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Factors influencing milk powder preferences: a comparative study of local and imported brands in Gampaha district

Maleesha M. A. N.*, Prabhashwara M., Wickramage R., Abeygoonewardena V., Rathnayake N.,
Madhushani T., Liyanage U. P. and Dissanayake D. M. P. V.

Department of Statistics and Computer Science, Faculty of Science, University of Kelaniya, Sri Lanka.
nipunimaleesha8@gmail.com*

Milk powder is a common choice in Sri Lanka because it's convenient, easy to store, and lasts longer than fresh milk. It is made by removing the moisture from milk, which makes it practical for storage and transport, especially in households where fresh milk isn't always accessible. However, due to the limited supply of locally produced milk powder, many people rely on imported brands. This study looks at why people in the Gampaha district, the most densely populated district in Sri Lanka, choose between local and imported milk powder. Gampaha has both urban and rural areas, making it a good place to study consumer habits. The research involved a survey given to people in three Divisional Secretary's Divisions (DSDs) out of 13 in the district. These areas were selected using cluster sampling, and convenience sampling was used to gather the data. The sample size was set at 303, based on a pilot survey, to ensure the findings would be reliable. The results showed that price, quality, and taste were the most important factors influencing people's choices when it came to milk powder. We used chi-square and G-square tests to confirm that these factors had a significant effect. Interestingly, household income and brand preference have not seemed to play much of a role in people's decisions. Some respondents also pointed out that herbal drinks like Ranawara, Belimal, and Kolakenda were viewed as alternative beverages to milk powder, especially when milk was not affordable or available. While many people believe that locally produced milk powder is of better quality, they often end up choosing imported brands because they are cheaper and more widely available in stores. There's also a strong sense among consumers that they want to support local products, but the higher cost of local milk powder makes it hard for many to buy. The study suggests that making local milk powder more affordable and available in more places could reduce the dependency on imports, benefiting not just the consumers but also the national economy by supporting local dairy production. If local milk powder were priced more competitively, it would encourage more people to choose it over imported brands. In conclusion, improving both the affordability and accessibility of local milk powder could help boost its consumption, strengthen the local dairy industry, and reduce reliance on imports, bringing economic benefits to Sri Lanka in the long run.

Keywords: Milk powder, Price, Economy, Consumption, Preferences