

FARMERS' MARKETS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE DETERMINANTS OF CONSUMERS' ATTITUDES AND BEHAVIOR

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Article History

Received: 12 November 2020

Revised: 28 December 2020

Accepted: 14 January 2021

Published: 26 January 2021

Keywords

Farmers' markets
Agri-business
Consumer behavior
Consumption motivation
Food
Willingness to pay
Direct marketing
Farm products.

ABSTRACT

This research explores indicators of the attitudes, preferences, and features of customers who buy at farmers' markets in India, using an intercept survey design. Single-stage purposive sampling was carried out in which consumers were targeted at weekend farmers' markets at nine different locations within the state of Maharashtra, India. Over a 2-month period of data collection (eight weekend visits) a total of 255 consumers were interviewed on site at the time of purchase, from whom we collected 235 completed questionnaires. Consumers in the sample were divided into three clusters and were rated positively on all seven factors considered. The findings of the study are that in cluster 1, about 80% of consumers were willing to pay more at the farmers' market rather than to go to a nearby retail outlet or supermarket. Cluster 2 comprised those consumers who prefer value for money while cluster 3 includes those consumers who gave a high rating to the hygiene and service conditions at the market. This research concludes that consumers are positive about the operation of farmers' markets held near their home.

Contribution/Originality: This study documents an understanding of what stimulates customers to buy from farmers' markets, and what distinguishes those markets from other food retailing sites such as supermarkets. The study findings will be used to improve marketing, farmers' markets, and economic conditions in order to attract other consumer groups.

DOI: [10.18488/journal.ajard.2021.111.63.70](https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.ajard.2021.111.63.70)

ISSN(P): 2304-1455/ ISSN(E): 2224-4433



How to cite: Sandip Solanki --- Krishna Murthy Inumula (2021). Farmers' Markets: An Analysis of the Determinants of Consumers' Attitudes and Behavior. *Asian Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development*, 11(1), 63-70. [10.18488/journal.ajard.2021.111.63.70](https://doi.org/10.18488/journal.ajard.2021.111.63.70)

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1. INTRODUCTION

India as an agrarian country has a wide presence of farmers' markets in both rural and urban sectors of society, where farmers directly sell their produce to end consumers thereby bringing down the cost of logistics and the role of middlemen, which ultimately reduces the final prices of produce. Various studies have reported that consumers choose to shop at farmers' markets because of low prices (Kuches, Toensmeyer, German, & Bacon, 1999), while at the same time enjoying the freshness, quality and variety of tasty, healthy fruit and vegetables (Pokorná, Pilař, Balcarová, & Sergeeva, 2015; Wolf, Spittler, & Ahern, 2005). As a consumer-driven economy, India has considerable potential in regard to the farmers' market business model, to increase access to food and improve the nutritional quality of produce from indigenous farmers.

Farmers' markets act as a catalyst in reducing the gap between the urban and rural landscape wherein every consumer wants home-grown organic food with less chemical input and available at an affordable price. The rural-urban interface in farmers' markets facilitates communication and an exchange of culture and trade relations between farmers and local residents, thereby building trust and customer loyalty to improve business (Feagan & Morris, 2009; Hunt, 2007). Direct marketing through farmers' markets also encourages farmers to grow independently and sustain competition, and helps to produce a wider variety and quality of farm products. According to Down-to-Earth, a private news agency, "Rural markets are presently not working as effective price discovery points for farmers. For 47 years, government has not acted on recommendation of upgrading rural market into business hubs. India needs 30,000 agriculture markets to give fair deal to farmers".

In the state of Maharashtra in India, weekend farmers' markets offer the benefits of providing fresh fruit and vegetables to local consumers; similar types of farmers' markets should be more widespread around the country so that benefits would be equally distributed among farmers and consumers for the greater good and a healthier nation.

1.1. What is a Farmers' Market?

Direct marketing or selling is variously defined: "Farmers' markets are characterized by the selling of foods and other items directly to the customer by the person who grew, reared or produced the goods." (Trobe, 2001). The current study identifies buyer attitudes, characteristics, and anxieties that predict the likelihood of visiting a farmers' market.

Most developed countries have experimented with the farmers' market business model to achieve improved hygienic standards and control over obesity in the population, by improving access to fresh fruit and vegetables at an affordable price. In India there is currently a need to develop the presence of farmers' markets in everyday business; to make this happen, public-private initiatives are required to encourage farmers, consumers, and society at large to understand the long-term benefits of farmers' markets. Due to globalization, Western practices are automatically followed by the developing nations; in India this is a way forward in regard to the demand for farmers' markets across urban and semi-urban cities to promote healthy diets and consumption of nutritious food. Farmers' markets are known for providing fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as other value-added products (Payne, 2002).

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Various scholars have revealed that concerns when buying fruit and vegetables include their provenance and freshness, good taste, and absence of food-borne illnesses (Archer, Sánchez, Vignali, & Chaillot, 2003; Bukenya, Mukiibi, Molnar, & Siaway, 2007; Conner, Colasanti, Ross, & Smalley, 2010; Govindasamy & Nayga, 1996; Murphy, 2011; Payne, 2002; Pokorná et al., 2015; Wolf et al., 2005). Kuches et al. (1999) found that locally grown produce is one of the key reasons for buying from farmers' markets. Moreover, Wolf et al. (2005) indicated that the quality of produce and price are among the most significant features when buying from farmers' markets. In other studies, Bukenya et al. (2007) highlighted that customers are happy to pay more for naturally grown food, while Wolf (1997) found that fresh produce reasonably priced, convenient to purchase, and easily accessible within cities was sought by consumers willing to buy produce from farmers' markets. Archer et al. (2003) revealed that almost all buyers will return to farmers' markets to buy produce because it is fresh, distinctive, and local; as well as wanting to support local farmers. Kuches et al. (1999) highlighted that the most important reason why respondents purchased produce at direct markets was for the selection of produce available. Bruhn, Vossen, Chapman, and Vaupel (1992) indicated that buyers will return to farmers' markets if they can buy locally grown produce at a reasonable price.

Several studies have been conducted on shoppers to determine who shops and why at these farmers' markets (Abelló, Palma, Waller, & Anderson, 2014; Adams & Adams, 2011; Bavorova, Unay-Gailhard, & Lehberger, 2016; Bukenya et al., 2007; Eastwood, 1996; Gallons, Toensmeyer, Bacon, & German, 1997; Kezis, Gwebu, Peavey, & Cheng, 1998; Onianwa, Wheelock, & Mojica, 2005; Wolf, 1997). Onianwa et al. (2005) explored an unfavorable but not significant correlation between married couples and buying at farmers' markets. With regard to location, those who live in metropolitan areas were expected to shop less at farmers' markets. Education (above high school) was one of the important variables in regard to buying from a direct farmer-to-consumer market (Onianwa et al., 2005).

Previous studies (Gallons et al., 1997; Govindasamy, Italia, Zurbruggen, & Hossain, 2002; Kuches et al., 1999; Sommer, Wing, & Aitkens, 1980; Wolf et al., 2005) have shown that buying at farmers' markets means value for money. Sommer et al. (1980) highlighted that consumers save money by buying from farmers' markets. Likewise, Gallons et al. (1997) found that farmers' markets help farmers to sell their products directly to customers while enjoying better profit margins. A key benefit of this set-up for consumers is that they get fresh produce at lower prices. Moreover, Kuches et al. (1999) highlighted that respondents believe that prices were lower at direct markets.

Many studies (Eastwood, 1996; Morgan & Alipoe, 2001; Pokorná et al., 2015; Rengasamy et al., 2003; Ross, Anderson, Goldberg, Houser, & Rogers, 1999; Wolf et al., 2005) have investigated lack of knowledge about farmers' markets: inconvenient access, high prices, and inconvenient opening hours were among some of the primary reasons for not buying. Morgan and Alipoe (2001) discussed how the geographic location of direct marketing outlets is one of the key determinants of success. In addition, Pokorná et al. (2015) reported that consumers visit farmers' markets because of the fresh and healthy produce but that higher prices and inconvenient operating hours were seen as disadvantages. Eastwood (1996) identified a list of problem areas regarding customers' reluctance to shop regularly at these outlets, the most frequently cited being the distances required to drive; prices were too high; equal or better quality available at more convenient locations; and the facility was acceptable for occasional, but not regular, trips. Rengasamy et al. (2003) also found that accessibility was a key influence regarding visiting farmers' markets.

Research studies have shown strong evidence that customers are willing to pay higher prices for local produce (Gumirakiza, Curtis, & Bosworth, 2017). Kezis et al. (1998) investigated customers who said that they would be willing to spend more for local produce at farmers' markets. Other studies (Feagan & Morris, 2009; Gumirakiza, Curtis, & Bosworth, 2014; Hunt, 2007) have attributed numerous reasons to why customers attend farmers' markets, including social interaction. Similarly, Gumirakiza et al. (2014) indicated that buyers who visit farmers' markets intend to purchase fresh food and interact with farmers. Many researchers (Archer et al., 2003; Bavorova et al., 2016; Conner et al., 2010; Feagan & Morris, 2009; Gallons et al., 1997; Kezis et al., 1998; Kuches et al., 1999) found that customers bought from farmers' markets to support farmers. Various factors, such as store atmosphere and quality of produce, have been found to influence consumer satisfaction (Lulfs-Baden, Spiller, Zuhlsdorf, & Mellin, 2008). It has also been demonstrated (Gale, 1997; Govindasamy, Hossain, & Adelaja, 1999; Guthrie, Guthrie, Lawson, & Cameron, 2006; Henneberry, Whitacre, & Agustini, 2009) that farmers' markets are a substantial source of income for smallholders and aid economic development.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Pilot Survey

Before taking up the large-scale survey on consumers' choice and why they prefer farmers' markets, a pilot survey of 25 consumers was tested using simple questions including the reasons for their preferences, their expectations, and how much time they spend at farmers' markets. A literature review of similar studies, mostly conducted outside of India, was taken into consideration while building up a large-scale survey in Maharashtra state.

3.2. Sample Survey

In addition to demographic and social information on consumers, three main constructs were used in the survey to assess consumer choices and preferences regarding farmers' markets. The first deals with the purchasing decisions of consumers based on 17 measurable items rated on a scale of importance from 1 (not at all important) to 5 (very important). The second concerns the level of agreement with the characteristics of purchasing importance, based on 10 measurable instruments from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The third construct, rating of farmers' market characteristics, consists of 15 measurable items from 1 (poor) to 5 (excellent). All the above survey items were tested for reliability and analysed, with Cronbach-alpha value exceeding the stipulated value of 0.70.

3.3. Sample Size

The sampling design used in this study is a single-stage, purposive method in which consumers were interviewed at weekend farmers' markets in 9 different locations within Maharashtra state. Over a 2-month data collection period (8 weekend visits), a total of 255 consumers were interviewed on site at the time of purchase, from whom we collected 235 completed questionnaires; 20 questionnaires were found to be inaccurate, either because of interviewee non-interest or incomplete responses, and therefore the sample size in this study is restricted to 235 consumers. The time period for data collection was chosen to ensure that there were no promotional offers or village fairs that could impact the study results.

The survey was administered through a direct approach to the respondents, with the set of questionnaires and responses noted by the investigators; the sample was a mix of men and women aged 15–60 years and including students, working professionals, and domestic workers.

3.4. Data Analysis

The data collected were coded, entered on an Excel spreadsheet, and converted to SPSS data files for analysis. Respondents' ratings were collected on three different 5-point Likert scales and were assumed to be on a continuous scale; we measured both ranking and distance between the attributes and opinions as rated by the consumers. A simple frequency analysis was used to describe the sociodemographic profile of respondents, factor analysis was used to reduce data variables to meaningful clusters, and subsequent cluster analysis was utilized to determine cluster naming and grouping. Hierarchical cluster analysis was then performed, in which the Ward dendrogram method was used to determine the number of clusters, followed by a *k*-means clustering technique for cluster grouping. Finally, profiling of clusters was done based on the demographic variables age, gender, and occupation.

4. RESULTS

4.1. Respondent Profile

The respondent sample is 65% male and 35% female, from different age groups, with 45% aged between 26 and 35 years and 28% between 15 and 25 years. Around 56% of the sample respondents are married, 43% are single; 48% have graduate qualification and 30% postgraduate. In terms of occupation, the private sector comprises 60% followed by self-employed (14%) and domestic (12%). The monthly household income is negatively skewed: 48% earn >Rs.40,000 and 21% earn Rs.31,000–40,000. Around 80% of respondents were found to be the primary buyer of fruit and vegetables at the farmers' market.

Around 80% of respondents said that they are willing to pay more for produce at farmers' markets rather than purchase at a supermarket or nearby market. The majority of respondents (38%) learned about the farmers' market through friends and neighbors, and 32% by word of mouth. About 76% of respondents go to the farmers' market every week, with 10% visiting twice per month. Typical time spent by respondents at the farmers' market ranged from <1 hour (63%) to 1–2 hours (33%). In a single transaction, 35% of consumers spend Rs.201–400 while 31%

spend Rs.401–600. Around 39% respondents said that of all fruit and vegetables bought each week, 75% came from the farmers' market while for 28% this was 50–75% of fresh produce.

4.2. Factor Determination

Factor analysis was used to reduce the number of data variables in the original dataset to a meaningful number of factors, with a few variables representing the originals. The preliminary factor analysis gave a 7-factor solution representing 22 variables from the original dataset of 42. The suitability of data for structure detection (Table 1) – also confirmed by the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy statistic value (0.823) – indicates that the proportion of variance in the data variables may well be due to underlying factors. The high value indicates that the factor analysis is justified for the given data. Bartlett's test of sphericity also confirms that the correlation matrix is not an identity matrix, meaning that the data variables are correlated with each other and that factor analysis gives a good representation of the original data variables in terms of factor solution.

Table-1. Structure detection.

KMO and Bartlett's test of sphericity		
KMO		0.823
Bartlett's	Approx. chi-square	3472.372
	d.f.	861
	Sig.	0.000

Table-2. Factor labels.

Factor number	Factor label
1	Convenience
2	Variety
3	Quality
4	Price
5	Hygiene and health
6	Service conditions
7	Buying experience

Table-3. Factor loadings.

Factor labels: items measured	Factor loading	Mean	Standard deviation
Convenience:			
Adequate parking	0.75	4.25	1.05
FConveniently located	0.68	4.18	0.98
Operating times are convenient	0.78	4.8	1.02
Flexibility in payment	0.84	4.12	1.12
Variety:			
Large variety of produce	0.72	4.02	0.98
This is one of the best farmers' markets I have ever seen	0.75	4.15	1.2
Number of crafts/stalls	0.67	3.98	0.89
Quality:			
Freshness	0.78	4.3	0.68
Fresh-tasting fruit & vegetables	0.74	4.12	0.95
Quality of products	0.84	4.47	1.04
Price:			
Price of fruit & vegetables is very reasonable	0.84	4.02	0.98
Fruit & vegetables sold by growers	0.89	4.37	1.23
Product return and exchange facilities	0.86	4.52	1.06
Hygiene & health:			
Pesticide-free fruit & vegetables	0.72	4.09	0.65
Cleanliness & hygienic condition of market	0.71	3.95	0.98
Minimum likelihood of food-borne disease	0.75	4.25	1.25
Service conditions:			
Adequate parking	0.7	4.56	0.59
Behavior and service	0.81	4.12	1.07
Security	0.73	3.87	1.32
Buying experience:			
Consistency	0.87	4.65	1.25
Product return and exchange facilities	0.91	4.15	1.54
Buying from this farmers' market is an outstanding experience	0.76	3.95	1.45

Because of the nature of the data variables to be correlated and subsequent correlation among factors, in this study factor analysis with the principal axis factoring extraction method, and direct oblimin rotation, were used to reduce the size of variables; items with small loadings (<0.5) were excluded from factor consideration, and the

resultant variables with higher loadings were considered. A total of 7 factors were extracted from the given data and named according to the characteristics they represent. Detailed factor labels, mean and standard deviation scores, along with factor loadings are given in Tables 2 and 3.

The reliability of the above 7-factor model was tested with Cronbach's-alpha, with results showing a reliability coefficient of 0.85 for all 22 items, which is above the threshold value suggested by Hair, Anderson, Tatham, and Black (1998). Hence the reliability of scale was well established for the 7 factors considered in the study. Consistency in regard to purchase, product return and exchange facilities, and farmers selling their own produce at farmers' markets was highly rated by consumers. Consumers in the sample data mostly preferred the factors price, quality, and convenience as reasons for purchasing at the farmers' market. All 7-factor measured items yielded a mean score of ≥ 4 , indicating a strong preference towards the farmers' market.

Table-4. Final cluster centers.

Cluster	1	2	3
Convenience	0.87	0.55	0.58
Variety	0.75	0.72	0.69
Quality	0.65	0.78	0.68
Price	0.75	0.84	0.60
Hygiene & health	0.66	0.74	0.82
Service conditions	0.67	0.45	0.72
Buying experience	0.78	0.64	0.60

Cluster 1 respondents show higher ratings for all factors; in particular, this group of respondents were interested in convenience, variety, and buying experience. Cluster 2 respondents gave high ratings to price and quality while cluster 3 respondents give high ratings to hygiene and health and service conditions. The respondents in cluster 1 showed an active interest in all factors, and hence they are the active consumers looking at all the factors involved in farmers' markets. All three clusters rated positively on all factors, with cluster 2 rating high on quality and price factors compared to the other two clusters. The factors hygiene and health and overall buying experience were rated higher by cluster 3 compared to the other two clusters.

4.3. Cluster Analysis

Hierarchical cluster analysis using Ward's agglomerative method – with the distance measure as squared Euclidean distance – was used to determine the number of clusters. The dendrogram produced by hierarchical cluster analysis gave four cluster solutions, of which one of very small size (<10 respondents) was excluded as an outlier from the study. Therefore a three-cluster solution was deemed appropriate to use in the *k*-means nonhierarchical cluster analysis to determine the final cluster centers. The final cluster centers were examined (Table 4) to give them suitable names.

To test the significant difference between the mean factor scores of each cluster and cluster similarity or variation, analysis of variance (ANOVA) with post hoc difference test by Tukey's HSD (honestly significant difference) was used. The results showed that all three clusters were significantly different from each other except on the factor "variety", where the mean factor scores were identical for all three clusters. Cluster 1 respondents gave higher ratings on all 7 factors, followed by cluster 2 respondents who rated high on price and quality factors while cluster 3 respondents rated high on health and hygiene and service conditions. Consumers in cluster 1 appeared to be regular visitors to farmers' markets, with a positive perception on all 7 factors and high ratings on convenience and buying experience. Consumers in cluster 2 also showed a positive response in all 7 factors, but with lower rating power than cluster 1. Consumers in cluster 3 also gave positive ratings on all 7 factors but with greater emphasis on health and hygiene and service conditions. Clusters 1, 2, and 3 had 103, 75, and 51 respondents, respectively. Based on cluster characteristics, Table 5 gives cluster membership along with suitable labels.

Table-5. Cluster membership and labels.

Cluster	Number of cases per cluster	%
Cluster 1 – local favorites	103.000	45
Cluster 2 – value for money	75.000	33
Cluster 3 – health conscious	51.000	22
Valid	229.000	
Missing	6.000	

4.4. Cluster Profiles

To profile the clusters, demographic information including age, gender, marital status, household size, qualification, occupation, and income were considered to determine any significant difference between cluster groups. A cross-tabulation procedure was used with chi-square statistic to determine the significant difference between

clusters using the above-mentioned demographic variables. Results showed that only age, gender, and occupation had a significant ($P < 0.05$) difference in all three clusters, and therefore other demographic information was excluded in cluster profiling.

4.5. Local Favorites (45%):

Cluster 1, labeled local favorites, is a male group aged 15–35 years and working in the private sector. This group represents 45% of the sample, more than either of the other two clusters. They were labeled local favorites because of the fact that they mostly use the farmers' market as their only source for purchasing fruit and vegetables, and they rated high on all 7 factors – mostly on convenience, variety, and purchasing experience. These local favourites have made the farmers' market visible and countable in the domestic markets, on a par with other retail layouts and supermarkets.

Cluster 2 was labeled value-for-money customers, representing a mix of males and females aged 26–35 years and working in the private sector. Customers in cluster 2 preferred quality at a price equivalent to that offered in other outlets. This group represents 33% of the sample, and who are looking for value for money as a key preference in buying choices at the farmers' market.

Cluster 3, labeled health-conscious consumers, represents women aged 26–45 years most of whom are self-employed homemakers. Cluster 3 represents 22% of consumers who are mainly interested in health and hygiene and service conditions at the farmers' market. Clusters 2 and 3 share a common female age group but differ slightly in their opinions or choices of farmers' markets as a factor of influence. Because 65% of the sample are men, cluster 3 is representation of a wholly female cohort, highlighting positive views on farmers' markets and placing greater emphasis on the health and hygiene factor.

5. DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

The findings of the current study on farmers' markets in an urban area reveal that consumers are positive about the operation of such markets in the vicinity of their homes. All consumers in the study favored the existence and utilization of farmers' market services in their neighborhood. The majority of respondents in the sample were men and were labeled the local favorites of farmers' markets because they rated high on all 7 factors; this group of consumers is represented by cluster 1, where the majority are in the age group 15–35 years and working in the private sector. Around 80% of consumers are willing to pay more at farmers' markets rather than shop at a nearby retail outlet or supermarket.

The second cluster of consumers represents 33% of the sample and they were positive about buying at farmers' markets, preferring value for money as they prioritize quality and price as the key factors when shopping. They represent a pool of men and women aged 26–35 years and working in the private sector. Cluster 3 consumers are women aged 26–45 years, most of whom are home-makers and self-employed, representing 22% of the sample. This group of consumers were mainly interested in health and hygiene and service conditions in farmers' markets.

Based on factor analysis results, a total of 7 factors were used to determine consumers' preferences and ratings for farmers' markets. The sample was divided into three clusters and were rated positively on all 7 factors considered. Cluster 1 are the local favorites because they liked all 7 factors, with high ratings for convenience; cluster 2 comprises consumers who prefer value for money, and cluster 3 are consumers who rated high on health and hygiene and service conditions of the farmers' market.

5.1. Managerial Implications

In the Indian context, the study of farmers' markets is a novel concept and is starting to become utilized in urban and semi-urban areas. This study highlights how consumer choice regarding shopping changes over time, by understanding farmers' role in producing and delivering their own produce directly to consumers in the form of farmers' markets. The majority of male consumers were enthusiastic about farmer's markets because of their operational time and convenience and fresh and tasty produce. Three segments of consumers were found in the study, with differing age groups and working conditions, and all were favourable in their opinions regarding farmers' markets; there is thus greater scope for the existence of farmers' markets in similar urban areas in India. The existence of farmers' markets sidelines the need for middlemen and, at the same time, consumers can enjoy the freshness of fruit and vegetables in their neighborhood.

6. LIMITATIONS

This study is based on customers who were interested in buying fruit and vegetable produce at farmers' markets; the study did not consider farmer's opinions on operating these markets. The study required the presence and practice of farmers' markets within the city because consumers were interviewed directly at the chosen locations. A total of 9 locations were identified, and therefore consumers were widespread across the study area, collectively representing the state as sample size. The classification of consumers into three clusters is based on demographic information including age, gender, and profession, and the results cannot be generalized because the locations and choices of consumers differ in both demography and working conditions.

Funding: This study received no specific financial support.

Competing Interests: The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Contributors/Acknowledgement: Both authors contributed equally to the conception and design of the study.

Views and opinions expressed in this study are those of the authors views; the Asian Journal of Agriculture and Rural Development shall not be responsible or answerable for any loss, damage, or liability, etc. caused in relation to/arising out of the use of the content.

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