

RESEARCH NOTE

FOOD CONSUMPTION PATTERNS IN TWO COMMUNITIES

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A survey on food consumption patterns was conducted in an urban black community and a rural black community. Urban consumers tend to consume more bread, and less maize meal than rural consumers. Urban consumers consume more meat than poverty-stricken rural dwellers. The same is true with respect to fruit and ready-made foods. Both quality and price are important considerations for consumers' food purchases, particularly rural consumers. Price appears to be less important to the higher income (> R2000 per month) consumers in purchases of bread and meat, but rather important in vegetable purchases. Almost 60 per cent never consume food at away from home food establishments.

SAMEVATTING : VOEDSELVERBRUIKSPATRONE IN TWEE GEMEENSAPPE

'n Opname aangaande voedselverbruikspatrone is in 'n stedelike swart gemeenskap en 'n landelike swart gemeenskap uitgevoer. Stedelike verbruikers neig om meer brood en minder mielie-meel te gebruik as landelike verbruikers. Stedelike verbruikers verbruik meer vleis as arm landelike verbruikers. Dieselfde geld ook ten opsigte van vrugte en vooraf bereide voedsel. Kwaliteit en prys is albei belangrike oorwegings in verbruikers se voedselaankope, veral by landelike verbruikers. Prys blyk minder belangrik vir hoër inkomste (> R2000 per maand) verbruikers te wees in aankope van brood en vleis, maar is belangrik in groente-aankope. Feitlik 60 persent verbruik nooit kos by weg- van-die-huis voedselinrigtings nie.

1. INTRODUCTION

Successful marketing and hence, production, depend on the extent to which the needs, wants and desires of consumers are satisfied. This means that the needs and wants of target markets must be assessed and addressed. Who does this most successfully, is ultimately the most successful participant in economic activity.

Relatively little research has as yet been done on the preferences of black consumers - who constitute 76 of the South African population - in terms of food, excepting some directed investigations by the UNISA Bureau of Marketing Research. A much more detailed study on carbohydrate purchasing behaviour has however been done by Elliott (1991).

Benhura and Chitsiku (1992) surveyed consumption patterns in a rural area in Zimbabwe and found that the consumption pattern of various food items in rural households change with seasons as the availability of various types of food changes. In general, more of those food items which the villagers produced themselves were consumed in the period May through August than in January. Consumption patterns of people of Mutambara District of Zimbabwe significantly reflected periods of social change, for example, urbanisation and industrialisation (Benhura and Chitsiku, 1990).

This note reports the results of a study to determine the food consumption patterns of two black communities, they are urban the other rural.

The first survey was conducted in the urban area of Mamelodi, Pretoria and the second in the rural area of Van der Merweskraal, Northern Province, in order to determine food purchasing habits of black people, predominantly from the lower to medium income groups. The sample sizes were 54 and 17 respectively.

The analysis involved frequency of food purchases and consumption factors influencing these, and motives for shopping and purchasing behaviour.

2. FREQUENCY OF FOOD CONSUMPTION

2.1 Bread and maize meal

Bread and maize meal (mostly in the form of maize porridge) are generally regarded as two staple foods of the South African population, although ethnical, demographic and sosio-economic influences are bound to have influences on the consumption of these foods. The frequency of consumption of these items by urban and rural sample families is shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Urban and rural sample households' consumption patterns of bread and maize meal

| Frequency Days/month | Bread | | Maize meal | |
|-------------------------|-------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural |
| 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| 1-7 | 0 | 17.7 | 0 | 5.9 |
| 8-16 | 24.0 | 0 | 32.9 | 11.8 |
| 17-29 | 26.0 | 0 | 39.1 | 0 |
| 30-31 | 50.0 | 76.4 | 24.0 | 82.3 |

The majority of the rural households consume both bread and maize meal on a daily basis. Among the urban households, one half consume bread every day, while just less than one quarter does so with maize meal. While no households reported never to use maize meal or bread, almost 18 per cent of rural households and no urban households consume it 7 days or less per month. One gains the impression that the urban households tend to alternate maize meal with bread, at least to a higher extent than rural households.

Of all households, 8,7 per cent baked bread themselves, the remainder being bought at the local store (78.3%) or another outlet (21.7%). With the exception of self-produced maize meal, the major part is bought at the local store (73.2%) and the remainder (26.8%) elsewhere.

2.2 Meat

Table 2 shows the consumption patterns of chicken meat and other meat.

Table 2: Urban and rural sample households' consumption patterns of meat

| Frequency Days/month | Chicken | | Other meat | |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------|------------|-------|
| | Urban | Rural | Urban | Rural |
| | Percentage of households | | | |
| 0 | 1.8 | 8.6 | 11.0 | 82.0 |
| 1-7 | 6.0 | 58.6 | 31.0 | 18.0 |
| 8-14 | 82.7 | 15.7 | 52.0 | 0 |
| 15-29 | 7.8 | 17.1 | 6.0 | 0 |
| 30-31 | 1.8 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

The urban consumers in this analysis are more regular consumers of both types of meat than the rural households.

Eighty two percent of the sample rural households never eat meat other than chicken, while the remaining 18 percent consume poultry only between one and seven days per month. (In the sample, no rural household consumed it more than three days per month). Only 8.6 per cent of these rural households never eat chicken meat, and the majority eat it between once and seven times per month. Among urban households, in contrast, the majority consume each of these types of meat between 8 and 14 days per month, with chicken meat consumption exceeding that of other meat. It is possible that the majority of the urban sample households normally eat some meat daily, while consumption of meat appears to occur more seldom in the rural households.

The reasons for this trend are not clear. It may be a function thereof that the rural households included more families with very low incomes. The availability of butchers within a convenience distance may be another factor.

2.3 Fruit

The respondents' fruit consumption patterns appear in Table 3.

Table 3 shows large differences in urban and rural respondents' fruit consumption patterns. Whereas the majority (65%) of rural respondents never consume fruit, the great majority of the urban respondents (89%) consume it at least once every two days.

Table 3: Urban and rural sample households' consumption patterns of fruit

| Frequency Days/month | Urban | Rural |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-------|
| | Percentage of households | |
| 0 | 0 | 65.0 |
| 1-7 | 0 | 17.6 |
| 8-14 | 11.0 | 11.6 |
| 15-29 | 79.6 | 5.8 |
| 30-31 | 9.4 | 0 |

The present of fruit stalls at strategic places such as bus stops, stations, taxi ranks increases availability of fruit for urban people, compared with much fewer outlets for rural residents. This probably contributed to the difference.

2.4 Ready-made foods

The consumption of three types of ready-made foods, i.e. pizzas, baked pies and cake was also obtained from the two samples. No single rural respondent recorded consumption of any of these items. The urban respondents' consumption pattern appears in Table 4.

The majority of urban households also gave a no consumption response to each of these three more luxury classes food. However, each of these three food types is consumed by considerable percentages of the sample of urban households, thereby signifying penetration in this market.

The absence of the consumption of cake, pizza and ready baked pies in the rural households may perhaps be ascribed to the absence of stores dealing

with these products in the consumers' residing areas. However the opposite cause-effect sequence may also hold; absence of local demand may be the reason why local stores do not stock these food items. These foods are too costly for many, perhaps the majority of these rural consumers, to afford.

Table 4: Urban respondents' consumption patterns of pizza, baked pie and cake

| Frequency Days/month | Pizza | Baked pie | Cake |
|-------------------------|--------------------------|-----------|------|
| | Percentage of households | | |
| 0 | 66.7 | 59.3 | 59.3 |
| 1-7 | 17.0 | 16.6 | 16.6 |
| 8-14 | 14.2 | 20.3 | 16.7 |
| 15-29 | 2.1 | 3.7 | 7.4 |
| 30-31 | 0 | 0 | 0 |

It is in the rural areas, particularly those in the erstwhile homelands, that the problems of poverty and the resultant malnutrition are the worst (Wilson & Ramphela, 1989). In this survey, the food consumption patterns of the rural respondents vis-à-vis the urban respondents also bear out those findings. The rural pattern appears to be more concentrated on grains with relatively less supplementation from meat, fruit and more luxury foods.

3. MOTIVE FOR SHOPPING CHOICE

Analyses were made to determine which attribute- quality, price or both is the main motivator underlying the respondent's choice of buying point for various food types. The results appear in Table 5.

Table 5: Motives underlying purchasing decisions (Percentages of respondents)

| Motive | Quality | Price | Both |
|-------------------|---------|-------|------|
| Bread: | 1.4 | 38.0 | 60.6 |
| Meat: | 32.4 | 7.0 | 60.6 |
| Fresh vegetables: | 14.1 | 21.1 | 64.8 |
| Fruit: | 18.3 | 18.3 | 63.4 |

Wilson (1988) argued that aggressive firms try to influence consumer tastes and preferences by advertising and other promotional activities. Such activities inform consumers of the desirable characteristics of various foods,

and, at the same time, help producers understand the importance of responding to changing consumer demands. The question may however, often be what ought to be stressed in advertisements - quality traits, or economy or a combination of these.

Within the sample in this study, between 60 and 65 per cent of respondents base their bread, meat, vegetables and fruit purchasing decisions on both quality and price. In the case of fruit and vegetables, price and quality appear to be about equally important. In the case of bread, 38 percent base their purchasing decision mainly on price, and only 1.4 per cent regard quality to be the most important consideration. To a large extent, this may be the result of a perception that quality differences in bread are small, therefore rendering price differences important as choice variable. The opposite is true with respect to meat: Quality differences are generally perceived to be substantial, and over 30 per cent of the respondents base their meat purchasing decisions mainly on quality while only seven per cent regard price as the main factor to consider.

An analysis was made to determine whether the rural and urban households differ in their shopping behaviour motivation. Data appear in Table 6.

Table 6: Rural and urban sample households' purchasing motives with respect to certain foods

| Product | Buying motive | | |
|-------------------|--------------------------|-------|------|
| | Quality | Price | Both |
| | Percentage of households | | |
| Bread: Urban | 1.8 | 46.3 | 51.9 |
| Rural | 0 | 11.8 | 88.2 |
| Meat: Urban | 40.7 | 7.4 | 51.9 |
| Rural | 5.9 | 5.9 | 88.2 |
| Vegetables: Urban | 18.5 | 25.9 | 55.6 |
| Rural | 0 | 5.9 | 94.1 |
| Fruit: Urban | 24.1 | 22.2 | 53.7 |
| Rural | 0 | 5.9 | 94.1 |

Considerable differences in motives are apparent. In the sample population 88.2 per cent of rural respondents and 51.9 per cent of urban respondents base their bread buying decisions on both price and quality considerations. Price

appears to outweigh quality considerations, with 46.3 per cent of urban respondents basing their bread buying decisions mainly on price, compared to 11.8 per cent of rural respondents. This difference may stem therefrom that urban consumers have a wider choice of stores where they can buy food, and thus have the opportunity to compare prices. The smaller choice of stores available to the rural respondents also limits their option to choose.

Identical percentages consider both price and quality attributes when buying meat. However, many urban respondents (40.7%) regard quality as the most important factor in meat purchase decisions, while only 7% regard price as the overriding factor. Rural dwellers appear to regard quality and price as equally important.

In the urban sample, 54 to 56 percent of consumers regard price and quality as equally important considerations in fruit and vegetable purchasing decisions. It appears that price may be a little more important for fresh vegetables, with price and quality equally important for fruit. Ninety-four percent of rural households consider both price and quality.

An attempt was also made to analyse the effect of family income on buying motives. A relatively frequency distribution of monthly incomes appears in Table 7, indicating that the sample was largely drawn from people with fairly low incomes; 84.5 percent of respondents had monthly incomes of less than R2 000 and 60.5 percent reported incomes of less than R1 per month.

Table 7: Bread purchasing motives per income group

| Income per month (R) | % of Respondents | Buying motive | | |
|----------------------------|---------------------|---------------|-------|------|
| | | Quality | Price | Both |
| Percentage of income group | | | | |
| 200-599 | 16.9 | 0 | 41.7 | 58.3 |
| 600-999 | 43.6 | 0 | 35.5 | 64.5 |
| 1000-1999 | 24.00 | 0 | 47.0 | 53.0 |
| 2000-2999 | 9.9 | 0 | 27.3 | 72.7 |
| 3000-3999 | 2.8 | | | |
| ≥ 4000 | 2.8 | | | |

In the case of bread, it appears that price is less of a consideration for respondents with revenues exceeding R2000 per month. Income did not perceptively affect buying motives of meat. In the case of fruit, quality appears to become progressively more important as family incomes rise, while respondents with monthly incomes exceeding R1000 per month also

appear more quality conscious in vegetable buying purchases than the poorer respondents with incomes smaller than R1000 per month.

Table 8: Meat purchasing motives per income group

| Income per month (R) | Buying motive | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------|------|
| | Quality | Price | Both |
| | Percentage of income group | | |
| 200-599 | 33.3 | 8.3 | 58.3 |
| 600-999 | 22.6 | 6.4 | 71.0 |
| 1000-1999 | 47.0 | 11.8 | 41.2 |
| ≥2000 | 36.4 | 0 | 63.6 |

Table 9: Fruit purchasing motives per income group

| Income per month (R) | Buying motive | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------|------|
| | Quality | Price | Both |
| | Percentage of income group | | |
| 200-599 | 0 | 33.3 | 66.7 |
| 600-999 | 12.9 | 19.4 | 67.7 |
| 1000-1999 | 29.4 | 17.6 | 53.0 |
| ≥2000 | 45.4 | 18.2 | 36.4 |

Table 10: Vegetable purchasing motives per income group

| Income per month (R) | Buying motive | | |
|-------------------------|----------------------------|-------|------|
| | Quality | Price | Both |
| | Percentage of income group | | |
| 200-599 | 0 | 33.3 | 66.7 |
| 600-999 | 9.7 | 22.6 | 67.7 |
| 1000-1999 | 29.4 | 17.6 | 53.0 |
| ≥2000 | 27.3 | 36.4 | 36.4 |

4. AWAY-FROM HOME FOOD CONSUMPTION

Eating away from home is becoming a part of everyday life, particularly in urban environments. Working conditions may occasionally necessitate it, but it is perhaps more often a means of relaxation. As it is normally more costly than at home consumption, it can be expected to be related to income. Table 11 indicates how frequently people eat away at eating establishments, all of which have for this purpose been classified as restaurants.

It appears that approximately 41 per cent of all respondents never eat at restaurants, and only about 21 per cent do so more than once per month. Although this is not shown in the table no respondents with incomes less than R400 per month ever eat at restaurants; they simply cannot afford it. Beyond this, the data in Table 11 do not reveal any relationship between income and eating away from home.

Table 11: Frequency of food consumption in restaurants

| Income per month (R) | Times food is consumed in restaurants per month | | |
|-------------------------|---|------|----------------|
| | Never | Once | More than once |
| | Percentage of income group | | |
| 200-599 | 58.3 | 25.0 | 16.7 |
| 600-999 | 41.9 | 32.3 | 25.8 |
| 1000-1999 | 23.5 | 52.9 | 23.5 |
| ≥2000 | 45.5 | 45.5 | 9.1 |
| Total sample | 40.8 | 38.0 | 21.2 |

7. CONCLUSION

This study has largely been of an exploratory nature, and also involved a fairly limited array of food products with two rather small samples. If marketing is to make its desired contribution to higher living standards among the relatively impecunious, and contribute to progress among small-scale food producers, more concerted efforts will have to be made to know what it is that makes one sector of the market "tick" - what are the demands of this, and other segments of the consuming public? This note can at best be regarded as a small contribution in a much needed field of research.

NOTE:

1. Based on an M Inst Agrar dissertation by D.J. Mmakola at the University of Pretoria.

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