Factors Influencing Tourists' Purchase Behavior of Local Dry Fruits in Skardu, Gilgit-Baltistan

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Abstract

The study explores the key determinants of tourists' buying behavior for Local Dry Fruits in Skardu, a very prominent and scenic tourist destination in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. It is also famous for its local dry fruits, which are an essential part of its traditional identity and also play a very vital role in the regional economy. The study uses a structured questionnaire with 350 tourists drawn from a convenience sampling to examine the influence of cultural, social, psychological, and economic factors on tourists' purchase intentions. The relationship and magnitude of contributing factors were compared with descriptive and inferential statistics. From the results, it can be seen that all of the variables have a positive relationship with purchase intention, with psychological and economic factors having the greatest effect. Local businesses may find opportunities in realizing that by matching tourists' expectations, in their marketing and product strategies, they can increase sales and customer confidence, and lead to sustainable tourism development in the area.

Keywords: Buying Intention, Tourist, Culture, Social, Psychological, Economic
JEL Classification: M3; Q13; R11; L83

Introduction

Billions of people around the world travel the globe each year to experience new things and become part of the traditions and customs of the countries they visit. Tourism now has a global

character (Zhang et al., 2023). Shopping for local products, including Jewelry, is an integral part of this cultural, albeit commercial, experience. Visitors seek to take tangible memories they can touch back home (He, 2022). Among these local products, native dishes and specialties are unique and give a glimpse into the culinary history as well as the taste of the area (Cifci et al., 2021). Baltistan is one of the most-visited areas of Pakistan, being visited annually by thousands of tourists due to its mountain ranges and cultural heritage (Abdul Aziz et al., 2020). Northern Pakistan is a remote, mountain-covered region. Also, this place is visited by thousands of tourists yearly from different parts of the world due to its extraordinary beauty and allure (Saqib et al., 2019). Skardu, a northern city of Pakistan and surrounded by scenic views of Gilgit-Baltistan, is one of the famous tourist spots, and in recent times, many people are visiting this place (Rizwan & Nasiruddin, 2018). The home of stunning natural beauty and an abundance of cultural history, with friendly people. Skardu has become a magnet for thrill seekers and a respite for people from across Baltistan. The climate in this area is good for cultivating many other fruits such as walnuts, mulberries, cherries, grapes, almonds, and apricots (Baig, Ali, & Raza, 2022). These fruits are available to purchase fresh or dried. Dry fruits or other dried fruits, known for their taste, longevity, and high nutritive value, make a knockout quotient in traditional gifts for many regions worldwide (Tanwar et al., 2018). These things are bought every day by the tourists (Santos et al., 2016). The purchase intention of local dried fruits could be affected due to a variety of reasons, such as taste preference, cultural interests, travel purposes, and educational attainment (Boltri et al., 2023). Understanding the basic associations between these factors will provide us with a clear picture of how tourists spend money and how vital they are to the local economy, conservation of cultural heritage, as well as to the growth of sustainable tourism. However, it is more likely that traditional traders will sell dried fruits due to the local climate. The region is rich in many types of dried fruit, some of which are also extremely healthy for human consumption. Almonds are high in monounsaturated fats, fiber, protein, and vitamin E (Javaid et al., 2019). Moreover, it also has benefits for heart health, weight control, and brain function. For instance, walnuts are a great source of fiber and protein, copper, manganese, and omega-3 fatty acids, all of which are good for developing brain health, reducing inflammation, and improving cognitive function (Kumawat et al., 2017). Furthermore, potassium, fiber, and vitamin A are abundant in dried apricots, which improve heart health, facilitate digestion, promote clear eyesight, and support skin health (Van Horn et al., 2016). Besides, mulberries are a nutrient-dense food that is also a fantastic source of antioxidants, vitamins, and minerals (Krishna et al., 2015). Due to the above facts, tourists are likely to purchase and bring back the local dry fruits to their places for self-consumption and gift purposes. However, several factors affect the tourist buying behavior, such as pricing, advertisement, location, packaging, recommendation, service, and quality. However, the buying behavior of tourists regarding local dry fruits is still unclear.

Therefore, this study aims to investigate how customer perceptions of various factors, including cultural, social, psychological, and economic factors, affect the buying intention of customers with respect to local dry fruits.

Review Of Literature

Tourism is a key driver of the local economy and cross-cultural interactions in many places (Oromjonovna & Eshnazarovna, 2023). Tourism consumption of locally-made goods is an

important part of the local economy. Given that regional dry fruits are an integral part of regional cuisine and cultural tradition, tourism sales of regional dry fruits may have a significant economic benefit. Buyer decisions regarding a particular purchase are explained by their buying intention (Qazzafi, 2020). The approach could be a useful instrument for evaluating the buying behavior as it is based on the client's perspective, attitude, and previous experiences (Rodgers & Nguyen, 2022). The balance between the buyer's decision-making operates with a wide range of buyer characteristics, which surround cultural, social, personal, psychological, and economic factors (Hexian, 2023).

Cultural Factors

Factors including Language and Communication Styles, Cultural Norms and Traditions, Religious & Ritual Inspirations, Cultural Values and Beliefs, have an important influence on consumers in their desire to make purchases. These aspects also impact purchasing and preference decisions (Zimu, 2023). The significance of culture in relation to consumer behavior is also reflected in how consumers respond to different advertising messages, product symbols, and buying behavior during holidays and festivals, which are strongly shaped by their cultural affiliations (Lin et al., 2021). Furthermore, the consumers' perception of companies and products is influenced by cultural values and beliefs. For example, in communistic societies, social cohesiveness and relationships might be particularly highly rated, making people prefer products that increase social status and help bolster group identity (Shavitt & Barnes, 2020). In contrast, individualistic cultures may attach greater importance to individual accomplishments and how one can realize oneself through the use of consumer goods (Bierle et al., 2023). Furthermore, language is a basic component of civilization, which might affect customer choices (De Mooij, 2019). Sellers need to be mindful of the language and cultural quirks of their target market to prevent miscommunication or offense (Reisinger & Dimanche, 2017). In different regions, symbols and icons have distinct meanings; thus, while creating their goods or marketing surety, businesses need to keep these symbols in mind (Chen et al., 2023). Besides, religion also has a significant effect on how customers behave. Certain goods or services could be regarded as forbidden or holy in particular religious contexts (Santovito et al., 2023). Within a culture, acceptable conduct and consumption patterns are determined by cultural norms and traditions (Florea, 2023). For example, cultural differences in gift-giving habits have a noteworthy impact on the kinds of presents that are bought and the occasions on which they are given (Saha, Pradhan, and Jha, 2023). This leads to the first hypothesis of the study:

H_1: *There is a relationship between cultural factors and buying intentions.*

H_0: *There is no relationship between cultural factors and buying intentions.*

Social Factors

The purchasing decisions made by consumers are largely influenced by social factors (SF), including family, social roles, culture and subculture, socioeconomic class, reference groups, and culture, because people strive for social conformity and approval (Gbadamosi, 2016). Consumer decisions are frequently controlled by peer pressure and the need for social approval, which affects brand preferences and product selection (Childers & Rao, 1992). Besides, more and more customers turn to online forums and peer reviews for product suggestions, and social media platforms have become strong influences (Y. Chen et al., 2011). A person's social class is defined

by their employment, social standing, income, and level of education (Sundararaj & Rejeesh, 2021). People from various socioeconomic classes may have diverse preferences and purchasing power, which can have an impact on their BI (Balabanis & Stathopoulou, 2021). That's why brands habitually use their products and marketing messaging to target particular socioeconomic strata (Saha et al., 2023). Moreover, reference groups also play an important role while purchasing various items. These might be close relatives, close friends, coworkers, or even well-known people. When making purchasing decisions, consumers often look to their reference groups for reinforcement or approval (Hoonsopon & Puriwat, 2016). This leads to the second hypothesis of the study:

H_1: *There is a relationship between social factors and buying intentions.*
H_0: *There is no relationship between social factors and buying intentions.*

Psychological Factors

The psychological factors (PF), such as emotions, perceptions, motivations, and attitudes, are some of the key forces that drive consumers' buying behavior. In order to connect with and appeal to their target audience, businesses and advertisers must understand those characteristics (Nuradina, 2022). Quality, value, and the perceived benefit of a product drive purchase decisions (Solomon Oluwagbemiga, 2021). Emotional factors like happiness or fear can also play a large role in how consumers make decisions and whether they are loyal to a brand (Fennis & Stroebe, 2020). Customer perceptions are also influenced by their culture, higher experiences, and impressions (de Araújo et al., 2022). Consumers' motivations are what drive them to make a purchase, and marketers can help consumers create favorable associations with their products by using how they brand, advertise, or package them to shape perceptions. For instance, individuals purchase for different reasons like social acceptance, necessities, self-esteem, and self-actualization (Osemeke & Adegboyega, 2017). Similarly, culture, past experiences, and beliefs heavily affect the buyers' attitudes, which can be described as neutral, favorable, or unfavorable (Ayaviri-Nina et al., 2022). There's an effort by marketers to mold and persuade consumer opinions about the products that they want to buy, through branding, advertising, and customer service encounters. This takes us to the fourth hypothesis of the study.

H_1: *Psychological factors have an influence on buying intentions.*
H_0: *There is no association between Factors Affecting Psychological and purchase intentions.*

Economic factors

Customers decide what to buy in large part based on economic considerations. These variables represent different aspects of a person's financial position and the economy. Being able to match the right context with the right message is critical for brands and marketers who are trying to draw and keep customers. Socio-economic issues, such as income level, price, and affordability, as well as the general economic situation, will directly affect consumers' purchasing power and preferences. (Vaidynathan et al., 2023). In times of recessions, consumers focus on the basics of life and scour the market for deals and which affects the luxury and non-essentials market (Baydar et al., 2023). Because lower purchasing power limits consumption and higher purchasing power often results in an increased demand for goods and services, customer income is one of the most apparent influences in the economy (Di Crosta et al., 2021). Marketers often focus on target income levels with price plans and product mix (Cakranegara et al., 2022). Hence, price is

a key driver (Rajasa et al., 2023). For instance, high-end (or luxury, or 'premium') goods may be of interest to a selective market segment while more affordable products could be sold in quantity to a broader market segment (Gielens et al., 2021). Also, bigger picture economic issues such as inflation, unemployment, and economic growth can also have a big effect on how confident customers may feel and how much they are spending (Durrani et al., 2023). When the economy is down, people tend to be more careful with their purchasing, and then when things are good, they have a tendency to splurge (Durrani et al., 2023). This provides the fifth hypothesis of the study:

   H_1: Economic variables are related to purchasing intentions.
   H_0: There is no correlation between economic conditions and purchase intentions.

Methodology Of The Research

The purpose of the study was to understand the purchasing habits of visitors in Skardu about local dry fruit. The tourists have been selected for sampling, as these two are primarily interacting agents and have a great impact on the dry business and regional economy. A structured quantitative questionnaire was used for primary data collection with convenient sampling. Major tourist destinations, hotels, restaurants, and local markets were selected to get feedback from 400 participants around Skardu City. Statistical analysis, including descriptive and inferential analysis, was carried out in SPSS software. Descriptive statistics have been used to describe and summarize the data, including measures of central tendency and dispersion. While the inferential statistics have been used, assess the strength of the relationship, its significance, and effect size. In inferential statistics, Pearson's correlation test has been applied to measure the nature, significance level, and strength of the relationship. In addition, Regression analysis has been used to find the combined effect size of independent variables on the dependent variables. In addition, the t-test has been used to check the significance level of the relationship for the acceptance or rejection of alternative hypotheses. The value of R-squared is focused on the contribution level of variables to see how much the independent variable contributes to changing the value of the dependent variable. Figure 1: Research Model
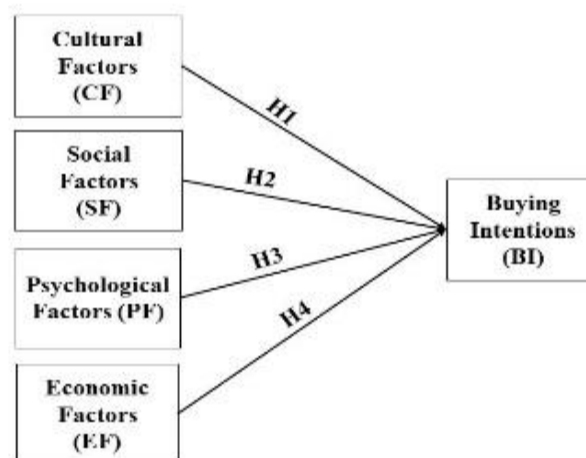
Instrument

The questionnaire used for this study consisted of two parts: one was of demographic variables, including age, gender, and qualification (Table 1). The second part consisted of 14 questions based on cultural, social, psychological, and economic factors. The first four questions in the survey related to cultural factors were from Ramya & Ali (2016), who explored the influence of cultural factors on consumer behavior. Furthermore, the influence of social factors is further explored with three questions adapted from Hofstede & Minkov, (2013), Moreover the questions related to psychological factors are also addressed, with three question asking whether respondents feel the need to buy dry fruits to feel better, which is based on Gross, (1998)and his research on emotional responses to purchases. Another item asks whether respondents are satisfied with their dry fruit purchasing experience, adapted from Kasser & Ryan (1996). The survey also delves into health-related perceptions with a question adapted from (Janz & Becker, 1984), asking if respondents believe purchasing dry fruits is beneficial to their health. Furthermore, Economic factors were examined with 04 questions, including consumer perception of quality, price, packaging, and variety of dry fruits based on Zeithaml (1988), Monroe (1990), Keller (1993), and Homburg & Giering (2001), respectively. A five-point Likert scale was used from strongly disagree to strongly agree (strongly disagree = 1 & strongly agree = 5). The reliability and validity of the instrument have been tested with a pilot study of 30 questionnaires. After that, 400 questionnaires were distributed, of which 380 were received back with a response rate of 95%. While 30 questionnaires were rejected due to improper and missing values and 350 questionnaires were used for the empirical analysis.

Demographic Variables

Age, gender, and qualification were considered for this study as these variables strongly affect the buying intention of consumers. Demographic distribution is shown in Table 1, which reflects a large number of respondents belonging to the age group 36 to 55. While the ratio of male to female was 55.7 to 44.3. In addition, the education level of the majority of respondents was graduation, followed by above graduation.

Table 1: Demographic Variables

Demographic Variable		No. of Respondents frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	195	55.7
	Female	155	44.3
	Total	350	100
Age	20-35	148	42
	36-55	162	46
	above 55	40	12
	Total	350	100
Education	Intermediate	37	10
	Graduation	167	48
	Above graduation	146	42
Total		**350**	**100**

Empirical Analysis and Findings

The empirical analysis was carried out using SPSS 16.0. Reliability analysis, as shown in Table 2, has been conducted to check the reliability of all variables. Cronbach's Alpha gives a value of more than 0.7, which shows that the data for all variables is reliable. The dependability of each variable has been examined using reliability analysis, as indicated in Table 2. A value of Cronbach's Alpha greater than 0.8 indicates the reliability of the data for all variables. For cultural factors, the standard deviation and mean score were 5.67 and 12.33, respectively, with an internal consistency score of 0.96; the Cronbach's alpha indicates strong internal consistency. The AVE of 0.95 showed excellent convergent validity. Moreover, for social factors, the mean score was 9.24 with a standard deviation of 3.88. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.92, indicating high internal consistency. While the AVE was 0.933, suggesting good validity. Furthermore, the standard deviation for psychological factors was 3.79 with a mean score of 9.22 as well, and Cronbach's alpha was 0.85, showing satisfactory internal consistency. The convergent validity appears to be fair as the AVE was 0.88. Likewise, the mean score of 12.38 with a standard deviation of 5.14 showed for economic factors as well, and Cronbach's alpha was 0.925, indicating a high internal consistency. While there was good, convergent validity was observed based on the AVE of 0.90. A similar trend was also observed for buying intention, as there was a mean score of 12.76 with a standard deviation of 4.85. The Cronbach's alpha was 0.876, indicating high internal consistency, whereas AVE was 0.85, suggesting good convergent validity (Table 2).

Table 3 represents the results of Pearson's correlation. The results showed that there was a strongly positive correlation between BI and PF (r=0.802), followed by EF (r=0.741) and CF (r = 0.681). However, there was a weak positive correlation between the SF and BI.

Table 2: *Mean, standard deviation, and reliability analysis*

Constructs	Factor/item	Mean	SD	Loading items	Cronbach alpha's	Average Variance
Cultural factors	Place (CF1) Tradition (CF2) values (CF3) Local Specialty (CF4)	12.33	5.674	0.909 0.965 0.976 0.972	0.968	0.955
Social Factors	Family (SF1) Reference group (SF2) Role and Status (SF3)	9.24	3.883	0.968 0.968 0.864	0.927	0.933
Psychological Factors	Feel better/happy (PF1) Feel basic need (PF2) Beneficial for health (PF3)	9.22	3.798	0.821 0.918 0.908	0.857	0.882

Economic Factors	Income level (EF1) Price of Product (EF2) availability of credit (EF3) Inflation (EF4)	12.38	5.146	0.923 0.894 0.908 0.888	0.925	0.903
Buying intentions	I plan to purchase dried fruit (BI1) Will purchase if there is good Packaging (BI 2) Will purchase if the price is negotiable (BI 3) Will purchase if easily transportable BI 4)	12.76	4.856	0.759 0.851 0.896 0.909	0.876	0.853

Table 3: *Correlation among factors that affect the buying intention of tourists*

	CF	SF	PF	EF	BI
CF	.977				
SF	.308*	.965			
PF	.726**	.482**	.939		
EF	.627**	.492**	.741**	.950	
BI	.681**	.495**	.802**	.741**	.923

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed) and *Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Regression analysis

Regression analysis has been used to check the effect size of independent variables on the dependent variable. The results of the regression analysis are shown in Tables 4 and 5. The value of the coefficient of determination (adjusted R Square) was 0.706. The Data demonstrated that the correlation between the observed values of different factors (CF, SF, EF, and PF) and BI was 70%, which means that 70% of changes in BI were due to all of these factors. The value of the F-statistic is 0.0, statistically significant as it is less than 0.05, revealing the significant impact of independent factors on dependent factors. Similarly, the Beta and B values showed for CF (Beta = 0.437, B = 0.413), SF (Beta = 0.104, B = 0.130), EF (Beta = 0.437, B = 0.413), and PF (Beta = 0.260, B = 0.332) also revealed that there is a strong impact of these factors on BI, leads towards the rejection of null hypothesis and acceptance of alternate hypothesis for all the factors.

Table 4*: Necessary statistics*

R2	Adjusted R *Square*	Significance of F. Statistics
0.710	0.706	0.000

Table 5: *Regression Analysis*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	1.610	0.435		3.706	0.000
Cultural factors	0.144	0.037	0.168	3.885	0.000
Social factors	0.130	0.043	0.104	3.040	0.003
Economic factors	0.413	0.048	0.437	8.528	0.000
Psychological factors	0.332	0.058	0.260	5.716	0.000

* Dependent Variable: Buying Intentions

Discussion

This research was carried out to investigate the factors that affect visitors' purchasing intentions, particularly regarding regional dry fruits in Skardu, Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan. To understand how these elements jointly affect visitors' purchase decisions, the study integrates several components, including cultural, social, psychological, and economic dimensions. Numerous studies (Zhao et al., 2023; Vaidynathan et al., 2023; Kardes et al., 2020) reported the impact of these factors on the buying decisions of customers. The relationship between culture and intention to purchase was found to be significant in this study. This indicates that the culture's language, customs, symbols, and traditions of a location have a positive impact on tourists' purchasing decisions. This result is in agreement with previous research (Zimu et al., 2023; Zhao et al., 2023), which underlies the extent to which culture must be considered when looking at consumer preferences and choices. As mentioned earlier, social factors and purchasing decisions are also positively related (Kardes et al., 2020), as social factors like peer pressure, social standing, family, and reference groups affect travelers' preferences. And also the impact from social media, as a channel to share reviews and recommendations, in this context is more relevant (Y. Chen et al., 2011). Our findings are also in line with this study. As tourists' subjective judgments, personal motives, and assessments of the quality of the products are important factors in their decision-making (Nuradina et al., 2022). Our findings are also in line with this study. As tourists' subjective judgments, personal motives, and assessments of the quality of the products are important factors in their decision-making (Solomon et al., 2021).

 Implications

In terms of implications, stakeholders consider several appropriate steps to ensure the suitability of their products with the consumer preferences and market trends. Thus, this study provides insight into the variables that affect visitors' decisions to buy locally produced dry fruits in Skardu, which will be helpful for shopkeepers, companies, and other stakeholders to improve and consider the preferences of dry fruit customers so that it has a positive effect on the local and regional economy. From the customer's point of view, the psychological aspect, followed by economic factors, was found highly significant and positively correlated with the buying

intention. Therefore, the stakeholders are responsible for producing and designing their products accordingly to enhance sales and customer trust.

Conclusion

This study explores the complex world of customers' buying habits, with a focus on local dry fruit purchases made in Skardu City, Pakistan. Through the analysis of the impact of several factors, including cultural, social, psychological, and economic factors, on the buying intention of tourists, this research has clarified that these factors have a profound impact on buyers' decisions. The results demonstrate how crucial each of these elements is in influencing travelers' tastes and decisions. Place, traditions, regional specialties, and symbols are a few examples of cultural elements that foster a sense of community and positively influence consumers' purchasing decisions. Social elements like family, peer group, and social standing are also very important. Additionally, economic factors have a significant impact on tourists' purchase intentions, especially in light of the present economic climate. Income levels, quality, packaging, cost, and sample availability are some of these factors. The psychological elements, attitudes, motivation, and perception that also influence visitors' intentions to make purchases emphasize the subjective and emotional character of decision-making. Similarly, the findings indicated that these variables explain roughly 70% of the variation in travelers' intentions to make purchases. In order to increase sales and customer trust, the stakeholders must produce and design their products appropriately.

Conflict of Interest Statement:

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

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