

## Consumer Preferences and Buying Behavior: Branded vs. Unbranded Milk

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### Abstract

This comprehensive study investigates consumer preferences and buying behavior toward branded and unbranded milk in India. By analysing responses from diverse demographic segments, the research examines the factors influencing milk purchasing decisions, such as price sensitivity, quality perceptions, brand trust, and the impact of government certification. Statistical analysis and visual representations highlight consumption patterns, key influencing factors, and consumer trust levels. The findings suggest that brand reputation, freshness, and FSSAI certification significantly affect consumer choices. Recommendations are proposed to improve milk quality assurance and consumer awareness.

**Keywords:** Consumer behavior; Branded & Unbranded milk; Price sensitivity; Quality perception; Consumer preference; Milk purchasing decisions

### 1. Introduction

Milk plays a vital role in the Indian diet, being one of the most consumed food items across all socioeconomic groups. India, being the largest milk producer in the world, exhibits diverse patterns of consumption based on region, brand perception, and consumer awareness. Consumers today are faced with the choice between branded (packaged) and unbranded (loose) milk. While branded milk is often associated with hygiene, quality assurance, and government certification, unbranded milk is typically preferred for its freshness, taste, and local availability. This paper aims to comprehensively analyze the preferences and buying behavior of consumers with respect to these two milk categories.

### 2. Review of Literature

Previous studies have emphasised the significance of consumer perception and trust in determining purchasing decisions. According to Gupta et al. (2021), urban consumers tend to prefer branded milk due to its perceived safety and convenience. However, rural and semi-urban consumers still rely on local dairies and unbranded sources because of cost-effectiveness and habitual trust. Kumar & Sharma (2020) found that quality perception and taste influence the choice of milk type. Studies also indicate that government certifications like FSSAI play a crucial role in shaping consumer confidence in milk products (Singh & Rao, 2019).

#### *Objectives of the Study*

The major objectives of this study are:

- To understand consumer preferences between branded and unbranded milk.
- To identify demographic factors influencing milk purchasing behavior.
- To examine the role of brand trust, quality, and certification in consumer decisions.

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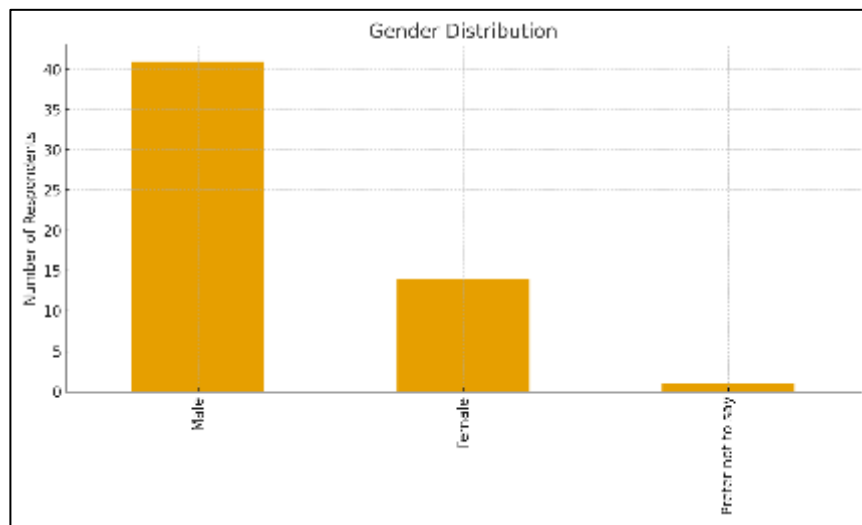
- To provide recommendations for improving milk quality, branding, and awareness.

### 3. Research Methodology

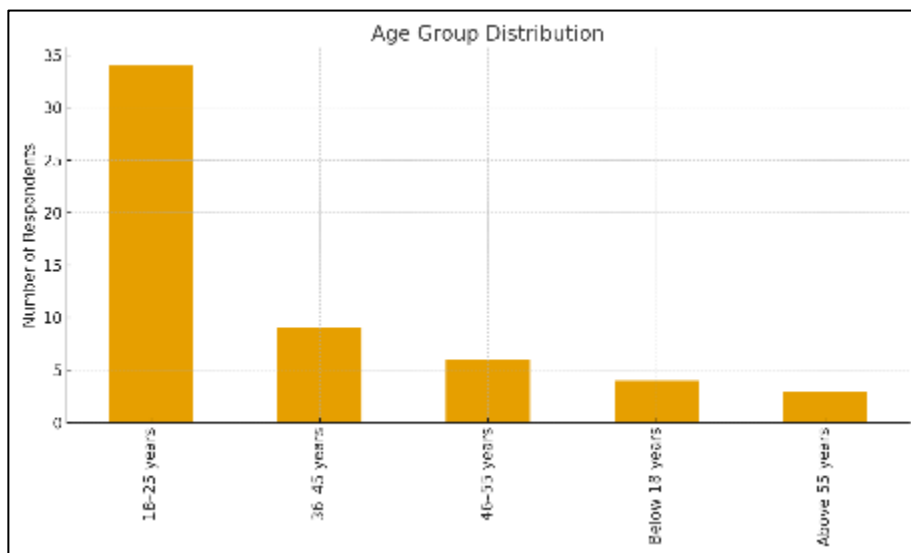
This study adopts a descriptive research design using a structured questionnaire distributed among consumers across different regions of India. The dataset includes variables such as gender, age, education, occupation, income, consumption frequency, and purchase preferences. Responses were collected through Google Forms, and the data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and visual charts. The analysis focuses on identifying key factors that differentiate branded milk consumers from unbranded milk consumers.

### 4. Data Analysis and Interpretation

The following section presents descriptive statistics and graphical representations derived from the collected data.



**Figure 1** Gender Distribution



**Figure 2** Age Group Distribution

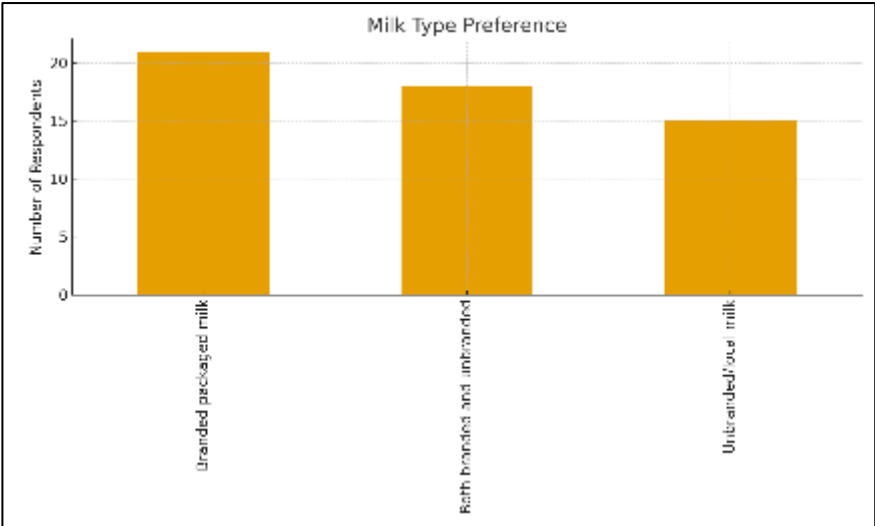


Figure 3 Milk Type Preference

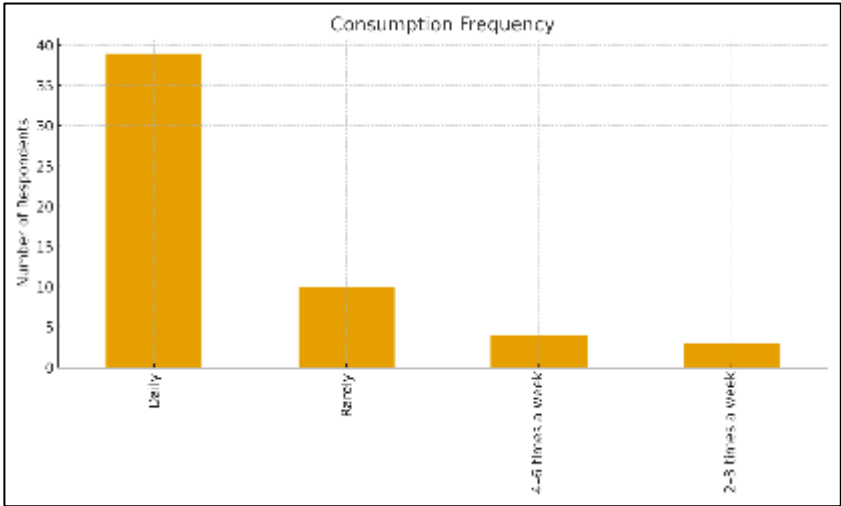


Figure 4 Consumption Frequency

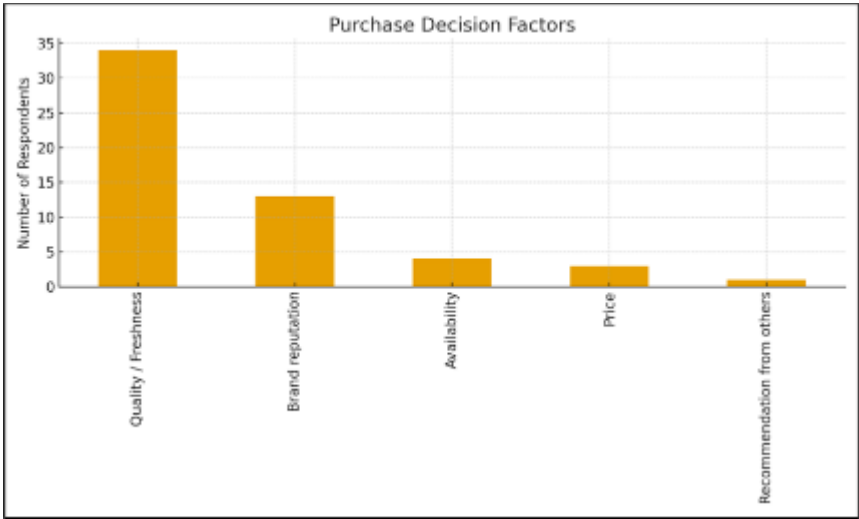
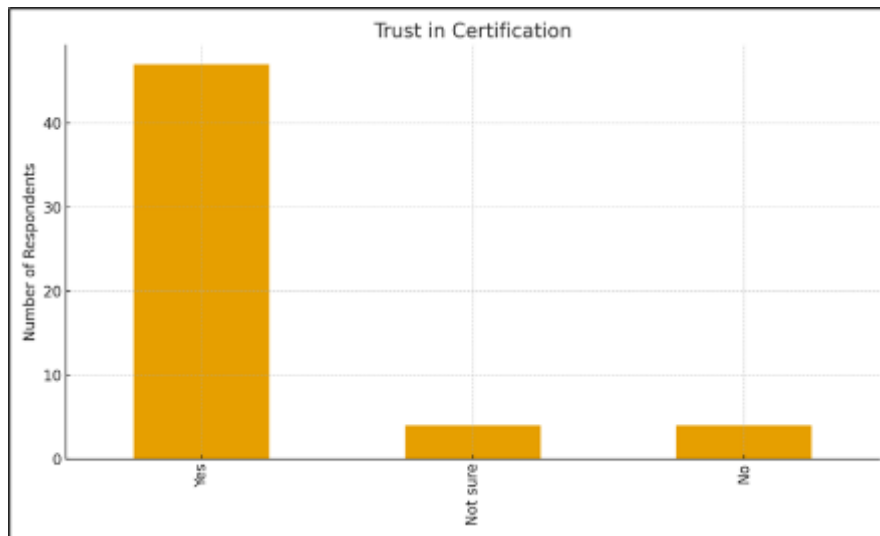


Figure 5 Purchase Decision Factors



**Figure 6** Trust in Certification

## 5. Discussion

The findings reveal that most respondents prefer branded milk due to factors such as quality, packaging, and certification assurance. The majority of respondents are young adults (18–25 years), predominantly students, who prioritise hygiene and brand reputation. Price, however, remains an important consideration, particularly among lower-income groups. Consumers also expressed trust in government certifications like FSSAI, which serve as a major determinant of brand reliability. Unbranded milk, while still popular in certain regions, faces challenges of adulteration and inconsistent quality.

### 5.1. Findings

Key findings include:

- Brand reputation and certification significantly influence purchasing behavior.
- Younger consumers and urban residents tend to prefer branded milk.
- Unbranded milk remains dominant in rural and semi-urban regions.
- Government certification (FSSAI) enhances consumer trust.

### Recommendations

- Strengthen regulatory oversight and promote FSSAI compliance.
- Educate consumers about the health implications of unbranded milk.
- Improve the affordability and accessibility of branded milk in rural areas.
- Encourage branding and packaging initiatives among local dairies.

## 6. Conclusion

This research highlights the evolving landscape of milk consumption in India, reflecting a gradual shift from unbranded to branded milk. As awareness regarding hygiene and safety grows, branded milk manufacturers have an opportunity to expand their market presence. However, affordability and local preferences continue to sustain the unbranded milk segment. Ultimately, consumer education and transparent certification systems will play pivotal roles in shaping the future of India's dairy industry.

### Limitations

Although the survey was circulated among a large number of college students, only a small proportion responded, which limits the representativeness of the results. This lower response rate may introduce non-response bias, affecting the general validity of the study's conclusions.

## **Compliance with ethical standards**

### *Disclosure of conflict of interest*

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

### *Statement of informed consent*

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in the study.

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