Abstract

Title: Impact of consumer preferences on ice cream consumption pattern in Pune city. A critical analysis with specific reference to Amul"

Worldwide per capita consumption of ice cream is 2.3 liters with USA leading at 22 liters Australia 18 liters, UK 7 liters, Thailand 1.8 liters, Pakistan 800 ml and India 300 ml. The Asian market is growing at a rate of 6.9% over last year's whereas the experts estimate the growth rate of Indian market to be 12%. If anything the figures indicate for Indian market is that there is huge potential lying untapped and a better understanding of Indian customer is the need of the hour.

Ice cream consumption in India is still majorly limited to metropolitan towns. Despite being a hot country with a young population, India has never made ice-cream culture its own, unlike in the West. The younger generation is showing a promising trend of consuming ice cream all round the year; but the variation of sales in summers and winters or rainy season; still is a bothering factor. The efforts of companies particularly by Amul in developing the cold chain infrastructure and retail network and making ice cream available at lower price point of Rs. 5 in India; have definitely provided an impetus to the consumption of ice cream and increased the per capita consumption from 250 ml to 300 ml over last five years. Unless industry players can generate a burning desire for the product amongst consumers, the ice cream will remain in the deep freeze only. Power shortages could be a major constraint inhibiting the expansion of cold chain in rural and semi-urban areas.

The per capita consumption will increase only when ice-cream manufacturers broad-base the positioning for their ice-creams. A concerted effort to give the consumer a reason to consume more ice cream is missing. AC Nelson carries out retail surveys for almost all dairy products including ice cream. These surveys are limited to finding out the region wise retail penetration of ice cream. Consumer surveys and understanding the consumer seems to be missing link. The understanding of consumption pattern and preferences of consumers of ice cream will help the marketers of ice cream to design right communication program. The current literature although gives the history of milk

and milk product consumption in India and consumption trends; there is no literature available on the insights of Indian ice cream consumer and the reasons of low consumption of ice cream in India.

The researcher in his study has attempted to study consumer perception of ice cream analyze consumer preferences identify factors driving the consumption pattern of ice cream. The research is an attempt to prove or disprove the hypothesis that the consumption pattern is associated with consumer preferences and the demographic characters of consumer.

The researcher's work experience with the dairy industry in sales and marketing function indicated that the marketers of ice cream have been focusing more on developing the retail network and cold chain and very little attention is given to understanding the customer. The research is a Diagnostic Research Study. The data was collected from 1152 respondents (consumers) from Pune city and from wholesalers of ice cream in Pune. The data collected through questionnaires of consumer survey was analyzed using statistical tools in SPSS.

The study concluded that ice cream is an 'indulgence' category product with almost 100% household penetration. By and large ice cream purchase is impulse and people require a companion for ice cream consumption. Stages in life cycle and income of the consumer have big impact on their ice cream consumption pattern. The ice cream market can be very distinctly segmented into 4 segments based on stage in life cycle and these four segments are outstandingly different from one another as regards to ice cream consumption preferences and consumption pattern. Both consumption preferences and consumption pattern are completely insensitive to gender. 'Amul' emerges as the most favorite and most consumed brand of ice cream in Pune city followed by Kwality Walls. Whereas, Amul and Kwality Walls cut across all SEC segments, Natural and Baskin Robbins are focusing higher middle and higher income class.

Unlike other food products, ice cream consumers are not very brand loyal. 'Taste' is the most important quality parameter for ice cream; followed by hygiene, flavor, creaminess and sweetness, in order. Butterscotch clearly emerges as the most favorite

flavor followed by Vanilla, Chocolate and strawberry in order. Interestingly, the most selling flavor of each of the brand is different. Consumers are totally self dependent to make their brand / flavor choice. Family pack is largely preferred at home whereas cone is the most consumed pack outside home followed by cup and scoop. About half of the ice cream being consumed at home is an encouraging figure. The ice cream consumption at home goes up significantly with increasing age. About half of the consumer's have reported they store ice cream at home. Evenings and nights are the most favorite times to eat ice cream. The motive behind i.e. cream consumption is mainly for its 'taste' and 'cooling effect'. Linking ice cream to 'taste' leads to higher frequencies and quantities of consumption than linking it to cooling effect. Seasonality in ice cream consumption applies to more than half of the consumers and fear of cold (predominant in winter season) and infection in throat (predominant in rainy season) are the major reasons for consuming less ice cream. Good number of consumers eat less ice cream in rainy season because they can't go out of home in rains. The awareness about "frozen dessert" is very weak. The consumer preferences significantly impact the consumption pattern of ice cream. The consumers storing ice cream at home, buying family or party pack, eating alone, preferring to eat into the afternoon and evening, eating at home and in parties are eating more quantities. Consumption in group and storage at home increases the frequency of consumption also. Brand and flavor preferences do not have any bearing either on frequency or quantity consumed. Consumer's attributed reasons for consumption has highly significant impact on consumer preferences.

The researcher recommends that the marketers of ice cream should focus their communication on "Taste" part which will reduce the seasonality, A different communication strategy should be worked out for the four identified segments and a strategy to build the culture of storing ice cream at home should be worked out. As the study concludes that, the school children preplan their ice cream purchases mostly, the companies may tie-up with the suppliers of books, uniform or the school itself to distribute the discount coupons or ice cream vouchers. The companies may think of arranging ice cream festivals or linking ice creams to some events. The companies may also think of launching Valentine twin pack and Birthday packs to build the excitement in the youngsters and children.

Special incentives to the consumers should be worked out, to boost the family pack and party pack consumption. The drive of opening ice cream parlors should be explored fast and needs to be extended beyond the metropolitan markets. The consumption can be increased by building a culture of eating two packs at a time. Companies need to activate their door deliver mechanism in rainy season strongly. Around 5% customers eat ice cream for health purpose. This base can definitely be tripled with focused communication on them and a niche segment can be developed. 'Hygiene' is second ranked quality parameter. Companies need to take ultimate care in maintaining the cleanliness and hygiene at retail points. 'Home delivery' mechanism needs to be strengthened to make ice cream available at an arm's length yet maintain the existing retailer's viability.

The researcher has critically analyzed the consumption pattern of ice cream for consumers of metro city like Pune and the findings can be applicable to all metropolitan cities of India. The researcher has redefined the target segments for ice cream and the findings of the study will help the Indian ice cream industry to better understand the customer and design their communication programs to boost the consumption of ice cream. The ice cream industry should take up a clinical research to find out whether the ice cream consumption in winter or rainy season really leads to cold or infection in throat. A further research to understand the impact of preferences for each of the parameter related to 'ice cream consumption' on 'consumption pattern' can be studied in detail with the reasoning. The present study was conducted in urban area; similar study may be undertaken for rural area to understand the rural customer of ice cream.