

Study on consumer awareness of dairy analogues in Gujarat State

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Abstract: Milk is considered almost a complete food that provides macro and micronutrients in balanced proportions. To capture the market of milk and milk products, their imitation product manufacturers use the word 'milk'. A detailed survey on the consumer awareness of dairy analogues of 852 respondents from 8 districts of Gujarat was done. This study analyzed the consumer awareness towards dairy analogues, to determine whether price, taste, texture and push selling have a direct effect on market demand of dairy products and whether consumers pay attention to the labels of the products. It was concluded that the consumers are less aware of the dairy analogues (milk, ice cream, butter and cheese). They pay attention to the price primarily followed by taste, appearance and brand. The consumers do not pay much attention to the parameters such as nutritional benefits, labels, ingredients, and best before or use by date.

Keywords: Consumer awareness, Dairy analogue, Gujarat.

Milk has been an unquestioned staple food of the Indian diet for centuries. Milk is a nutrient-dense food of highly bioavailable nutrients at a very low cost; hence it is considered almost a complete food. It is the first food that is being received by any mammal after birth. The Codex Alimentarius Commission, the apex body for the collection of internationally adopted food standards

and related texts, defines 'milk' as "The normal mammary secretion of milking animals obtained from one or more milkings without either addition to it or extraction from it, intended for consumption as liquid milk or further processing." In today's cut-throat competitive world, some imitation products are being tried to misguide and confuse consumers by systematic wrong marketing while using dairy terms like the word "milk." Many consumers are being diverted to plant-based products as non-dairy milk alternatives. In India, FSSAI (2017) notification has mentioned the use of dairy terms. Milk has been well defined as lacteal secretion; the term milk cannot be legally used for plant-based beverages or drinks. Under such circumstances, consumers must get real information backed by science and regulations. Balanced nutrition is an integral part of a healthy way of life. There is a global trend that the consumption of plant-based food products substitutes for the consumption of dairy products. There are abundant dairy analogues or imitation products available in the market today such as margarine or vegetable fat spreads, frozen desserts, filled cream, filled cheese and burfi are imitation products of butter, ice cream, dairy cream, natural cheese and sweetened khoa, respectively. Similarly, milk protein is substituted with vegetable proteins, especially soy proteins.

Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), an apex body for all matters related to food safety and standards in India defines milk as "The normal mammary secretion derived from complete milking of healthy milch animal, without either addition to that or extraction therefrom, unless otherwise provided in these regulations and it shall be free from colostrum." Analogues are the products manufactured using cheap substitutes either partially or wholly to the product's actual ingredient, e.g., milk fat, a unique and costliest ingredient of milk is replaced with more affordable alternatives such as vegetable fat/oils. There are plenty of imitation products available in the market and are wrongly marketed to target the consumers for more profit by manufacturers. The market of analogues in India is as high as 50,000 crores if we consider organized and unorganized sectors, said Vijay Sardana (Jitendra, 2018). Analogue/imitation products are physically and functionally similar products to the original product i.e. milk. The prime objective of the manufacturers of analogue/imitation products is to reduce the production cost, thereby fetching more profit by advertising the analogues as

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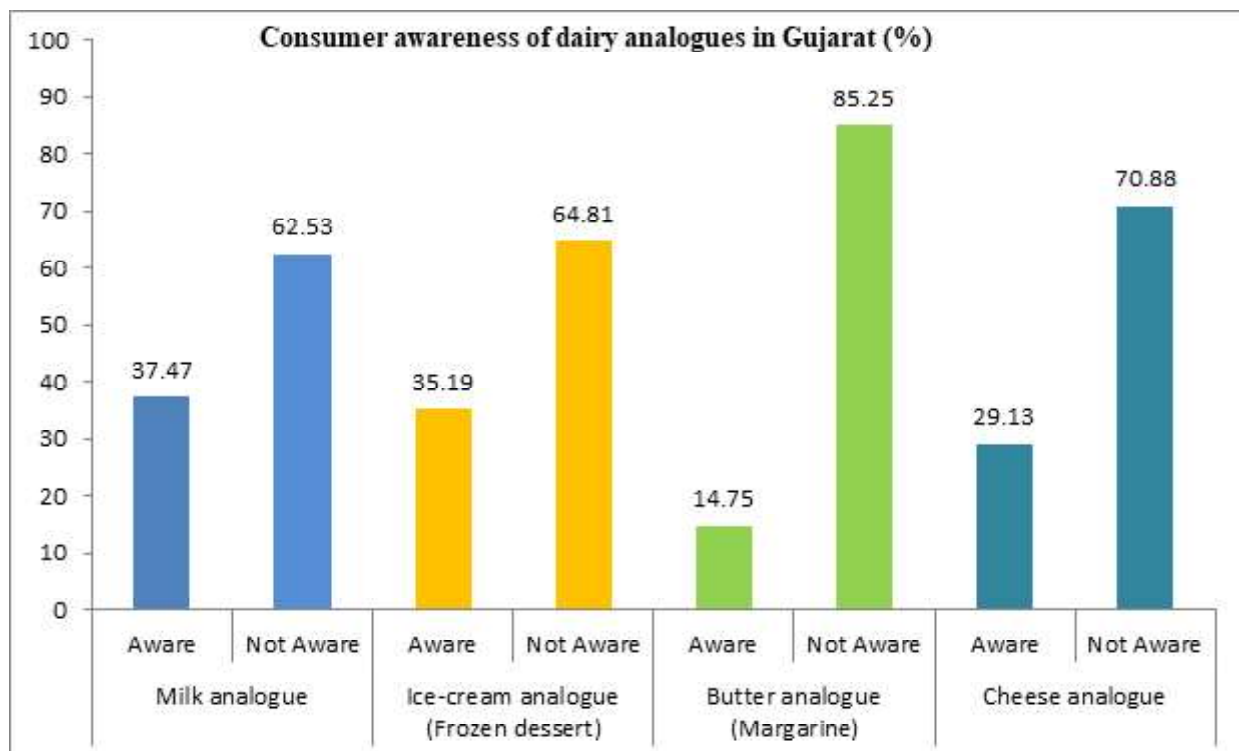


Fig 1: Consumer awareness of dairy analogues in Gujarat

healthier as and more functional than the original product. Dairy analogues are products that resemble milk-based products. Dairy alternatives, as opposed to animal-based products, are generally made out of plant-based ingredients. They are high in protein, nutritious vitamins, minerals, etc. They include products such as milk, butter, yoghurt, cheese and others. Milk includes products such as soy milk, coconut milk, almond milk, rice milk, oat milk, etc. Butter includes peanut butter, almond butter, etc. Yoghurt includes coconut milk yoghurt, cashew milk yoghurt, almond milk yoghurt, etc. Cheese includes tree-line cheese, cashew cheese, etc.

There is a lack of systematic data on consumers' knowledge about the milk and milk products they purchase what they know about milk and its plant-based alternatives and their level of understanding about reading the labels, content, nutrients, etc. To arrive at the research investigation objectives, the team collected techno-social information from approximately 852 families from the Gujarat state. For a better representation of the state and different groups of consumers, survey sampling was done in both backward and forward districts from different regions of Gujarat - Banaskantha, Mehsana, Rajkot, Porbandar, Anand, Panchmahal, Surat, and Tapi. The survey was conducted in 8 districts of Gujarat from five regions viz., north, south, east, west and central Gujarat. From each district, the capital city, 2 towns and 4 developed villages were selected to survey the family level. Districts, towns and villages were selected in such a way that it gives a holistic picture of the society. Figure 1 shows consumer

awareness of milk analogues. It is clear from the figure that the awareness of milk analogues is very less. Four different questions were asked to the households to check their awareness of milk analogues and it was observed that the overall awareness of milk analogues was only 37.47% while 62.53% of consumers are not aware of the milk analogues. It is clear from the figure that the awareness of Ice-cream analogues is also very less. Two questions were asked to the households to check their awareness of ice-cream analogues and it was observed that the overall awareness of ice-cream analogues was only 35.19% while 64.81% of consumers are not aware of ice-cream analogues such as frozen dessert. The figure shows the awareness of butter analogues is also very less. It was observed that the awareness of butter analogues was only 14.75% while 85.25% of consumers are not aware of the Butter analogues such as margarine. It is clear from the figure that the awareness of cheese analogues is also very less. It was observed that the overall awareness of cheese analogues was only 29.13% while 70.88% of consumers are not aware of the cheese analogues.

Conclusions

This research study investigated the perception of dairy analogues by real and potential consumers and determined the prospects of their understanding. It is clear from the observations that the consumers of Gujarat state are less aware of the dairy analogues despite their education level. There is a need to increase the awareness of dairy analogues amongst consumers.

Consumers pay attention to the price primarily followed by taste, appearance and brand which may affect the market demand for pure dairy products. It is evident from the result that the consumers are well educated but they are not paying much attention to the parameters such as nutritional benefits, labels, ingredients, and best before or use by date. Therefore, awareness campaigns at the pan India level are needed to increase the awareness amongst consumers. This project serves as a sample survey in Gujarat state. The data has been shared with the policy makers of FSSAI. This paper can be a blueprint to launch the national-level survey across other states. There is a great need to study the consumer's perception. Further there is a need for the implementation of strict regulations by national regulatory bodies to reduce the impact of wrong branding and marketing of imitation products which captures the market of pure dairy products by using the brand equity of term milk.

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