CONSUMER BEHAVIOR IN DECISION-MAKING ON PALM SUGAR PRODUCT ATTRIBUTES

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Abstract: Consumer behavior encompasses actions directly involved in acquiring, consuming, and disposing of products or services, including the processes that occur before and after these actions. Palm sugar, which is used both as a sweetener and in herbal medicine, affects consumer behavior in unique ways. This study aims to explore consumer behavior in decision-making, focusing on the attributes of palm sugar products. Conducted in Rambah Tengah Barat Village, Rambah District, the study utilizes the Fishbein model for data analysis. The findings show that consumer behavior is generally positive, with product taste being the most influential factor in decision-making.

Keywords: *Consumer Attitudes and Behavior*

In today's world, consumers are not only concerned about the taste and nutritional value of food but also about how it impacts their health. Values held by individuals and the community influence their perception of what is considered good or bad, shaping their attitudes and behavior. The demand for nutritious food is not only about quantity but also quality. A more diverse diet ensures adequate nutrition, which subsequently affects one's nutritional and health status.

Palm sugar, a natural substitute for cane sugar, is frequently used as a sweetener in various products and also offers medicinal benefits. It has been recognized for helping with diabetes management, digestion, and enhancing nerve function. Meeting consumer expectations for palm sugar products is crucial. Marwati and Amidi (2018) explain that natural or herbal remedies are effective in treating illnesses without harming body cells, although they may take longer to produce results compared to chemical medications. Consumer behavior in making purchasing decisions varies and is influenced by factors such as age. As Cahyani (2016) highlights, consumers expect the products they buy to meet high-quality standards.

Consumer attitude plays a vital role in purchasing behavior. Attitudes, whether positive or negative, are shaped by past experiences and significantly influence decision-making. Schifman and Kanuk (2015) suggest that attitudes are a reflection of emotions, revealing whether someone is content or dissatisfied, or whether they agree or disagree with something. This "something" could be a brand, service, or even a specific behavior. Simamora (2011) further explains that understanding consumer attitudes is essential for companies to create products that align with customer needs.

Consumer attitudes are crucial for marketers because they are often closely related to behavior. Attitudes serve as effective predictors of consumer behavior. When consumers have a positive attitude towards a product, they are more likely to purchase it. Conversely, negative attitudes discourage purchases, and consumers may even share their dissatisfaction with others, which impacts the brand's reputation. As Suryani (2012) points out, marketers work to build positive consumer attitudes through attractive marketing campaigns, which aim to shift neutral or negative opinions to positive ones.

Consumer attitudes are a reflection of their emotions, which in turn affect their behavior (Sumarwan, 2004). Consumers typically respond to a product in a consistent

manner, regardless of whether they like it or not (Sutisna, 2013). Attitudes are enduring and are shaped by various factors, including motivation, emotions, perception, and cognition, all of which are influenced by the surrounding environment. Ferrinadewi (2008) suggests that attitudes represent a stable pattern of thinking, feeling, and behaving toward objects within an individual's environment.

The multi-attribute attitude model, as discussed by Sumarwan (2004), is useful for understanding how consumer knowledge about product attributes influences their attitudes toward those products. The Fishbein model, for example, has been successfully used to predict market share for new products. It allows marketers to analyze how consumers evaluate alternative product brands based on attributes. This understanding helps marketers develop effective strategies to change attitudes and influence purchasing behavior (Suryani, 2008).

According to Kotler & Armstrong (2008), consumer satisfaction is derived from comparing the actual performance of a product with consumer expectations. This satisfaction can influence their loyalty to a product. Clark and Wood (1999) emphasize the importance of product quality as the main factor in fostering customer loyalty, a view supported by Namkung and Jang (2007), who found that food quality—such as variety, freshness, and taste—plays a crucial role in determining customer satisfaction.

Kim et al. (2009) further highlight that for consumer satisfaction to last, creating product value is essential. This value creation often requires a longer time to establish, particularly when it comes to influencing consumer behavior. The slow and steady development of a brand or product value can ensure that consumers remain loyal in the long term.

Natural products, including herbal medicines, are becoming more favorable due to their health benefits. As Marwati and Amidi (2018) discuss, herbal medicines, although slower in effect compared to chemical treatments, provide healing without damaging body cells, which appeals to health-conscious consumers. This shift in consumer behavior toward more natural products is crucial for marketers to understand, as it influences purchasing decisions and preferences.

Cahyani and Sitohang (2016) also point out that product quality, service quality, and price are the three key factors that contribute to consumer satisfaction. When consumers perceive the quality of a product to be high and the price reasonable, they are more likely to make repeat purchases. This notion aligns with Retnowati and Abdurahman's (2017) findings on consumer attitudes toward coffee products, where quality was the primary factor influencing consumer loyalty.

In summary, understanding consumer attitudes and the factors that shape them is fundamental for marketers. As consumers become more health-conscious and discerning about product quality, companies must ensure that their offerings meet these expectations. Attributes such as taste, freshness, and quality play a pivotal role in shaping consumer behavior, and addressing these attributes effectively can lead to higher customer satisfaction and loyalty.

RESEARCH METHODS

The research was conducted in Rambah Tengah Barat Village, Rambah District, Rokan Hulu Regency, the data used in the study were primary data that the author directly obtained from the research object in the form of a questionnaire using ordinal scale measurements. The sample to be taken was 35 respondents using purposive sampling techniques. The product attributes studied were 1) product aroma; 2) product taste; 3) product texture; 4) product color; 5) product cuts; 6) product availability; 7) product packaging; 8) product promotion; and 9) product price. Sugiyono (2017) The measurement scale uses semantic differential.

The measurement scale used was the semantic differential scale, as suggested by

Sugiyono (2017). To measure attitudes, the Fishbein model was employed, which evaluates the strength of consumer beliefs about product attributes and their subsequent evaluations.

The Fishbein model formula is expressed as follows:

$$A_0 = \sum (b_i \cdot e_i)$$

Where:

- *A0* represents the attitude toward the object
- *bi* is refers to the belief regarding attribute *i*,
- *ei* is the evaluation of attribute *i*,
- *n* is the total number of attributes.

The model suggests that intentions, viewed as the immediate occurrence of behavior, are determined by an attitudinal or personal component and a normative or social component that is weighted by evaluations of attributes.

The measurement of the required data is based on a questionnaire containing the four variables with a measurement scale weighted from +2 to -2 using a semantic differential measurement scale. This measurement scale is a difference scale containing a series of two poles whether positive-negative, good-bad, strong-weak and others. Based on this, the data measurement uses two poles, namely agree – disagree.

Don't agree				Agree
-2	-1	0	+1	+2

Furthermore, to answer the hypothesis, namely by proving the results of the Fisbein model if the value is positive then it is said to be good and if the value is negative then it is said to be not good. The scores generated from a collection of research data cannot yet be interpreted, either when viewed from the total score or from the average score. In this study, the average score is used as a basis for measuring the level of achievement of each indicator and its variables.

After obtaining the consumer attitude value (AB), then find the consumer behavior value using the formula: (Umar, 2002).

B~BI　　=　W1(AB) + W2(SN)

Information　=

B	=	Behavior
B1	=	Behavioral Interest
AB	=	Attitude towards the implementation of behavior B
SN	=	Subjective Norm
W1 and W2	=	Empirically determined weights that describe the relative influence of the components.

RESEARCH RESULTS

When assessing the importance of a product's attributes, consumers have not focused on the brand itself while evaluating the significance of those attributes. To examine the factors influencing consumer attitudes in this study, the analysis was conducted by evaluating the level of importance of the existing product attributes.

Table 1: Summary of Consumer Confidence Attribute Value Results

Attribute	Consumer Confidence Weight					Score
	2	1	0	-1	-2	
1) Product aroma	20	11	4	0	0	1,4571
2) Flavor product.	18	16	1	0	0	1,4857
3) Texture product	17	13	3	2	0	1,2857
4) Color product	17	13	4	1	0	1,3143
5) Piece product	17	15	1	2	0	1,3429
6) Availability product	12	16	5	2	0	1,0857
7) Packaging product	12	17	4	2	0	1,1143
8) Promotion product	12	16	4	2	0	1,1176
9) Price product	10	15	7	3	0	0.9143

Source: Processed Data

Based on the table, it can be seen that consumer responses before purchasing show that the highest score for this attribute is the taste of the product at 1.4857.

Table 2: Summary of Consumer Evaluation Attribute Value Results

Attribute	Consumer Confidence Weight					Score
	2	1	0	-1	-2	
1) Aroma product	17	14	4	0	0	1,3714
2) Product taste.	16	17	2	0	0	1,4000
3) Texture product	15	15	3	2	0	1.2286
4) Color product	16	13	5	1	0	1,2571
5) Piece product	15	17	1	2	0	1,2857
6) Availability product	10	16	6	3	0	0.9429

7)	Packaging product	11	18	4	2	0	1,0857
8)	Promotion product	10	18	5	2	0	1,0286
9)	Price product	8	16	8	3	0	0.8286

Source: Processed Data

Consumer responses after purchasing showed that the highest score for this attribute was the taste of the product at 1,400.

Based on the respondents' responses that have been explained in the form of consumer beliefs and evaluations, we can measure consumer attitudes towards palm sugar products as follows:

Table 3: Consumer Attitudes (AB) Towards Palm Sugar Products

|	Attribute	Belief	Evaluation	SK	%
1)	Aroma product	1,4571	1,3714	1.9984	15.17
2)	Flavor product.	1,4857	1,4000	2,0800	15.78
3)	Texture product	1,2857	1.2286	1,5796	11.99
4)	Color product	1,3143	1,2571	1.6522	12.54
5)	Piece product	1,3429	1,2857	1.7265	13.10
6)	Availability product	1,0857	0.9429	1,0237	7.77
7)	Packaging product	1,1143	1,0857	1,2098	9.18
8)	Promotion product	1,1176	1,0286	1,1496	8.72
9)	Price product	0.9143	0.8286	0.7576	5.75
	Total			13,1773	100

Source: Processed Data

Based on the data in table 3, it shows that the highest product attribute is product taste with an attitude score of 15.78% of the total attitude score of 13.18.

Table 4. Maximum Score of Consumer Attitudes Towards Products

	Attribute	Belief	Evaluation	Maximum SK
1)	Aroma product	2	1,3714	2,7429
2)	Flavor product.	2	1,4000	2,8000
3)	Texture product	2	1.2286	2,4571
4)	Color product	2	1,2571	2,5143
5)	Piece product	2	1,2857	2,5714
6)	Availability product	2	0.9429	1.8857
7)	Packaging product	2	1,0857	2,1714
8)	Promotion product	2	1,0286	2,0571
9)	Price product	2	0.8286	1,6571
	Total Score			20,8571

Source: Processed Data

The measurement of consumer attitudes based on the maximum score data obtained for the product indicates that the weight range is +2 for very good and -2 for not good. As a result, the maximum possible attitude value is 20.86, and the minimum is -20.86. This range can be described as follows:
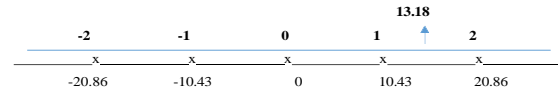
Based on the scale above, the measurement of consumer attitudes toward the product has a value of 13.18, which shows that consumer attitudes are still in the positive category, indicating that they are fairly satisfied.

Table 5. Summary of Subjective Norm Value Results

Variable Attributes	Normative Belief (NBj)	Motivation (MCj)	Total SN = (NBj) x (MCj)
Family members	1.08	1.16	1.25
Others	1.04	0.58	0.60
Friend	0.74	0.94	0.70
Sales Force	0.58	0.62	0.36
Total			2.91

Source: Processed Data

Based on the analysis of respondent behavior, it was found that decision-making by consumers was mostly influenced by others, with a ratio of W2 = 63%, while 37% of decisions were made by consumers themselves (W1). Thus, the value of consumer behavior can be calculated as follows:

B~BI = W1(AB) + W2(SN)
= 0.37 (13.18) + 0.63 (2.91)
= 4.88 + 1.95
= 6.83

The results indicate a consumer behavior value of 6.83, which is positive and greater than zero, confirming that the resulting consumer behavior is favorable.

The evaluation of consumer attitudes towards the attributes of palm sugar products was measured through belief and evaluation scores. Table 1 presents a summary of the results, showing that the product taste received the highest consumer confidence

score (1.4857). Other important attributes include product aroma and color.

Table 2 summarizes the consumer evaluation of the product attributes, with taste again scoring the highest (14000). Based on these results, Table 3 provides a detailed analysis of consumer attitudes towards palm sugar products. The highest attitude score (15.78%) was attributed to product taste, followed by product texture (11.99%) and product color (12.54%).

Consumer attitudes are essential in understanding purchasing behavior. The Fishbein model helped reveal the importance of taste as a determining factor in consumer decision-making. Additionally, Table 4 shows that consumer attitudes remain within a positive category, with an overall attitude score of 13.18, indicating that consumers are generally satisfied with palm sugar products. Subjective norms, as presented in Table 5, show that family members had the most significant influence on consumer behavior, with a normative belief score of 1.25. Friends and sales forces had lesser influence. Overall, the value of consumer behavior (B) was calculated at 6.83, indicating positive consumer behavior towards palm sugar products.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the taste attribute significantly influences consumer behavior in purchasing palm sugar products, with the highest attitude score of 15.78%. This aligns with Namkung and Jang's (2007) research, which highlights that food quality attributes, such as taste, play a crucial role in driving customer satisfaction and behavioral intentions. The results further emphasize that taste is not only a sensory preference but also a key determinant of product evaluation, as supported by Ferrinadewi (2008), who states that consumer attitudes are shaped by a combination of emotional and cognitive factors.

In addition to taste, other attributes like aroma, texture, and color also contributed positively to consumer attitudes, albeit to a lesser extent. The findings suggest that while

consumers prioritize taste, the overall sensory experience, including aroma and texture, reinforces their positive perception of palm sugar. These insights align with the Fishbein model, which posits that consumer behavior is influenced by belief and evaluation of product attributes (Sumarwan, 2004).

Interestingly, the price attribute received the lowest score (5.75%), indicating that consumers place less emphasis on cost when evaluating palm sugar. This is consistent with studies by Cahyani and Sitohang (2016), which found that quality often outweighs price in shaping consumer decisions. However, producers should remain cautious, as competitive pricing strategies still play a role in attracting price-sensitive consumers.

Subjective norms, particularly family influence, were another critical factor, contributing 63% to decision-making. This finding underscores the importance of social dynamics in shaping consumer preferences, as noted by Schiffman and Kanuk (2015), who highlight that external influences significantly impact purchasing decisions.

Overall, the positive consumer behavior score of 6.83 demonstrates favorable attitudes toward palm sugar products. This suggests that producers must focus on maintaining and enhancing key attributes, such as taste and aroma, while also exploring innovative ways to improve other elements like packaging and promotion. Addressing these factors will not only enhance consumer satisfaction but also foster long-term loyalty, as suggested by Kim et al. (2009).

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that consumer behavior regarding palm sugar products is predominantly driven by the product's taste. To ensure long-term consumer loyalty, it is crucial for producers to maintain and improve the attributes that consumers prioritize, such as taste and packaging. While taste remains a key factor

in purchasing decisions, producers should not overlook other aspects like packaging, which can enhance product appeal. Furthermore, pricing strategies should be reassessed, as price was found to have the least impact on consumer decisions. To remain competitive in the market, producers need to continuously monitor and evaluate consumer preferences, ensuring that product attributes are consistently aligned with consumer expectations. Additionally, incorporating innovative features and addressing emerging consumer trends, such as sustainability or health benefits, could further solidify the product's position in the market.

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