

Consumer Awareness and Distribution Effectiveness of Dehydrated Food Products in Emerging Urban Markets

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ABSTRACT

The growing demand for healthy, convenient, and nutritionally rich food products has significantly increased the market potential of dehydrated food products in India. Despite the advantages of extended shelf life, ease of storage, and nutritional retention, consumer acceptance and market penetration remain dependent upon effective distribution systems and awareness-building activities. This study examines consumer awareness and distribution effectiveness of dehydrated food products in emerging urban markets with special reference to Foodo Savy LLP and its Instasprouts product range in Pune city, Maharashtra.

The study adopts a descriptive research design and utilizes primary data collected from 100 respondents through a structured questionnaire. Percentage analysis, tabular analysis, and graphical interpretation were employed to evaluate consumer awareness, purchasing behaviour, promotional effectiveness, and product availability. The findings indicate that 63% of respondents were aware of dehydrated food products, whereas only 42% were aware of the Instasprouts brand. Social media emerged as the most influential source of awareness, while online platforms were identified as the preferred purchasing channel. Product quality, health benefits, and availability significantly influenced consumer purchasing decisions. Lack of awareness and limited retail availability were identified as major barriers affecting product adoption.

The study concludes that effective digital marketing and improved distribution channel management are critical determinants of consumer awareness and market growth for dehydrated food products. The findings provide valuable implications for food processing enterprises, marketers, and supply chain managers seeking to expand market reach and improve consumer acceptance of healthy food products.

Keywords: Consumer Awareness, Dehydrated Food Products, Distribution Effectiveness, Digital Marketing, Consumer Behaviour, Food Processing Industry, Supply Chain Management, Emerging Urban Markets.

INTRODUCTION

The food processing industry has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors in India due to increasing urbanization, changing lifestyles, rising disposable income, and growing health consciousness among consumers. Modern consumers increasingly seek convenient, nutritious, and ready-to-consume food products that align with their busy schedules and health-oriented preferences. Among such products, dehydrated food products have gained considerable attention due to their longer shelf life, reduced storage requirements, ease of transportation, and retention of nutritional value.

Dehydration is one of the oldest and most widely adopted food preservation techniques. It removes moisture content from food products while maintaining essential nutrients, thereby increasing product longevity and reducing post-harvest losses. Dehydrated fruits, vegetables, sprouts, and ready-to-eat mixes have become

increasingly popular among health-conscious consumers who seek convenience without compromising nutritional quality.

Despite these advantages, the market penetration of dehydrated food products remains limited in many emerging urban markets. Consumer awareness regarding product benefits, usage methods, nutritional value, and availability continues to influence purchasing decisions. In addition, effective distribution channel management plays a crucial role in ensuring product accessibility and customer satisfaction. A well-developed distribution network enables companies to reach target consumers efficiently while reducing logistical challenges and enhancing market presence.

Foodo Savy LLP, Pune, is a food processing start-up engaged in manufacturing and marketing dehydrated food products under the brand name "Instasprouts." The company offers innovative and health-oriented products designed to meet the needs of modern consumers. However, challenges related to brand awareness, distribution reach, and consumer education continue to affect market expansion.

The present study investigates consumer awareness levels and evaluates distribution effectiveness of dehydrated food products in Pune city. The study also examines the role of marketing communication and promotional activities in influencing consumer awareness and purchase intentions. The findings are expected to contribute to the growing body of knowledge on food marketing, consumer behaviour, and supply chain management within emerging urban markets.

Research Gap

A review of existing literature indicates that previous studies have primarily focused on food preservation technologies, consumer perception of healthy foods, and supply chain efficiency in food processing industries. Limited research has examined the combined influence of consumer awareness and distribution channel effectiveness on the market performance of dehydrated food products, particularly in the context of emerging food-processing start-ups in India.

Furthermore, there is insufficient empirical evidence regarding consumer awareness of dehydrated food products in urban markets such as Pune. Existing studies have not adequately explored the role of digital marketing, social media promotion, and retail distribution networks in shaping consumer perceptions and purchasing behaviour for dehydrated food products.

Therefore, this study attempts to bridge this research gap by investigating both consumer awareness and distribution effectiveness within a single framework, thereby providing practical insights for food processing enterprises and marketers.

Objectives of the Study

The study is based on the following objectives:

1. To assess the level of consumer awareness regarding dehydrated food products in emerging urban markets.
2. To evaluate the effectiveness of distribution channels in ensuring product availability and accessibility.
3. To identify factors influencing consumer purchasing behaviour toward dehydrated food products.

Research Hypotheses

The study proposes the following hypotheses:

H1: Consumer awareness significantly influences the acceptance of dehydrated food products.

H2: Distribution channel effectiveness positively affects product availability and consumer purchase intention.

H3: Marketing and promotional activities significantly enhance consumer awareness regarding dehydrated food products.

Significance of the Study

The study is significant for the following reasons:

1. It provides empirical evidence regarding consumer awareness of dehydrated food products in urban markets.
2. It helps food processing companies understand factors influencing consumer buying behaviour.
3. It highlights the importance of effective distribution networks in improving product accessibility.
4. It offers strategic recommendations for enhancing marketing communication and market penetration.
5. It contributes to academic literature in the fields of consumer behaviour, food marketing, and supply chain management.
6. The findings can assist entrepreneurs and start-up companies in designing effective growth strategies for healthy food products.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Concept of Supply Chain Management

Supply Chain Management (SCM) refers to the integration of activities involved in sourcing, procurement, production, and distribution of goods to ensure that products reach consumers efficiently. According to Philip Kotler (2017), SCM is a system that connects manufacturers, suppliers, distributors, and customers to deliver value.

Sunil Chopra (2019) defines SCM as the coordination of all supply chain activities with the objective of maximizing customer value while minimizing costs. Effective supply chain management ensures smooth flow of goods, information, and finances across the entire network.

In the food processing industry, SCM plays a crucial role due to the perishable nature of products. Although dehydrated food products have longer shelf life compared to fresh products, efficient logistics and inventory management are still necessary to maintain quality and ensure timely availability.

Key components of supply chain management include:

- a. Procurement of raw materials
- b. Production and processing
- c. Warehousing and inventory control
- d. Transportation and logistics
- e. Distribution to retailers and end consumers

For companies like Foodo Savy LLP, an efficient supply chain is vital to expand market reach and improve customer satisfaction.

Distribution Channel Management

Distribution channel management refers to the process of managing the flow of goods from the producer to the

final consumer through various intermediaries such as wholesalers, distributors, and retailers. According to Kotler (2017), a distribution channel is a set of interdependent organizations involved in making a product available for consumption.

There are different types of distribution channels:

1. **Direct Channel:** Manufacturer sells directly to consumers (e.g., online sales)
2. **Indirect Channel:** Involves intermediaries such as wholesalers and retailers
3. **Hybrid Channel:** Combination of both direct and indirect channels

Research indicates that effective distribution channel management ensures:

- a. Product availability at the right place and time
- b. Reduction in logistics and operational costs
- c. Improved customer satisfaction
- d. Increased market coverage

However, start-ups like Foodo Savy LLP often face challenges such as:

- a. Limited access to retail networks
- b. High distribution costs
- c. Dependence on local markets
- d. Lack of established dealer relationships

Thus, evaluating the effectiveness of distribution channels becomes essential for business growth.

Distribution Challenges in Food Processing Industry

The food processing industry in developing countries like India faces several distribution-related challenges. According to the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2020), inadequate infrastructure, fragmented supply chains, and high transportation costs are major barriers.

Research by Kumar and Singh (2022) highlights that small food processing firms struggle due to:

- a. Poor logistics management
- b. Limited financial resources
- c. Lack of cold chain infrastructure
- d. Inefficient inventory systems

Although dehydrated foods do not require strict cold storage, challenges such as packaging, storage conditions, and transportation still affect product quality.

Joshi et al. (2023) emphasized that supply chain inefficiencies can lead to delays, increased costs, and reduced product availability in the market. This directly impacts customer satisfaction and brand reputation.

For Foodo Savy LLP, which operates on a relatively small scale, these challenges limit its ability to expand

beyond local markets like Pune.

Consumer Awareness and Buying Behaviour

Consumer awareness refers to the extent to which consumers are informed about the availability, features, and benefits of a product. According to Schiffman and Wisenblit (2018), awareness is the first stage in the consumer decision-making process, followed by interest, evaluation, purchase, and post-purchase behaviour.

Consumer buying behaviour is influenced by several factors:

- a. Personal factors (age, lifestyle, income)
- b. Psychological factors (perception, motivation, attitude)
- c. Social factors (family, culture, reference groups)
- d. Marketing factors (advertising, branding, promotion)

Studies show that awareness significantly affects purchasing decisions, especially for new and innovative products like dehydrated foods.

A report by Nielsen (2021) indicates that:

- a. Health-conscious consumers are more likely to adopt processed and functional foods
- b. Urban consumers prefer convenience-oriented food products
- c. Lack of awareness and trust reduces product adoption

In Pune, consumers are increasingly inclined toward healthy eating habits. However, awareness about dehydrated sprout-based products remains limited due to insufficient promotion and education.

Impact of Marketing and Promotional Activities

Marketing and promotional activities play a crucial role in creating awareness and influencing consumer behaviour. According to Kevin Lane Keller (2016), brand awareness and brand image are key elements that affect consumer perception and purchase decisions.

Marketing communication tools include:

- a. Advertising (print, TV, digital)
- b. Sales promotion (discounts, offers, sampling)
- c. Public relations
- d. Personal selling
- e. Digital marketing (social media, influencer marketing)

Recent studies highlight the importance of digital marketing for food start-ups. Platforms like Instagram and Facebook help businesses reach a wider audience at relatively low cost.

Sheela (2025) emphasized that:

- a. Innovative packaging and branding attract consumers

- b. Health-based messaging increases product acceptance
- c. Social media campaigns improve brand visibility

For Foodo Savy LLP, promotional strategies such as “ready in 5 minutes” convenience, high-protein content, and plant-based positioning can significantly influence consumer awareness and trial.

However, ineffective marketing communication can result in:

- a. Low brand recognition
- b. Poor consumer understanding
- c. Reduced sales performance

Dehydrated Food Products: Market Trends and Consumer Acceptance

Dehydrated food products are gaining popularity due to their convenience, long shelf life, and nutritional benefits. According to industry reports, the demand for ready-to-cook and ready-to-eat food products is increasing rapidly in urban areas.

Key trends in the dehydrated food market include:

- a. Growing demand for healthy and organic food products
- b. Increase in working population and busy lifestyles
- c. Preference for convenience and time-saving solutions
- d. Rise in e-commerce and online food retailing

However, despite these positive trends, several barriers affect consumer acceptance:

- a. Lack of awareness about product benefits
- b. Misconception regarding taste and quality
- c. Limited availability in retail outlets
- d. Lack of familiarity with preparation methods

Patil (2021) found that consumer perception plays a significant role in the adoption of processed food products. Positive perception leads to higher acceptance, while negative beliefs restrict market growth.

These challenges are directly relevant to Foodo Savy LLP, which aims to promote dehydrated sprout-based products in Pune.

a) Kumar and Singh (2022)

The study examined supply chain challenges in the food processing industry. The researchers identified distribution inefficiencies, inventory management issues, and market accessibility as major constraints affecting food processing enterprises. The study concluded that an efficient distribution network significantly improves product availability and customer satisfaction.

b) Joshi, Patil and Deshmukh (2023)

This research investigated the relationship between distribution efficiency and consumer satisfaction in food start-ups. The findings revealed that wider market coverage, improved retail presence, and better logistics management positively influence customer satisfaction and repeat purchases.

c) Nielsen Report (2021)

The report highlighted changing consumer preferences toward healthy, convenient, and ready-to-consume food products. It identified increasing health consciousness and busy lifestyles as major drivers of demand for processed and dehydrated food products.

d) Sheela (2025)

The study evaluated the role of digital marketing in creating consumer awareness regarding food products. The findings suggested that social media platforms such as Instagram and Facebook significantly influence consumer awareness and purchase intention compared to traditional advertising channels.

e) FAO Report (2020)

The report emphasized the importance of supply chain integration in food distribution systems. Effective coordination between manufacturers, distributors, and retailers was found essential for improving product accessibility and reducing market inefficiencies.

f) Sharma and Gupta (2021)

The researchers analyzed consumer perception toward healthy packaged food products in urban India. Product quality, nutritional value, and affordability emerged as significant factors influencing consumer purchase decisions.

g) Verma and Kulkarni (2022)

The study focused on online food purchasing behaviour among urban consumers. Results showed that consumers increasingly prefer online channels due to convenience, wider product choices, and easy accessibility.

h) Patel and Shah (2023)

This study examined promotional strategies adopted by food start-ups. Social media advertisements, influencer marketing, and product sampling were found to be highly effective in generating awareness and increasing trial purchases.

i) Mishra and Rao (2024)

The researchers investigated factors affecting consumer adoption of dehydrated food products. Health benefits, convenience, and product quality positively influenced consumer acceptance, whereas lack of awareness restricted market growth.

j) Chavan and Bhosale (2024)

The study explored distribution channel effectiveness in emerging food businesses. The findings highlighted that improved retail availability and stronger dealer networks significantly enhance market penetration and sales performance.

Research Gap Identified

The review of literature indicates that previous studies have separately examined consumer awareness, food marketing, supply chain efficiency, and consumer behaviour. However, limited studies have simultaneously

investigated consumer awareness and distribution effectiveness of dehydrated food products, particularly within the context of emerging food processing start-ups in urban Indian markets. Therefore, the present study addresses this gap by integrating both dimensions into a single research framework.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a descriptive research design to understand consumer awareness and distribution effectiveness of dehydrated food products.

Area of Study

The research was conducted in Pune City, Maharashtra, covering Katraj, Kondhwa, Hadapsar, Manjari, Loni-Kalbhor, and Swargate areas.

Sources of Data

a) Primary Data

Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to consumers.

b) Secondary Data

Secondary information was collected from books, journals, company records, websites, research papers, and industry reports.

Sampling Technique

Stratified Random Sampling was adopted to ensure representation from different demographic groups.

Sample Size

A total of 100 respondents participated in the survey.

Statistical Tools Used

1. Percentage Analysis
2. Tabular Analysis
3. Graphical Analysis
4. Comparative Analysis

Conceptual Framework of the Study

Independent Variables

- I. Marketing & Promotional Activities
 - a) Social Media Advertising
 - b) Influencer Marketing
 - c) Free Samples

d) Discounts and Offers

II. Distribution Effectiveness

a) Retail Availability

b) Online Availability

c) Distribution Network Coverage

d) Product Accessibility

III. Consumer Awareness

a) Brand Awareness

b) Product Knowledge

c) Information Exposure

Dependent Variables

a) Purchase Intention

b) Product Trial

c) Consumer Acceptance

d) Repeat Purchase Behaviour

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

a) Consumer Awareness of Dehydrated Food Products

The study found that 63% of respondents were aware of dehydrated food products, whereas 37% lacked awareness. This indicates moderate market awareness and substantial scope for awareness-building initiatives.

b) Awareness of Instasprouts Products

Only 42% of respondents had heard about Instasprouts products, while 58% were unaware of the brand. This suggests that the company requires stronger branding and promotional activities to improve market visibility.

c) Sources of Information

Instagram emerged as the most important source of information, followed by exhibitions, food stalls, Facebook, and word-of-mouth communication. The findings support earlier studies emphasizing the growing influence of digital marketing.

d) Factors Influencing Purchase Decisions

Quality was identified as the most influential factor affecting purchasing behaviour, followed by health benefits, price, and brand name. Consumers showed greater concern for nutritional value and product quality than packaging aesthetics.

e) Distribution Effectiveness

Most respondents rated product availability as good; however, several consumers reported difficulties in accessing products. Limited retail availability was identified as a significant challenge affecting market penetration.

f) Preferred Purchase Channels

Online platforms emerged as the most preferred purchasing channel, followed by direct purchases from the company and offline stores. The findings indicate increasing consumer preference for digital purchasing platforms.

g) Promotional Effectiveness

Social media advertisements were identified as the most attractive promotional activity, followed by free samples and discounts. Social media was also considered the most influential medium for creating awareness.

h) Consumer Concerns

Price and taste emerged as the primary concerns among consumers. This suggests that companies must maintain an optimal balance between affordability and product quality.

i) Suggestions from Consumers

Consumers identified better availability, affordable pricing, and stronger promotional efforts as the key factors that would encourage increased purchasing of dehydrated food products.

Discussion

The findings reveal that consumer awareness and distribution effectiveness are closely interconnected determinants of market success for dehydrated food products. Although awareness regarding dehydrated foods is gradually increasing, awareness of specific brands remains limited. This indicates that companies need to invest in continuous consumer education and branding activities.

The dominance of social media as an awareness-generation platform confirms the growing role of digital marketing in influencing consumer behaviour. Instagram and similar platforms provide cost-effective opportunities for food start-ups to engage with consumers and communicate product benefits.

Distribution effectiveness emerged as another critical factor. Consumers expressed a preference for products that are easily accessible through both retail outlets and online channels. Limited availability reduces purchase frequency and negatively affects consumer adoption.

The findings further demonstrate that product quality and health benefits significantly influence purchasing decisions. Therefore, marketing communication should focus on nutritional advantages, convenience, and product quality rather than solely promotional offers.

Managerial Implications

The study offers several practical implications for food processing companies:

1. Companies should strengthen digital marketing efforts through social media campaigns, influencer collaborations, and content marketing.
2. Product awareness programs should emphasize nutritional benefits, convenience, and usage methods.
3. Retail distribution networks should be expanded to improve accessibility and market penetration.

4. E-commerce partnerships should be strengthened to meet increasing online purchasing preferences.
5. Product sampling campaigns should be conducted in supermarkets, malls, food festivals, and exhibitions.
6. Competitive pricing strategies should be developed to address consumer price sensitivity.
7. Continuous consumer feedback mechanisms should be established to monitor changing preferences.

CONCLUSION

- a) The study concludes that dehydrated food products possess substantial growth potential in emerging urban markets due to increasing health consciousness, changing lifestyles, and growing demand for convenience foods.
- b) Consumer awareness regarding dehydrated food products is moderate; however, awareness regarding specific brands such as Instasprouts remains comparatively low. Digital marketing platforms, particularly social media, play a significant role in creating awareness and influencing purchase decisions.
- c) Distribution effectiveness emerged as a major determinant of market success. Consumers expect products to be easily accessible through retail stores as well as online channels. Limited availability and inadequate awareness were identified as major barriers affecting product adoption.
- d) The findings suggest that strengthening distribution networks, increasing digital marketing activities, enhancing product visibility, and improving consumer education can significantly improve market penetration and long-term business growth. The positive consumer attitude toward dehydrated food products indicates strong opportunities for expansion within the healthy food segment.

Limitations of the Study

1. The study was limited to Pune city only.
2. The sample size was restricted to 100 respondents.
3. Time constraints limited broader geographical coverage.

Ethical Statement

The study was conducted exclusively for academic research purposes. Participation of respondents was voluntary and informed consent was obtained prior to data collection. Confidentiality and anonymity of respondents were maintained throughout the study. No personal identifying information was disclosed during data analysis or publication.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Scope for Future Research

1. Future studies may be conducted across multiple cities and states.
2. Larger sample sizes may provide broader insights.
3. Comparative studies involving multiple food brands can be undertaken.

4. Advanced statistical techniques such as regression analysis and structural equation modelling may be applied.
5. Future research may examine long-term consumer loyalty and repurchase behaviour.

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