, Reliance Fresh offered innovative Fruits and Vegetable market promotion activities such as provision of loyalty cards to the privileged customers, sending SMS about discounts and offers, initiating Wednesday bazaar, circulating leaflets on best deals etc., these would have motivated the consumers to patronise the stores as compared to other stores in their locality.

As regards the RCRC (Sri Kannan Departmental Store) relatively old aged and educated customers preferred the store for the purchase of fruits and vegetables. Sri Kannan Departmental Store houses wider merchandise covering the product desired by all age groups. Aged customers purchased fruits and vegetable and grocery in addition to other products for their household which where made available under one roof.

The factors namely occupation, income, product factors, food safety and food quality determined the probability of the consumers to choose the Private Sector Specialized Stores namely, Kovai Pazamudhir Nilayam. PazamudhirNilayam concentrated on food safety and quality. Persons employed in private sector with relatively higher income group preferred to shop at Pazamudhirnilayam for purchase of fruits and vegetables. The probability of preference by consumers to Public Sector Specialized Store farmers market (Uzavar Santhai) was positively influenced by factors such as age, education, market access and food quality. Uzavar santhai is located in the central residential part of the city with adequate market access attributes such as parking facility, number of neighbouring stores, location etc., attracted the consumers to choose Uzavar Santhai. When the frequency of purchase gets higher the tendency of the consumers to choose Mom and Pop store- kirana store seems to be higher. Mom and pop stores were preferred by low income group, retired persons or customers who rely upon their daily wages.

Conclusion :

Convenience, product range and services greatly influenced the consumers' preferences for traditional mom and pop stores. The modern fruits and vegetable retail stores though bestow attention for providing wider merchandise of product, they need to bestow attention to personalized service and convenience factor in their store formats, so as to improve their competitive advantage. The results also indicated that, as income and size of the household increased the concern over food safety parameters and the preference to modern fruits and vegetable retail stores increased. Therefore the modern retail store should target this section of consumers. Since the consumers are placing emphasis on food safety parameters, the government should formulate and enforce guidelines / regulations for ensuring food safety and hygiene at the fruits and vegetable retail stores.

Income, nuclear family type, competitive price and concern over food safety parameters had a positive and significant influence on the choice of modern fruits and vegetable retail outlets. The size of the household and higher frequency of purchase had significant negative influence on the choice of modern fruits and vegetable retail outlets. The data and literature reveals that the income of the Indian households is increasing, families are becoming more of nuclear type and concern for food safety and quality is increasing. Thus, the consumers' demographic profile is changing and the evolving consumer profile and it influence on store choice needs to be taken in to

account by the firms that will enter Indian market through FDI, especially while formulating their positioning, promotional strategies and designing their store formats. Needs are to be taken in to account in formulating policies related to retailing fruits and vegetables. Government has to take initiatives and provide incentives to transform fruits and vegetable retail outlets with greater emphasis on food safety, quality, hygiene and tractability.

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