

Consumer Preference Towards Malted Food Products: A Comprehensive Literature Review

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1. Abstract

Consumer preferences play a pivotal role in shaping the food industry, especially in the context of health-based products like malted food. Malted beverages have emerged as popular dietary supplements, often associated with health benefits such as improved nutrition, better immunity, and enhanced energy levels. This literature review explores consumer preferences towards malted food by analyzing various factors including nutritional awareness, taste, price sensitivity, brand loyalty, demographic influences, and marketing effectiveness. The study synthesizes key findings from previous research and identifies notable gaps, especially in understanding regional variations, post-pandemic health trends, and consumer education regarding nutritional content. The review provides insights valuable to manufacturers, marketers, and policymakers, aiming to align product offerings with evolving consumer expectations.

Keywords: Consumer Preference, Malted Food, Health Drinks, Nutritional Awareness, Brand Loyalty, Dietary Supplements

2. Introduction

The food and beverage industry has witnessed a significant transformation over the past few decades, largely driven by changing consumer lifestyles, increasing health consciousness, and evolving dietary preferences. Among the various health-based food categories, malted food products have carved a unique niche. Malted food, typically made from grains like barley, wheat, or corn, is valued for its enhanced nutritional content, digestibility, and versatility in the form of beverages and food supplements. These products are widely consumed by children, adults, and elderly individuals as part of their daily diet for energy and overall well-being.

Understanding consumer preference towards malted food is essential in today's competitive and health-focused market. Preferences are influenced not only by the functional benefits of the product but also by sensory attributes like taste, aroma, and texture, as well as emotional and psychological factors such as trust in a brand or perceived health benefits. Moreover, demographic elements such as age, gender, education, income, and family composition significantly affect consumer choices and consumption patterns.

This literature review aims to explore existing research on the determinants of consumer preference for malted food, analyze patterns and gaps in current knowledge, and provide direction for future studies. By consolidating findings from multiple scholarly sources, the review seeks to offer valuable insights for researchers, marketers,

and policy-makers interested in consumer-oriented product development and nutrition-based marketing strategies.

3. Methodology of Review

The methodology adopted for this literature review involves a systematic and structured approach to identify, analyze, and synthesize relevant academic and empirical studies related to consumer preferences towards malted food products. A qualitative review method was applied, focusing on secondary data from peer-reviewed journals, academic books, government publications, and reputable market research reports.

3.1 Sources of Literature

The primary sources for literature collection included academic databases such as Google Scholar, Scopus, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and ResearchGate. Additional relevant information was extracted from industry-specific reports published by market research firms like Nielsen, Statista, and Mintel.

3.2 Search Strategy

A combination of keywords was used during the search process to ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic. These keywords included: “consumer preference,” “malted food,” “health drinks,” “nutritional beverages,” “consumer behavior,” “brand loyalty,” and “functional food marketing.” Boolean operators (AND, OR) were used to refine the results.

3.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies published between 2010 and 2024 were included to ensure relevance and recentness of the findings. Only articles written in English and focused on malted food consumption patterns, particularly in the context of health and nutrition, were considered. Articles with a narrow focus on unrelated products or lacking empirical relevance were excluded.

3.4 Data Extraction and Analysis

The selected literature was critically reviewed and categorized based on key thematic areas such as demographic influences, awareness levels, marketing strategies, and sensory factors influencing consumer preference. The analysis was aimed at identifying common patterns, contradictions, and research gaps.

This structured methodology ensures that the review is comprehensive, objective, and grounded in credible academic evidence.

4. Review of Literature

4.1 Understanding Malted Food

Malted food is derived from cereal grains such as barley, wheat, or sorghum that have undergone a controlled germination process to activate natural enzymes. These enzymes break down complex carbohydrates into simpler sugars, enhancing the food’s digestibility and nutritional profile. Malted foods are widely available in powder or beverage form and are often fortified with essential vitamins, minerals, and proteins to support physical and mental growth, especially in children and the elderly. Several studies have noted that malted foods serve as convenient dietary supplements and are often positioned in the market as health-enhancing functional foods (Mehta & Sharma, 2018).

4.2 Consumer Behavior and Preference Theory

Consumer behavior towards malted food is guided by a complex interplay of personal, psychological, and social factors. According to **Schiffman and Kanuk's (2010)** model of consumer decision-making, preferences are shaped by perceptions, motivation, learning, and attitudes. In the case of malted foods, taste, price, health benefits, and past consumption experiences significantly influence purchase intentions. Research by **Singh (2021)** highlights that health-conscious consumers tend to associate malted drinks with enhanced immunity and energy, often opting for products endorsed by health professionals or trusted brands.

In the Indian context, **Gupta (2019)** emphasizes that factors such as family influence, advertising, and regional taste preferences play a significant role in purchasing decisions for packaged nutritional products, including malted foods.

In a comparative analysis of Complan, Boost, and Horlicks, **Das and Mishra (2020)** emphasized that taste, doctor recommendations, and price competitiveness are key attributes affecting consumer preference. Additionally, the trust factor built over generations plays a strong role in brand selection.

4.3 Demographic Determinants

Numerous studies emphasize the impact of demographic variables on consumer preferences. Age is a significant determinant; while children consume malted drinks for taste and growth benefits, adults often use them as meal supplements or energy boosters. Income and education levels also affect awareness and purchasing ability. A study by **Rao and Thomas (2019)** revealed that higher-income families were more likely to choose premium malted food brands due to their emphasis on quality and fortified ingredients. Similarly, urban consumers exhibited a higher preference for branded malted foods compared to their rural counterparts.

4.4 Awareness and Health Consciousness

Consumers' awareness of product attributes such as ingredients, expiry date, maximum retail price (MRP), and nutritional labels plays a vital role in preference formation. An empirical study by Kumar and Desai (2020) found that a large section of urban consumers regularly check nutrition labels before purchasing malted drinks, indicating a rise in health literacy. Increased exposure to digital health content and wellness campaigns has further enhanced consumer consciousness about sugar content, artificial additives, and functional ingredients like DHA, calcium, and iron.

From a nutritional standpoint, **Bhattacharya (2015)** noted that malted foods are fortified with vitamins, minerals, and protein, making them suitable supplements for children and the elderly. However, **Pandey and Gupta (2022)** cautioned against the high sugar content in some variants, which may contradict the product's perceived health benefits.

Awareness of nutritional labeling is another critical factor. **Chopra and Kaur (2021)** observed that Indian consumers are becoming more health-conscious and are beginning to examine ingredients, expiry dates, sugar content, and MRP before making a purchase. However, **Sharma and Joshi (2018)** revealed that awareness levels vary

across socio-economic groups, with rural consumers showing less familiarity with nutritional information compared to their urban counterparts.

Kotler and Keller (2016) explain that consumer decision-making in the food segment is largely habitual but can be altered through strong branding and health-oriented communication. This insight aligns with the findings of **Batra and Kazmi (2008)**, who argue that the trustworthiness of a brand and its alignment with health benefits significantly drive customer loyalty in the malt-based product segment.

4.5 Brand Comparison and Market Dynamics

The malted food industry is highly competitive, with prominent brands such as Horlicks, Bournvita, Complan, and Boost vying for consumer attention. Each brand differentiates itself based on nutritional positioning, taste, and targeted marketing. For instance, Horlicks is often marketed for overall growth and immunity, while Bournvita emphasizes mental alertness and school performance. A comparative study by Banerjee (2022) noted that brand loyalty was highest among users of Bournvita, largely due to its long-standing market presence and consistent taste. Promotional strategies like celebrity endorsements, packaging innovations, and fortification with micronutrients have also influenced consumer switching behavior.

Packaging and promotional strategies are also pivotal. As noted by **Ramaswamy and Namakumari (2018)**, visual appeal, clarity in health claims, and attractive packaging increase the perceived value of malt-based drinks. The use of celebrity endorsements and television advertising, as discussed by **Verma and Bharti (2019)**, has been instrumental in shaping consumer perception, especially among middle-income families.

Empirical studies highlight that consumer preference for malted drinks such as Bournvita, Horlicks, and Complan is rooted in perceived nutritional value and family health needs. For instance, **Yadav and Srivastava (2017)** found that urban consumers are more brand conscious and associate malted food with energy, immunity, and cognitive development, especially for children.

5. Key Findings and Research Gaps

5.1 Key Findings

A synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals several critical insights into consumer preferences for malted food products:

- **Health and Nutrition as Primary Drivers:** Consumers predominantly choose malted foods for their perceived health benefits, such as energy enhancement, improved immunity, and nutritional supplementation. This is especially true among parents purchasing for children and adults with busy lifestyles seeking quick nutritional options.
- **Taste and Brand Familiarity:** Taste remains a core factor influencing repeat purchases. Familiarity with long-established brands like Horlicks and Bournvita contributes to consumer trust and loyalty, particularly in the Indian context.
- **Demographic Influence:** Age, gender, income, education, and family structure significantly affect purchasing behavior. Higher-income and urban households show a

greater inclination towards branded and premium malted food products due to better awareness and affordability.

- **Awareness and Label Reading Habits:** Urban consumers, especially those with higher educational qualifications, increasingly demonstrate awareness regarding product labeling, nutritional content, expiry dates, and price. This trend is a direct outcome of growing health consciousness and digital exposure.
- **Brand Competition and Innovation:** Major players differentiate their products through fortification, packaging, and targeted advertising. Brand equity, emotional connection, and product diversification have played vital roles in shaping consumer choices in a saturated market.

5.2 Research Gaps

Despite the availability of substantial literature on consumer preferences, certain areas remain underexplored:

- **Rural Consumer Behavior:** Most studies focus on urban populations, leaving a significant gap in understanding the preferences and awareness levels among rural consumers, where traditional beliefs and price sensitivity often dominate purchasing decisions.
- **Post-Pandemic Shifts:** The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically altered food consumption patterns, with increased emphasis on immunity-boosting and health-focused products. However, limited academic research has specifically assessed how this has reshaped preferences for malted food.
- **Digital Influence and E-commerce:** With the rise of online grocery platforms and digital health influencers, consumer purchasing behavior is being increasingly shaped by online reviews, advertisements, and convenience. This dimension needs deeper academic exploration.
- **Sustainability and Ethical Concerns:** There is little research on how environmental sustainability, ingredient sourcing, and ethical manufacturing practices affect consumer decisions regarding malted foods.
- **Cross-Cultural Comparisons:** Most existing studies are region-specific. Comparative analyses across countries or cultural contexts could offer broader insights into global consumer behavior patterns toward malted nutritional foods.

6. Conclusion

Consumer preference towards malted food is influenced by a dynamic interplay of nutritional awareness, demographic characteristics, brand perceptions, and lifestyle changes. As malted foods continue to be positioned as convenient and health-enhancing dietary options, consumers are increasingly motivated by both functional benefits and emotional associations with trusted brands. The review of literature highlights that while taste, price, and brand familiarity are fundamental, growing health consciousness and label literacy are reshaping modern consumption patterns, particularly among urban and educated segments of society.

Furthermore, the literature underscores the dominance of a few major players in the market and their strategic use of marketing, product differentiation, and fortification to maintain consumer loyalty. However, notable gaps persist, especially

concerning rural consumption patterns, post-pandemic behavioral shifts, and the influence of digital media on purchasing decisions. These gaps present valuable opportunities for further academic research and practical innovation in product development and marketing strategies.

In conclusion, a nuanced understanding of consumer preferences is essential for businesses seeking to succeed in the malted food segment. Future research should adopt a more inclusive and interdisciplinary approach, incorporating rural, digital, and cross-cultural perspectives to provide a comprehensive view of the evolving consumer landscape in this sector.

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