

Consumer preferences and purchasing intention towards a new healthy snack product

(Penerimaan dan pertimbangan untuk membeli dalam kalangan pengguna terhadap produk snek sihat baharu)

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Keywords: correct prediction rate, snack product, consumer acceptance, purchasing intention, granola bar, MARDI

Abstract

A consumer study on a newly developed product of granola bar was carried out in Klang Valley. The objectives of the study were to assess consumer preference and purchasing decision towards granola bars developed by MARDI. The survey involved 1,200 respondents representing major ethnic groups in Malaysia. Four types of granola bar were reviewed, namely roselle-almond, dates-almond, banana-almond and coconut-almond. Consumers evaluated the products based on products' attributes (colour, aroma, appearance, taste, chewiness, sweetness and overall acceptability) using 5-point Likert scale. Purchasing decision was accessed using binomial (yes/no) scale. Data were analysed using analysis of variance (ANOVA), multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA), descriptive discriminant analysis (DDA) and logistic regression analysis (LRA). It was found that all the granola bars were well accepted by the consumers although majority of them were not familiar with the products. In purchase intention assessment, the LRA yielded a correct prediction rate of 67% accuracy. The most important attribute considered for purchasing intention was taste followed by overall acceptability. Therefore, these two attributes were the most important for product refinement.

Introduction

Granola bar is a cereal-based snack product consists of mainly healthy whole grain such as oat, rice, nuts and naturally sweetened with honey and fruits. Dried fruits such as dates and raisins are usually added for varieties. The granola mixture is crumbled and baked until crispy. It is stirred during baking to maintain a loose consistency or in major production the mixture is pressed into bars for easy packing and handling for sale. It is considered healthy because of its

high fibre content and nutritional goodness of its ingredients.

Granola bar is a relatively new snack introduced into Malaysian market and it posed the highest growth of 4% among snack of its category in 2012. The market for Malaysian granola bar is small and dominated by imported brands such as *Nature Valley*, *Uncle Toby*, *Kellogs* and *Quaker*. Estimated market value was around RM7 million (Euromonitor 2013).

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The granola bar can be positioned as healthy snack and functional bar for the future. It is suitable for growing school children, sportsmen or busy people on the go. It should be proposed to the Education Ministry and the Youth and Sport Ministry to consider consumption of granola bars extensively as a substitute for the less healthy food products. Healthy eating will be one of the major concerns to lead a healthy life. Healthy and functional food and snacks would be the trend for the healthy conscious future generations.

MARDI has developed a technology to produce a healthy snack in the form of granola bar. Local food manufacturer would benefit from this technology development in fulfilling the demand for healthy snacking. The granola bar product is ready for commercialisation except that consumer preference assessment should be undertaken prior to it. Therefore, this study was carried out with the objectives to assess consumer preference of the granola bars developed by MARDI based on product attributes and to predict consumer purchase decision of granola bars.

The product

Granola bar is made from dry ingredients such as rolled oat and puffed rice, and specific bioactive ingredients such as roselle in the form of ingredients such as candies, powders, granules and concentrate. These bioactive ingredients combine together with binders such as sugar, corn syrup, honey and malt dextrin as well as fat and emulsifiers. The processing stages of granola bar making were roasting of dry ingredients and then syrup preparation, syrup acted as binder. Subsequent steps were mixing of all ingredients, followed by toasting, rolling, cooling, cutting and packing. The four types of granola bar used for the consumer acceptance study were roselle-almond, dates-almond, banana-almond and coconut-almond granola bars.

Literature review

Basically, the study was about purchasing intention and new functional product development. Purchasing intention or purchase intent is one of the area of research in marketing and business. It has captured vast attention among researchers in the area. Purchase intent is a measure of the probability that a consumer will purchase a service or a product. Some researchers described it as the implied promise to one's self to buy the product again whenever one makes next trip to the market (Tariq et al. 2013). Examples of specific field of studies in purchasing intention among others are service based brand equity, brand performance, customer perception and relationship study on quality and purchase intention measure (Jamieson and Bass 1989; Cornwell and Coote 2003; Shaharudin et al. 2011; Irshad 2012; Tariq et al. 2013).

Purchasing intention is always tied up with new product development especially in new functional food products. Functional foods and drinks are usually come in a form of processed and convenient products with nutritional benefits attached to them. These products may have some attributes unfamiliar to taste bud for they may contain a combination of functional ingredients with uncompromised nutritional values. Acceptance evaluation is very important in ensuring consumers' acceptability at large, thus purchasing intention assessment is crucial prior to product launching.

There are a number of literatures on the acceptance and purchase intent of functional food products based on sensory attributes and purchasing intention. Walker (2002) evaluated consumer sensory properties of a healthy frozen dessert, i.e. low fat sugar free orange sherbets containing soy protein. The study showed that flavour and texture and overall liking were identified as critical attributes to acceptance and purchase intent. Bond (2002) studied the acceptance of butter cake made from rice flour which is suitable for people with spruce-celiac disease, who are resistant to gluten found in wheat flour.

She found out that consumers would be willing to compromise certain attributes in order to gain a potential health benefit from consuming rice-based product.

Pavon (2003) studied natural milk candy made from milk powder which contains calcium and other essential nutrients. This candy is a potential food supplement for adult and children. Her study was to characterise sensory properties of the candy and to determine product acceptance and purchase intent. The study concluded that different flavour added to the milk candy caused a significant difference in the consumer responses towards sensory attributes evaluated. The taste, specific flavour, overall liking and aroma were critical to acceptance of the flavoured high calcium milk candy.

Amporn et al. (2007) reported that rice butter cake was differentiated by appearance attributes, which were overall appearance acceptability and crumb colour. Gracia (2006) evaluated cholesterol-free mayonnaise-type spreads containing rice bran oil and found that taste, mouth feel and overall liking were identified as the attributes influencing purchase intent. The study also stated that taste and mouth feel should be emphasised for advanced product refinement. Local studies had also shown that taste and acceptability were the two attributes that were considered which significantly contributed to the significant difference in product preference and purchasing intent (Rashilah et al. 2011, 2012).

Methodology

The survey was held at supermarkets and public places where there were many people congregated. A number of 1,200 respondents participated in this study. Respondents were randomly selected and they willingly participated in the study. The number of respondents participated was determined based on the Malaysian population with the estimated 90% population size coverage with 3% allowable error (and Z score of

desired confident level of 1.96) (Ryan 2013) and with the intention to have equal representation of the three major ethnic groups of Chinese, Malay and Indian. The profile of the respondents is shown in *Table 1*.

The survey consisted of two parts, the first part was sensory evaluation of the four types of the products reviewed and the second part was answering survey questions in a structured questionnaire form. For the sensory evaluation part, respondents were presented with coded samples of the four types of granola bars. Sensory evaluation was carried out using Randomised Block Statistical Design. Respondents were instructed to visually evaluate each sample for colour, texture and overall acceptability. The respondents then chewed the samples

Table 1. Demographic data of the respondents (%)

Gender	
Male	39
Female	61
Age	
Below 21	6.3
21 to 40	68.7
40 to 58	22.8
Above 58	2.2
Ethnic group	
Malay	36.5
Chinese	33.5
Indian & others	30.0
Income	
RM4,000/month and below	63
RM4,000/month and above	37
Occupation	
Wage earner	81
Others	19
Education	
Tertiary level	56
Others	44
Marital status	
Married	58
Others	42
Number of household	
1 – 5 persons	80.0
6 – 10 persons	19.5
11 persons and above	0.5

and rated the sensory attributes which include taste, aroma, texture and overall acceptability. Score for attributes was based on the 5-point Likert scale (1 = Dislike extremely, 3 = Neither like nor dislike, 5 = Like extremely). This scale is useful in consumer testing because it defines psychological states of 'like' and 'dislike' on a linear scale.

In determining whether the respondents would purchase the products reviewed, they had to answer a question whether they would purchase the products if they were commercially available in the market. This question was rated using the bi-polar scale of yes and no, and LRA was applied to determine odd ratio estimate and correct prediction rate for purchasing decision of the granola bars developed by MARDI.

Statistical data analysis techniques

Consumers' data were analysed using SAS software version 9.1, by SAS Institute, Cary, N.C., USA. Types of analysis performed were analysis of variance (ANOVA), multiple analysis of variance (MANOVA), descriptive discriminant analysis (DDA) and logistic regression analysis (LRA). ANOVA was performed to determine consumer perceptions and acceptability of each sensory attribute while MANOVA was performed to determine if the products reviewed were significantly different when all the sensory attributes were simultaneously considered.

In its simplest form, ANOVA provides a statistical test of whether or not the means of several attributes of the products being compared are all equal. If the means are equal, the products in question are not significantly different; this also indicates that the attributes of the products being compared are also not significantly different from each other in terms of consumer preference. On the other hand, MANOVA determines whether there were significant differences if all attributes of all products were compared simultaneously. DDA was performed to identify sensory attributes

underlying the differences in all products reviewed while the LRA (Allison 1999; Bond 2002) was performed to identify sensory attributes influencing purchasing decision of the consumers.

Results and discussion

Product acceptance

ANOVA result showed that all types of granola bars were significantly different ($p < 0.05$) from each other when comparing each product attribute separately (Table 2). Respondents perceived each product to be significantly different from each other but none of the product was superior from the rest. Respondents discovered that the products could be differentiated from each other but none of them had been identified as really different in taste from the rest. This is because the basic ingredients were similar but only differ in flavours.

MANOVA statistic

MANOVA technique produced F value of 4.5 for Wilk's Lambda statistic ($p < 0.0001$) which indicated that all products were significantly different when all attributes were considered simultaneously. As for the other statistics (Pillai's Trace, Hotelling-Lawley Trace and Roy's Greatest Root), they were significant at $p < 0.0001$ (Table 3). MANOVA statistics showed that the products reviewed were significantly different at 1%.

Descriptive discriminant analysis (DDA)

The step that followed was to determine which attributes were significantly responsible for the underlying differences among the products reviewed. DDA was performed for this purpose. According to the pooled within canonical structure, attributes taste (0.7454) and overall acceptability (0.6854) contributed significantly to overall differences among the two products resulting in 63% cumulative variance explained (Table 4).

Table 2. ANOVA and Duncan multiple range result of the four flavours of granola bar

	Roselle-almond	Dates-almond	Banana-almond	Coconut-almond
Colour	3.5733ab (0.9203)	3.6402a (0.8795)	3.6447a (0.8757)	3.5439b (0.9112)
Aroma	3.4417b (0.9861)	3.5985b (0.9212)	3.5346b (1.0402)	3.4637b (0.9889)
Appearance	3.5700a (0.8827)	3.6285a (0.8775)	3.6472a (0.8599)	3.5798a (0.8929)
Taste	3.3900b (1.0498)	3.6503a (0.9846)	3.5571a (1.0408)	3.4236b (1.0570)
Chewiness	3.3983b (1.0209)	3.5785a (0.9734)	3.5897a (0.9513)	3.4871a (0.9844)
Sweetness	3.5450b (0.9969)	3.6928a (0.9025)	3.6597a (0.9242)	3.4879a (0.9768)
Overall acceptance	3.6392c (0.9118)	3.8497a (0.8579)	3.7815ab (0.9011)	3.6884c (0.9567)
Yes for purchase decision (%)	61.2	63.0	58.7	58.7

Mean values in the same row not designated by the same letter were significantly different ($p < 0.05$)

Table 3. Multivariate statistics and F approximations

	Value	F value	Degree of freedom	Pr>F
Wilk's Lambda	0.974995	4.50	27	<0.0001
Pillai's Trace	0.025169	4.50	27	<0.0001
Hottelling-Lawley Trace	0.025476	4.51	27	<0.0001
Roy's Greatest Root	0.015971	8.49	9	<0.0001

Table 4. Canonical Structurer's describing differences among the granola bars

	Can1	Can2	Can3
Colour	0.265866	0.341960	0.389730
Aroma	0.463223	0.266500	0.041060
Appearance	0.238685	0.109531	0.387031
Taste	0.745396*	0.437165	0.047666
Chewiness	0.590594	0.002494	0.515254
Sweetness	0.508663	0.665155	0.409016
Overall acceptability	0.685355*	0.284809	0.047978
Variance explained (%)	62.69	27.76	9.55
Cumulative variance explained (%)	62.69	90.45	100

*Indicates sensory attributes which largely account for group differences

Assessing purchasing decision using logistic regression analysis (LRA) for product 1 (roselle-almond granola bar)

The result of LRA for product 1 indicated that the Wald X^2 value was 0.392 at $p < 0.0001$ (Table 5). Result shows that taste

was the most critical attribute influencing purchasing decision.

The odd ratio estimate of taste was 0.675 indicating the probability of the product being purchased will be 0.7 time higher than not being purchased ($p < 0.0001$)

Table 5. LRA on purchase intent for the four granola bar product

	Estimate	Pr>X ²	Odd ratio
Roselle-almond			
Colour	0.00002	0.9986	1.000
Aroma	0.0975	0.2954	0.907
Appearance	0.1152	0.2335	0.891
Taste**	0.3931	<0.0001	0.675
Chewiness	0.1026	0.2177	0.902
Sweetness	0.0208	0.7949	1.021
Overall acceptability	0.0083	0.9432	0.992
Dates-almond			
Colour	0.0495	0.6344	1.051
Aroma	0.1330	0.1785	0.875
Appearance	0.2633	0.0143	0.768
Taste*	0.3498	0.0044	0.705
Chewiness	0.1894	0.0473	0.827
Sweetness	0.2087	0.1450	0.827
Overall acceptability	0.0842	0.4542	0.919
Banana-almond			
Colour	0.0147	0.8843	0.981
Aroma	0.1749	0.0630	1.191
Appearance	0.2306	0.0346	0.794
Taste**	0.6839	<0.0001	0.505
Chewiness	0.0381	0.6962	0.963
Sweetness	0.2454	0.0826	1.278
Overall acceptability	0.0860	0.4633	0.918
Coconut-almond			
Colour	0.0467	0.6547	1.048
Aroma	0.0083	0.9369	0.992
Appearance	0.1139	0.3017	0.892
Taste*	0.3794	0.0037	0.684
Chewiness	0.0140	0.8870	1.014
Sweetness	0.1851	0.2010	0.831
Overall acceptability	0.0706	0.5114	0.932

Model fit statistic: $-2\log$ likelihood for intercept & covariates:

Rosella-almond granola bar = 1483.033

Dates-almond granola bar = 1447.787

Banana-almond granola bar = 1480.169

Coconut-almond granola bar = 1496.918

Testing global null hypothesis: Chi-squared ($p < 0.0001$)

with every one unit increase of taste score based on a 5-point Likert scale (Table 5).

The LRA could also determine the correct classification of unit based on correct prediction rate of the model. As for the product 1 the correct prediction rate was 67.3% indicating that only such amount of percentage of respondent would bought product 1 out of 100% respondent who indicated yes (Table 6).

Apart from the above analysis, the LRA also produced the correct prediction rate which is the correct classification of a product either being purchased or not being purchased (Amporn et al. 2007). In this study, taste was significant ($p < 0.0001$) in determining purchasing intent, therefore, taste alone indicated 52.8% in influencing correct prediction rate of the purchasing intent (Table 7). Based on the full logit

Table 6. The correct classification of an unknown unit into group of overall purchasing intent for the four granola bar product

	Predicted (%) purchasing decision		
	Yes	No	Total
Roselle-almond			
Yes	41.2	20.0	61.2
No	12.7	26.1	38.8
Total	53.9	46.1	100.0
Correct prediction (%)	67.30		
Incorrect prediction (%)	32.70		
Dates-almond			
Yes	42.0	21.0	63.0
No	12.3	24.7	37.0
Total	54.3	45.7	100.0
Correct prediction (%)	66.7		
Incorrect prediction (%)	33.3		
Banana-almond			
Yes	40.3	18.4	58.7
No	13.2	28.1	41.3
Total	53.5	46.5	100.0
Correct prediction (%)	66.6		
Incorrect prediction (%)	33.4		
Coconut-almond			
Yes	39.3	19.4	58.7
No	13.7	27.6	41.3
Total	53.0	47.0	100.0
Correct prediction (%)	66.9		
Incorrect prediction (%)	33.1		

model with seven attributes, purchase intent of the product 1 (roselle-almond granola bar) could be predicted with 67.3% accuracy.

Assessing purchasing decision using logistic regression analysis (LRA) for product 2 (dates-almond granola bar)

The result of LRA for product 2 indicated that the Wald X^2 value was at $p < 0.0005$ is tabulated in (Table 5). Result showed that taste was also the most critical attribute influencing purchasing decision for product 2.

The odd ratio estimate of taste was 0.705 indicating the probability of the product being purchased will be 0.7 time higher than not being purchased ($p < 0.05$) with every one unit increase of taste score based on a 5-point Likert scale.

Table 7. Hit rate for the four granular bar product

	% Hit rate
Roselle-almond	
Full model (7 variables)	67.3
Colour	44.5
Aroma	48.0
Appearance	45.3
Taste	52.8
Chewiness	47.6
Sweetness	44.3
Overall acceptability	46.1
Dates-almond	
Full model (7 variables)	66.7
Colour	43.7
Aroma	46.7
Appearance	48.7
Taste	50.1
Chewiness	48.5
Sweetness	45.8
Overall acceptability	44.5
Banana-almond	
Full model (7 variables)	66.6
Colour	43.7
Aroma	46.3
Appearance	45.7
Taste	52.8
Chewiness	46.0
Sweetness	46.8
Overall acceptability	46.0
Coconut-almond	
Full model (7 variables)	66.9
Colour	45.0
Aroma	48.8
Appearance	45.6
Taste	54.4
Chewiness	46.9
Sweetness	51.6
Overall acceptability	48.0

The correct prediction rate of the model was 66.7%, which indicated that 67 out of 100 respondents who indicated yes for purchasing product 2 would really purchase the product while the rest or 33 respondents would not purchase it, indicating that the incorrect prediction rate was 33.3% (Table 6).

The LRA also indicated the hit rate or the prediction rate of the product being purchased based on product attributes. For

product 2, the model indicated that the hit rate was 66.7% when all attributes were considered simultaneously. The hit rate for the taste alone was 50.1% and the overall acceptability was 44.5% (Table 7).

Assessing purchasing decision using logistic regression analysis (LRA) for product 3 (banana-almond granola bar)

It was indicated again that taste ($p < 0.0001$) was the most important attribute in determining purchase intent (Table 5). The odd ratio estimate was 0.505 indicating that the probability of the product 3 (banana-almond granola bar) being purchased will be 0.5 time higher than not being purchased ($p < 0.0001$) with every one unit increase of taste score based on a 5-point Likert scale.

The correct prediction rate was 66.6% (Table 6), indicating that the model was able to identify that 66 out of 100 respondents who indicated positively in purchasing product 3 will actually buy the product while the other 33 respondents will not buy it, thus indicating that the incorrect prediction rate was 33%.

Considering all seven attributes for product 3, the purchasing intent would likely be 66.6% (Table 7). The hit rate for taste alone was 52.8% and overall acceptability was 46.0%.

Assessing purchasing decision using logistic regression analysis (LRA) for product 4 (coconut-almond granola bar)

Result of the LRA analysis was in concordance with the rest of the types of the granola bar, here again taste ($p < 0.0005$) was the only major attribute influencing purchase intent. The odd ratio was 0.684 indicating that the probability of the product being purchased will be 0.68 time higher than not being purchased ($p < 0.005$) with every one unit increase of taste score based on a 5-point Likert scale (Table 5).

The model's correct prediction rate was 66.9% (Table 6). This showed that for every 100 respondents who indicated that they would buy the product, only 67 of

them would actually purchase it and the rest of 33 respondents would not buy it. Thus, indicating the incorrect prediction rate was 33%.

The LRA also produced the correct prediction rate which was the correct classification of product 4 either it was being purchased or not based on product attributes considered in this study. Based on the full logit model with seven attributes, purchase intent could be predicted with 66.9% accuracy (Table 7). The taste alone in a single model could predict purchasing intent with 54% accuracy and sweetness alone with 51.6% accuracy. These are the most important two attributes to be considered in developing and marketing the product.

Conclusion and recommendation

The consumer acceptance study indicated that all the granola bars were favourably accepted by the consumers. Although the ANOVA result could hardly indicate which type was favoured the most, the MANOVA analysis showed that they were significantly different from each other. The statistic 'pooled within canonical structure' of the DDA indicated that the attributes taste and overall acceptability were responsible for the significant difference of consumer preference for the four types of the granola bars reviewed. The attribute taste yielded the most weight in influencing consumer preference as compared to overall acceptability. The LRA has also identified that the most critical attributes for purchase intent was also taste, followed by sweetness at a lesser degree of importance.

All the statistical analysis used in this study indicated that the most important attribute considered by the consumers was taste, thus taste was the most important attribute to consider for in further analysing consumer acceptance and preference. The attribute should be considered the most important in product development and improvement by the researchers and entrepreneurs in making inroad into the market place.

As for the correct prediction rate of the purchasing decision, which was around 67%, it was not very strong but it could be used as guidance in formulating marketing strategy. Researchers strongly felt that respondents were not familiar with the products as it was a totally a new concept of snack and health food products for them. The respondents were not used to the taste, thus resulting in rather low level of purchasing decision.

This study has identified taste and overall acceptance as crucial attributes considered for purchasing decision. This information is useful for product refinement. Further consumer sensory study together with marketing research which focused on demographic characteristics and geographical areas are needed prior to products launching.

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Abstrak

Kajian penerimaan pengguna terhadap produk snek yang baharu iaitu bar granola telah dijalankan di Lembah Klang. Objektif kajian adalah untuk menilai penerimaan dan pertimbangan untuk membeli dalam kalangan pengguna terhadap bar granola yang dibangunkan oleh MARDI. Survei ini melibatkan 1,200 orang responden yang mewakili kaum utama di Malaysia. Empat jenis granola telah dinilai, iaitu rosel-badam, kurma-badam, pisang-badam dan kelapa-badam. Pengguna menilai bar granola berdasarkan skala Likert 5-mata dan kecenderungan membeli dinilai menggunakan skala binomial (ya/tidak). Data dianalisis menggunakan statistik ANOVA, MANOVA, DDA and LRA. Kajian mendapati bar granola diterima baik oleh pengguna, walaupun mereka belum biasa dengan produk tersebut. Dalam menentukan sama ada pengguna akan membeli bar granola tersebut, analisis LRA mendapati pembelian dapat diramalkan dengan 67% ketepatan. Atribut yang diutamakan dalam pembelian ialah rasa dan penerimaan keseluruhan. Oleh itu kedua-dua ciri tersebut amat berguna dalam menambah baik formulasi produk.