

CONSUMERS' PREFERENCE OF FISH PRODUCTS IN YENAGOA METROPOLIS, BAYELSA STATE.

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Abstract

The study was conducted to assess consumer's preference of fish products in Yenagoa metropolis, Bayelsa State, one hundred and ninety consumers were randomly selected for the study. Results showed that fishery products in Yenagoa metropolis include fresh, smoked, fried, dried, canned and frozen fish. Sixty-eight percent of the enough whereas seventy-six percent feel the variety of fishery products is low. Majority of the respondents (86%) preferred fresh fish followed by smoked fish which was preferred by sixty-four percent of the respondents. Age, ethnic grouping, gender, marital status and education did not have any significant influence on the preferences of the consumers ($P > 0.05$). Major problems identified by the consumers were exorbitant prices of fish because of activities middlemen, unhygienic selling environment and scarcity of fish products. Consequently, it is recommended that an adequate system of financing small scale fisheries be evolved to reduce the influence of middlemen; sanitary laws should be enacted and enforced in the fish markets around the metropolis; Establishment of modern fish markets in Yenagoa; to boost fish production, aquacultural investors should be attracted.

Key words: Consumers. Preference, fish, products.

Introduction

According to Nwokoye and Ahiauzu (1987), marketing starts with a thorough understanding of the consumer himself his needs, location, preference, attitudes, perceptions and socio-economic characteristics. They hold the view that the marketer builds the information gathered into the design and execution of his marketing strategy and tries, through promotional methods such as advertising, to influence consumer attitudes and behaviour in favour of his product or service.

Alfred-Ockiya (1987), in his pioneering work in old River State, Nigeria, showed that smoke-dried fish was the most preferred fish product. In another study, Alfred-Ockiya (1998) also reported that consumers preferred and accepted *Heterotis niloticus* to *Parachanna obscura*, *Clarias gariepinus* and *Oreochromis niloticus* base on taste and eating quality in River State.

Information on the consumer preferences of fish products in the Yenagoa metropolis is presently lacking. This is why this work had been carried out with the following objectives: (i). To identify the fish products available in Yenagoa metropolis; (ii). To identify the fish products preferred by consumers in Yenagoa metropolis; (iii). To determine if the socio-economic characteristics of consumers have any significant influence on their preferences; (iv). To find out the constraints faced by fish consumers; and (v). To suggest possible solutions to the problems highlighted. The result of this study, will provide empirical evidence on the preferences of fish consumers in Yenagoa metropolis. This will not only guide the fish marketers on fish consumption pattern but will also assist policy makers in the development of fisheries in the state capital in particular and state as a whole.

Methodology

Study Area

The study was carried out in the urban areas of the Yenagoa Local Government Area of Bayelsa State. Yenagoa is the capital city of Bayelsa State. Bayelsa State is a new State that was created in 1996 out of the old River State. It is geographically located within latitude $04^{\circ} 15' 1''$ North, $05^{\circ} 23' 1''$ North and longitude $05^{\circ} 22' 1''$ East and $06^{\circ} 45' 1''$ East. It shares boundaries with Delta State on the North, Rivers on the East and the Atlantic Ocean on the West and South. Yenagoa is growing very fast in population and has an ox-bow lake and several creeks, with a large adjoining swamp forest which is flooded during the flood season.

Sampling Procedure and Data Analysis

A stratified sampling framework was adopted to administer structure questionnaires to fish consumers in the Yenagoa metropolis. Ten (10) towns were randomly selected from the study area. These towns include Yenagoa, Onopa, Ovom, Biogbolo, Okutukutu, Amarata, Ekeki, Opolo, Yenezuegene and Edepie. In each town nineteen fish consumers were randomly selected and interviewed. The data obtained was analysed by simply descriptive and inferential statistics (bar charts, pie charts and chi-square).

Results

The results showed that fish products mostly available in Yenagoa metropolis include fresh, smoked and fried fish such as *Heterotis niloticus*, thread fins, *Tilapia*, *Bagrids*, *Clariharinids*, *Clupeids*, *Mochokids*, Shrimps (*Macrobrachium spp.*, *Nematopalaemon hastatus*) Periwinkle (*Tympanotonus spp.*) and Clams (*Egeria radiata*). Others include canned fish ('Geisha', Sardine), dried fish (Stock fish, 'Kpanla') and frozen fish (Mackerel, Jackfish, Croakers, Sole.)

The result revealed that 68% of the respondents felt the quantity of fish was not enough while 76% felt the varieties of fish is low. Consumer preference of fish products in Yenagoa metropolis is shown in Fig. 1. Fresh fish (86%) was the most preferred fish product while dried and canned fish were the least preferred.

From the questionnaire, the organoleptic factors influencing consumer preference of fish products in Yenagoa metropolis is shown in Fig. 2. It shows that taste and flavour are the most influencing organoleptic factors. Based on result from chi-square analysis, age, gender, ethnic grouping, marital status and educational did not have any significant influence on the preferences of the consumers. ($P > 0.05$).

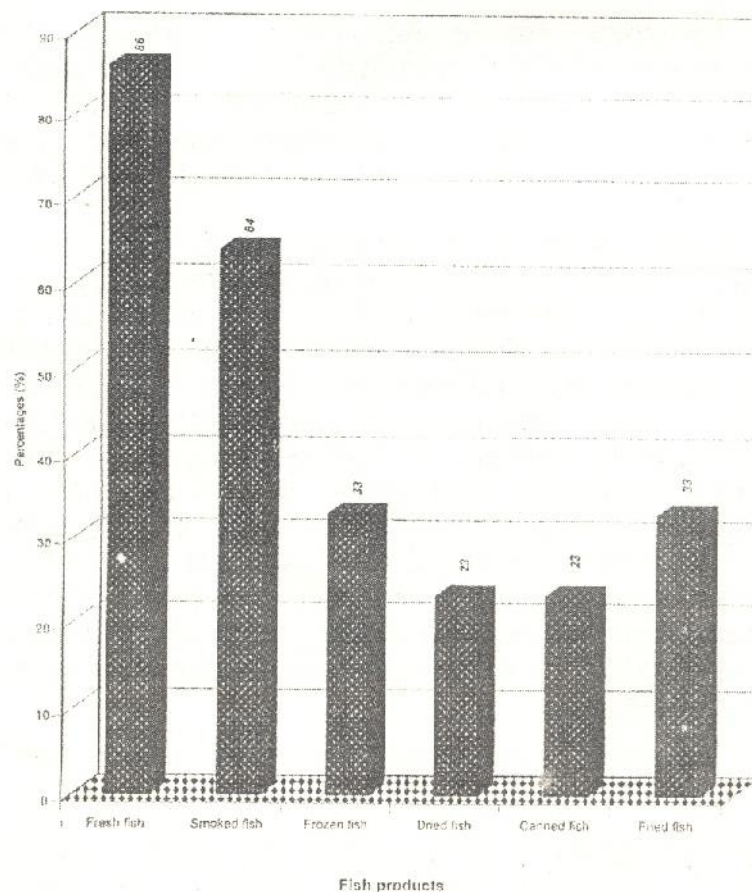


Fig. 1: Consumer preference of fish products in Yenagoa Metropolis

The problems fish consumers are facing is shown in Fig.3 and this indicates that exorbitant price of fish in Yenagoa metropolis is the major problem followed by unhygienic selling environment and scarcity of fish products.

Discussion

The fresh fish is the most preferred fish product in Yenagoa. Fresh fish was not among the consideration of fish products in Rivers State by Alfred-Ockiya (1987), therefore, the preference for smoked fish which was reported then does not agree with the present consideration. Tobor (1984), reported that Nigerian fish consumers generally prefer fresh to sun or smoke-dried fish and will be prepared to buy any quantity available in good condition and at a reasonable price.

The low patronage of canned fish by consumers observed in this study may be linked to their high prices which tend to be higher when compared with other fish products weight for weight (Olatunde, 1982). Infact, Igere (1986) reported that conservation attitude towards some products may also be a factor of the low patronage. The reported major organoleptic factor (taste) influencing fish consumers' preference in Yenagoa is in agreement with the observation of Quikan *et. al.* (1998) which reported that people in the Southern China are influenced by taste and flavour in the choice of food.

The observed exorbitant prices of fish in the Yenagoa metropolis is not surprising because high prices is a common feature of the marketing system of the developing countries of the tropics.

Also, Olatunde (1982) and Eyo (1992) suggested that the interposition of middlemen or series of middlemen between the producers (fishers) and the consumers is the main cause of the exorbitant prices. The result of which the middlemen make all the profits while the fishers get very little returns for their efforts and the consumer buys at high prices. Furthermore, Fatunla *et al.* (1982) had reported that as long as there is a supply deficit of fish (especially in most developing countries), price of fish keeps rising as demand increases. Other factors that may contribute to the high prices and scarcity of fish include the scattered nature of artisanal fisheries, poor communication facilities between the fishing settlements and the population centres coupled with the relative poverty of the artisanal fishers who are forced to depend on the middlemen for credit to operate business and therefore forced to sell the product to them.

The unhygienic selling environment observed in this study is in agreement with the results of Igere (1986) which reported that at the retail level. Fish are displayed in open shelves/table in the markets. This display method attracts flies which leads to contamination and rapid deterioration of product.

Conclusion

The findings of this study showed that the preference scale of fish consumers in the Yenagoa metropolis is in the decreasing order: fresh fish > smoked fish > fried fish > frozen fish > dried fish = canned fish.

Recommendation

- (1). As a way of curtailing the high prices of fish, and adequate system of financing the small scale fisheries should be evolve. This will assist in eliminating such middlemen/creditors without reducing production from this sector.
- (2). Fishers, Processors and Fish Marketers should be educated and encouraged to adopt improved post-harves fish handling practices as a way of containing the menace of unhygienic selling environment.
- (3). Also, legislation should be enacted and enforced by sanitary inspectors or quality control officers in the Local Government Office.
- (4). Modern fish markets should be established in Yenagoa to facilitate the sales of fish. These markets should include cold storage facilities, potable water, good draining system and public toilets.
- (5). To boost fish production, aquacultural production should be encouraged taking advantage of the suitable environment of Yenagoa and its environs.
- (6). To make fish product easily available, communication system should be improved.

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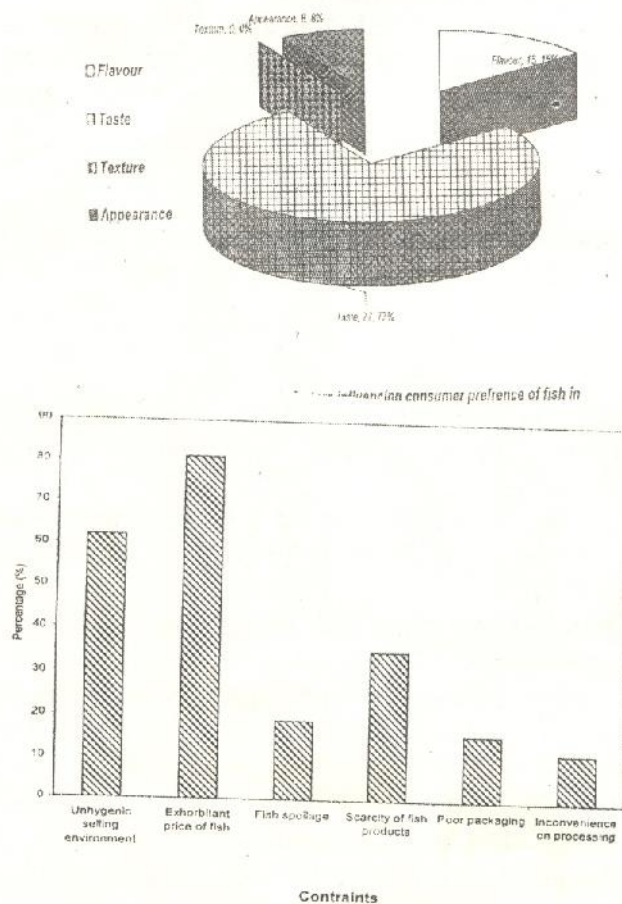


Fig. 3: Constraints facing fish consumers in Yenagoa Metropolis