Exploring Consumer Intention and Perceptions towards Purchasing Local Milk Powder

A.G.K. Wijesinghe*, U.M.R.M.I. Senadeera and N.R. Abeynayake

ABSTRACT

Disputable information recently released through the mass media related to the imported milk powder has made a negative influence on powdered milk consumption in Sri Lanka. Conversely, this disputable information has been able to make high demand for local milk powder products. Therefore, this study was mainly focused to evaluate how the attitude towards the product, perceived knowledge, trust, price, availability, health consciousness, and subjective norms influence the local milk powder purchase intention of consumers. Primary data were collected through a questionnaire-based survey employing a face-to-face interview from a sample of 250 respondents covering five Divisional Secretariats in the Kegalle District. Data were analyzed by using Confirmatory Factor Analysis through Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS).

Faculty of Agriculture and Plantation Management, Wayamba University of Sri Lanka, Makandura, Gonawilla (NWP), Sri Lanka.

*kusum_wijesinghe06@yahoo.com
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0431-9823

The results revealed that trust, health consciousness, availability and price are the main factors that influence the local milk powder purchase intention of the consumers. The results also show that the lack of availability is the major issue in the local milk powder industry. Hence, the findings of the case of Kegalle District, are important to policymakers, producers, vendors, and the government to implement better strategies for the development of the local milk powder industry in Sri Lanka.

INTRODUCTION

Milk is a rich source of several nutrients which are essential for the maintenance of good health. It plays a valuable role especially in infant feeding and alleviating nutritional deficiencies in all other age groups. According to the average monthly household expenditure for all food items, the expenditure for powdered milk takes a high percentage. Sri Lanka is not self-sufficient in milk production, thus, heavily depends on imported milk powder from countries like Australia and New Zealand. Hundred thousand

metric tons of powdered milk have been imported to compensate for the consumption requirement in the country (Anon 2020; Lanka Business Online, 2020).

Local dairy producers in Sri Lanka only provide 40% of the required amount of powdered milk (Economic and Social Statics of Sri Lanka, 2018). Nevertheless, there are issues relating to the quality and food safety of imported milk powder products in recent years due to the presence of harmful additives in milk products (Boniface and Umberger, 2012; Casewell, 1998). According to the literature, such harmful additives in milk products are identified as arsenic, melamine, dicyandiamide (DCD) and animal fat (Perera *et al.*, 2019; Azad and Ahmed, 2016; Anon, 2013). Sri Lankan consumers consider the quality attributes more when they purchase milk powder than that they purchase other dairy products (Saheeka *et al.*, 2013). However, those issues of imported milk powder have been able to make changes in consumer attitudes. According to Anuranga (2012), several imported milk powder brands were tested in Sri Lanka and four of them were found to be contaminated with dicyandiamide (DCD). Due to the

disputable issues of imported powdered milk during the last several years, consumer preference has been changed towards the local milk powder products in Sri Lanka (Economic and Social Statics of Sri Lanka, 2018).

According to the literature, several factors influence on purchase intention of powdered milk in Sri Lanka. Purchase intention is viewed as the motivation of a person to attempt to buy a product of a particular brand (Hoang *et al.*, 2017). Researchers have mentioned that country image and brand image are supposed to have direct impacts on purchase intention (Anon, 2013; Cordell, 1993; Hoang *et al.*, 2017; Tse and Gorn, 1993; Parkvithee and Miranda, 2012). Further, researchers have mentioned that consumer knowledge is also a factor that influences the purchase intention of a product (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). In a recent study, it has been pointed out that consumers' product knowledge has a significant effect on the purchase intention of a product (Cakici and Shukla, 2017).

According to past studies, the subjective norm is another factor that influences on purchase intention of consumers for a product (Ortega *et al.*,

2014; Teng and Wang, 2015; Tonsor and Wolf, 2012). Subjective norm describes the degree of social pressure (i.e. from family, friends, news and magazines, and other significant sources) for a consumer to accept or avoid the purchasing of a product (Senadisai *et al*., 2014). Moreover, numerous studies have shown that price has a significant impact on the milk powder purchase intention of consumers (Senadisai *et al*., 2014; Kuma *et al*., 2012; Bingham *et al*., 2014).

The literature also highlighted that consumers' attitude towards a product is a function of consumers' evaluations of the attributes possessed with that product (Hysen *et al*., 2008; Howard, 1989; Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). A better attitude towards a product makes more preference to buy that product (Lee and Lee, 2009; Ajzen and Fishbein, 1980).

Trust towards a product is another important factor in purchase intention. When consumers trust a product, it reduces uncertainty and enhances purchase intention (Hart and Saunders, 1997). Another research has mentioned that consumers evaluate the quality of a milk product and assure trust prior to purchase (Lakmali and

Abeynayake, 2016). Another most important factor for purchase intention is the knowledge of a product. Consumer knowledge is considered as a kind of product-related experience that influences purchase intention (Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). In a recent study, Cakici and Shukla (2017), has pointed out that consumers' product knowledge has a significant effect on purchase intention.

Product availability influences the purchase intention for a given product. Kumar and Babu (2014) have mentioned that availability is a major factor that affects the purchase intention of dairy products.

Some studies have been carried out in Sri Lanka to evaluate the purchasing behaviour of locally produced milk products. But there is no sufficient research carried out to investigate the factors that influence on purchase intention of locally produced powdered milk in Sri Lanka especially after the controversial issues that were recently happened about imported powdered milk. Hence, the objectives of this study were to examine how attitude, perceived knowledge, trust, health consciousness, subjective norms, availability and price determine the

local milk powder purchase intention among consumers in Sri Lanka.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Conceptual Framework

Based on the literature, the conceptual framework was proposed and it is illustrated in Figure 1 explaining the selected variables. Accordingly, the following hypotheses were depicted for this research.

H1: Attitude towards the product influences local milk powder purchase intention.

H2: Trust influences local milk powder purchase intention.

H3: Perceived knowledge influences local milk powder purchase intention.

H4: Subjective norms influence local milk powder purchase intention.

H5: Product availability influences local milk powder purchase intention.

H6: Price of the product influences local milk powder purchase intention.

H7: Health consciousness influences local milk powder purchase intention.

Data Collection

Data were collected from 250 people who consume local milk powder by using a structured questionnaire.
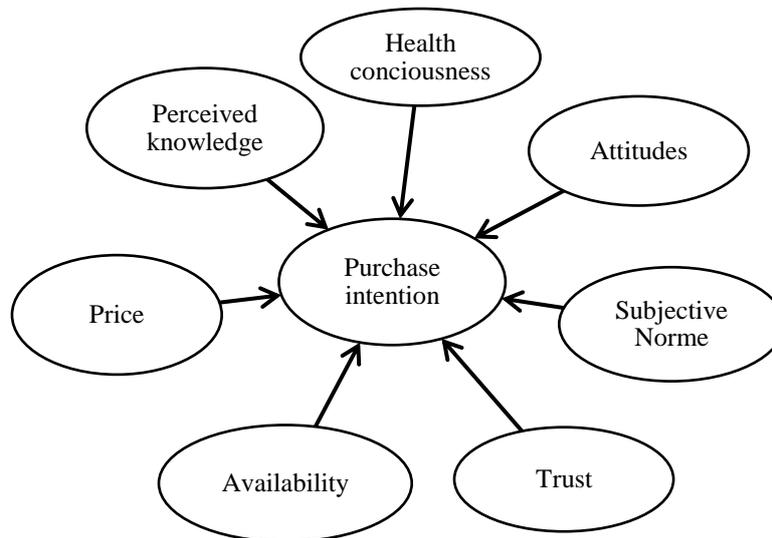

Figure 1. Proposed Conceptual Framework

The questionnaire was pretested prior to the survey with a sample of potential consumers (n=20) and accordingly, minor modifications were done. Respondents were selected by using a multi-stage sampling method in Kegalle District. The multistage sampling process that included Divisional Secretariate (DS) divisions of the district is demonstrated in Figure 2.

Measures

The questionnaire consisted of nine constructs (i.e. factors) including personal information of the consumers, attitude towards the product, perceived knowledge, subjective norms, availability, price, health consciousness, trust, and purchase intention of local milk powder products. Thirty-one items were used to assess seven constructs other than personal information and purchase intention. All items were assessed using a five-point Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 to 5, where 1 denoted "strongly disagree" and 5 denoted "strongly agree". A summary of all items under each construct is given in Table 1.
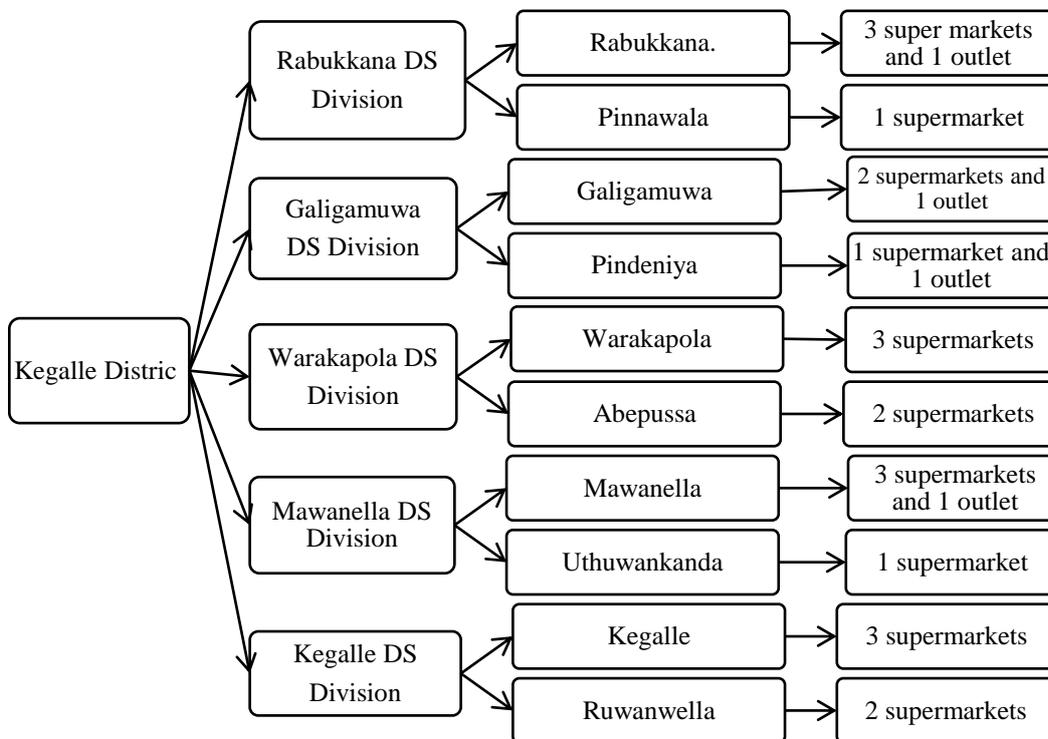
Figure 2. Multistage Sampling Procedure

Table 1. Likert scale items used to measure the purchase intention

Construct	Item Name	Likert Scale Items
Attitude towards the product	PA1	Good taste of local milk powder
	PA2	Attractive package design of the local milk powder products
	PA3	Importance of SLS, ISO certification of the product
	PA4	Importance of HALAL certification of the product
	PA5	Importance of brand name of the milk powder
	PA6	Good dissolving ability of the product
	PA7	Attractive advertisement of the product
	PA8	Good smell of the product
Subjective norms	SN1	Family perception on buying behaviour of the product
	SN2	Professionals' perception on buying behaviour of the product
	SN3	Influences of new research findings on buying behaviour of the product
Perceived knowledge	K1	Having knowledge on the problems of imported powdered milk
	K2	Having knowledge on the ingredients of local powdered milk.
	K3	Having knowledge on harmful ingredients which can be included in imported
	K4	Having knowledge on the absence of any harmful ingredients in local milk
Health consciousness	H1	I believe that local milk powder contains only natural ingredients.
	H2	I believe that local milk powder does not contain animal fat.
	H3	I believe that local milk powder does not create any health problems
	H4	I believe that local milk powder does not contain DCD
	H5	I believe that local milk powder does not contain melamine

Price	P1	The low price of local milk powder products has a significant influence on my
	P2	Even though the price is higher for local milk powder products, I buy them
	P3	Price offers good value for local milk powder products
Trust	T1	I believe that the source of the collection of raw milk is
	T2	I believe that the delivery process of raw milk is safe
	T3	I believe that local milk powder product processing is safe
Availability	AV1	Poor availability of local brands creates a barrier to purchase.
	AV2	Seek to purchase local milk powder products anyhow.
	AV3	If local milk powder is not available, I buy local branded liquid milk.
	AV4	If local milk powder is not available, I buy local fresh milk
	AV5	If local milk powder is not available, I do not use milk.

Data Analysis

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) test was applied to check the sampling adequacy for the multivariate analysis while Pearson Correlation Coefficient was employed to ensure that the multivariate analysis was not distorted (Rohlf, 2009).

The internal consistency of each construct was examined by using Cronbach's Alpha Reliability Coefficient. Descriptive statistics were used to analyse the demographic factors of the sample.

In this study, Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) was used to examine the proposed model by using Analysis of Moment Structure (AMOS) in the SPSS 24 version. Byrne (2016) has elaborated that the CFA was done to determine whether all observed variables (Indicator variables) properly reflect their underlying constructs (Latent variables) and whether the measurement model has an acceptable fit to the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Descriptive Statistics of the Sample

The majority of the respondents were women (54%) and 46% were men in the studied sample. The sample contained 43 % and 37% in the age groups of 16-30 and 31- 50, respectively. Among the respondents studied, 8% had primary education while others had above that level. The majority of the sample was in the secondary level of education (61.2%). In the survey sample, 59.2% were employed and 32.8% were among the income level between LKR 35,001-60,000 (Table 2).

Consumer Buying Behaviour

The result revealed that 48.4% of respondents purchase only local milk powder while the majority of people consume both imported and local milk powder (51.6%) as there is a shortage of local milk powder in the market.

Consumer Brand Preference

Consumers mainly focus on two popular local milk brands in the market. In the study sample, 41.6% of the respondents are brand loyal while

the majority of the respondents (58.4%) do not consider the brand name when purchasing local milk powder in the market.

Sampling Adequacy

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) and Bartlett's Test of sphericity (BTS) were conducted to verify the factorability of data. The recommended threshold value for KMO is at least 0.60 and BTS must be significant at $P < 0.1$. The results for both of the tests were found to meet the minimum requirements (Table 3).

Table 2. Socio-demographic characteristics of the sample

Parameter	Category	Percentage (%)
Gender	Male	46.0
	Female	54.0
Age	16-30 years	43.0
	31-50 years	37.0
	50 years above	20.0
Employment Status	Unemployed	40.8
	Employed	59.2
Monthly Income	Less than 15,000 (LKR)	11.2
	15,001-35,000 (LKR)	26.4
	35,001- 60,000 (LKR)	32.8
	Above 60,000 (LKR)	29.6
Educational Level	Primary	8.0
	Secondary	61.2
	Tertiary	30.8
Ethnicity	Sinhala	92.0
	Tamil	6.8
	Muslim	1.2

Consistency of Constructs

The Cronbach's Alpha coefficient is a useful indicator to test the internal consistency of the items that make up a construct. When Cronbach's Alpha is

Table 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test

Sample adequacy indicator	Relevant value for indicator
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.709
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity Approx. Chi-Square	6571.394
df	595
Significant Probability	0.000

higher the reliability of the scale is higher (Dunn *et al.*, 1994). Malhotra and Birks (2003) state that if the coefficient is above 0.65 it could be acceptable. Furthermore, the deletion of one or more items from a construct can also contribute to an increase of the Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient. All 31 items (statements) under the selected seven constructs, were checked separately for consistency using Cronbach's Alpha. Production Attitude (PA) showed 0.691 as Cronbach's Alpha after deleting items (PA4 and PA8). Similarly, item 3 from Subjective Norm, (SN3), and item 5 from

Availability, (AV5) were removed to bring the Cronbach's Alpha 0.762 and 0.788 respectively. Cronbach's Alpha for other 4 constructs: Trusts (T), Health Conscious (H), Price (P), and Perceived Knowledge (K), are 0.721, 0.870, 0.740, and 0.742, respectively.

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA)

CFA was used to validate the proposed model that assessed the overall quality of the measurement model. The maximum likelihood method was used to estimate the model and model fit was assessed by using Multiple Fit Indices (Table 4).

Table 4. Measurement model fit indices

Index	Measurement Model Estimate
Chi-square (χ^2)	212.002
df	121
Probability Level	0.000
χ^2/df Ratio	1.887
CFI	0.901
GFI	0.944
AGFI	0.889
RMSEA	0.037

Chi-square value (212.002) for the model was statistically significant (χ^2/df = 1.887) with a root mean of squared error of approximation (RMSEA) = 0.037, goodness-of-fit (GFI) = 0.944, adjusted goodness-of-fit (AGFI)

= 0.889, and comparative fit index (CFI) = 0.901. According to Hair *et al*. (1998), the fit indices indicate a good model fit.

Table 5, shows that all standardized estimates are statistically significant except item K2 (indicator variable). Thus, the selected items effectively reflect each latent variable except the K2 variable. Item K2 indicates the 'knowledge of the ingredients included in local milk powder' and it does not contribute to the underlying construct of perceived knowledge.

Item PA1 shows the highest factor loading (0.974) for the attitude towards the product, indicating that the taste of local milk powder highly reflects the underlying construct of product attitude. Item SN1 shows higher factor loading (0.743) towards the subjective norm which indicates the higher family influence than the professional influence on purchase intention. Item T3 shows the highest factor loading (0.902) towards trust which indicates the safety of the milk production process. Item H3 shows the highest factor loading (0.967) towards health consciousness which indicates that no health risk is associated with consumption of local milk powder. Item P1 indicates the highest factor loading (0.553) towards the purchase intention, indicating that the low price

of local milk powder influences the purchase intention.

The item AV1 shows the highest factor loading (1.032) towards the construct, availability, which is the poor availability of local milk powder as a barrier for purchasing. Figure 4, elaborates the structural relationship between selected constructs and purchase intention of local milk powder. Standardized Regression Weights obtained from Structural Equation Model between latent factors (constructs) and indicators (items), as well as the latent subfactor items and purchase intention are pointed out on arrows. The Figure clearly shows that the comparable importance of each item on the relevant construct and its association with the purchase intention of local milk powder.

Further, significant influences of all the constructs on purchasing intention are interpreted based on the probability values obtained from the output of Structural Equation Model analysis as indicated in Table 6. According to Table 6, trust, availability and health consciousness significantly and positively enhance consumers' local milk powder purchase intention. Under the trust, four items were included which asked about 'safeness of local milk powder process', 'safeness of raw milk transportation process',

Table 5. Confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) output

Construct	Estimate of items	Cronbach's α	Composite Reliability	AVE
Product Attitude		0.691	0.799	
PA1	0.974***			.395
PA2	0.194***			.321
PA3	0.229**			.441
PA5	0.888**			.390
PA6	0.631**			.269
PA7	0.274***			.188
Subjective Norm		0.762	0.774	
SN1	0.743**			.713
SN2	0.531**			.850
Trust		0.721	0.754	
T1	0.833***			.916
T2	0.878***			.366
T3	0.902***			.421
T4	0.681***			.370
Health Consciousness		0.870	0.758	
H1	0.574***			.441
H2	0.743***			.572
H3	0.967***			.668
H4	0.949***			.804
H5	0.266***			.779
Price		0.740	0.770	
P1	0.553***			.824
P2	0.429***			.717
P3	0.421***			.831
Perceived Knowledge		0.742	0.765	
K1	0.806***			.910
K2	0.884			.761
K3	0.799**			.754
K4	1.082***			.774
Availability		0.788	0.778	
AV1	1.032***			.627
AV2	0.362***			.590
AV3	0.385***			.583
AV4	0.782***			.718

*** Significant at P < 0.01, *** Significant at P < 0.001, AVE=Average variance extracted*
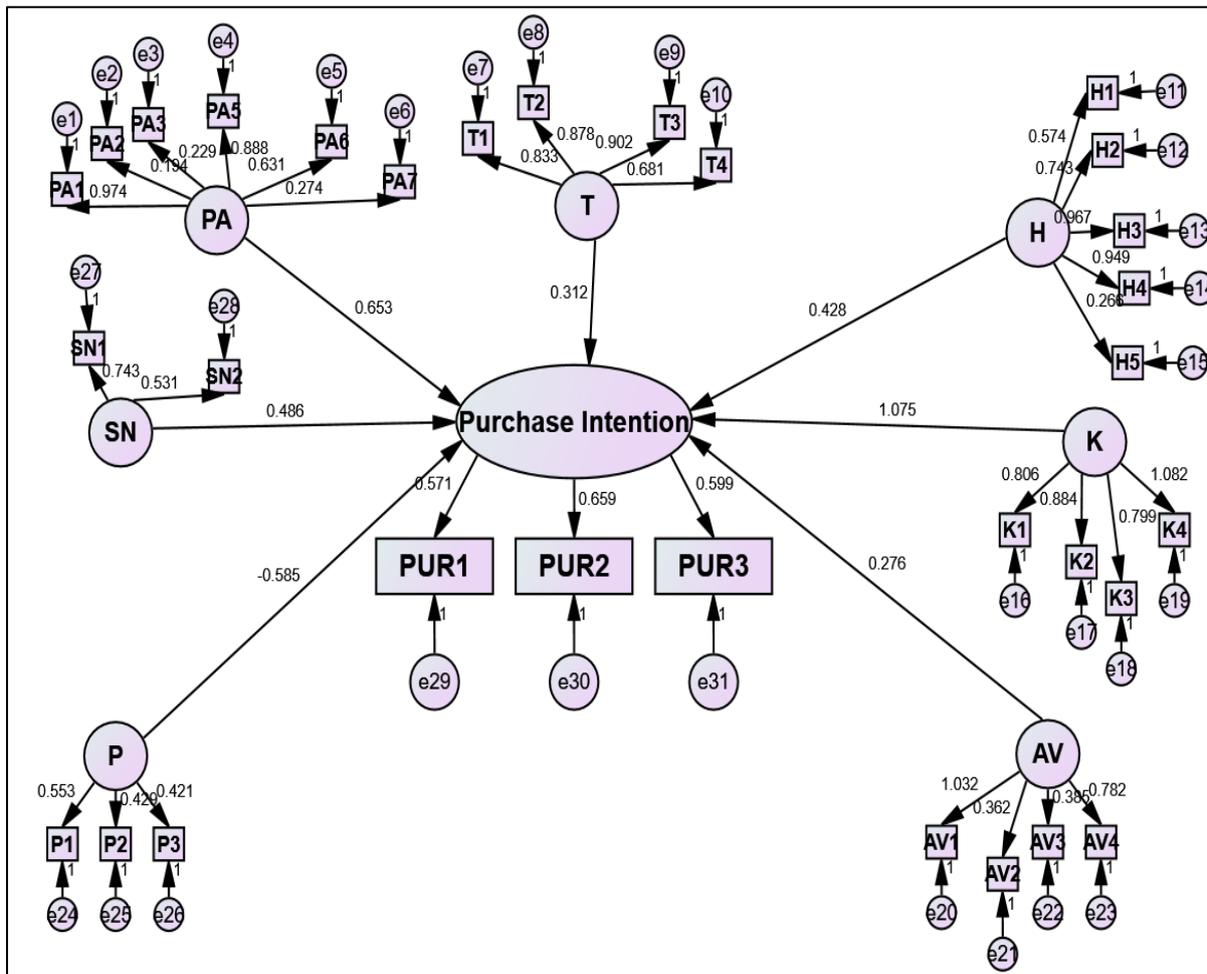
Figure 4. The structural relationship between constructs and the purchase intention

Table 6. Standardized regression weights (SRW) for the structural paths

Hypothesized Relationships between Constructs and		Estimates
Purchase intention	←Attitude towards the product	0.653
Purchase intention	← Trust	0.312***
Purchase intention	←Availability	0.276**
Purchase intention	← Perceived knowledge	1.075
Purchase intention	←Price	-0.585**
Purchase intention	←Subjective norm	0.486
Purchase intention	←Health consciousness	0.428***

*** Significant at $P < 0.001$, ** Significant at $P < 0.05$

'safeness of local milk powder packaging' and 'safeness of raw milk collection process'. The results indicate that trust in local milk powder is one of the constructs that highly influence local milk powder purchase intention (SRW 0.312, $P < 0.001$). Based on that, hypothesis two (H2) constructed in this study can be proved. Therefore, we can propose that the local milk powder market can be improved by incorporating quality developments included under the construct of trust.

The results of the construct availability indicate that the availability of local milk powder highly influences local milk powder purchase intention (SRW 0.276, $P < 0.05$), indicating the possibility of approving hypothesis five (H5).

Health consciousness was measured about the perceptions on harmful chemical residues (dicyandiamide, melamine, harmful animal fats), health problems that can be occurred due to the consumption of local milk powder and healthiness of ingredients in the local milk powder. Health consciousness is also a highly significant factor that influences local milk powder purchase intention (SRW 0.428, $P < 0.001$). Based on that,

hypothesis seven (H7) constructed in this study can be proved. According to these findings, it can be proposed that if local milk powder producers adapt to the healthy practices and standard ingredients for the production process, the local milk powder market can be promoted.

The price of the milk powder significantly and negatively enhances the purchase intention of local powdered milk (SRW -0.585, $P < 0.05$), indicating that hypothesis six (H6) constructed in this study could be proved.

Attitude towards the product, perceived knowledge and subjective norms do not significantly affect local milk powder purchase intention. Hence, H1, H3 and H4 hypotheses are not supported by the results. This revealed that Sri Lankan consumers tend to buy local milk powder based on the trust in the local milk powder, availability of the local milk powder, price of the local milk powder and health consciousness on local milk powder.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal that trust, availability and health consciousness factors (constructs) positively and significantly influence on purchase intention of local milk powder.

Trust was measured by four items which were asked about the 'safeness of local powder milk production process', 'safeness of raw milk transportation process', 'safeness of local milk powder packaging' and 'safeness of raw milk collection process'. Out of these four items, the most contributing items were the 'belief in the safe production process of local milk powder' and 'belief in the safe delivery process of raw milk'.

Availability was measured by five items and out of those items, the most influencing items were 'creating a barrier for purchasing local milk powder due to poor availability of local brands' and 'intention of buying local fresh milk in case unavailability of the local milk powder'.

Health consciousness was measured by using five items and out of them, the most contributing items for health consciousness were 'not creating any health problem by local milk powder' and 'not containing DCD (dicyandiamide) in local milk powder'.

These findings would be useful to provide recommendations at the policy level and industry level. According to this study, consumers purchase local milk powder mainly based on trust, availability and health consciousness. Therefore, the implementation of the safety measures in the raw milk delivery process and milk powder production process is important to enhance local milk powder purchase intention. Further, in order to increase the availability of local milk powder, the government should develop strategies, especially by encouraging farmers and giving infrastructure facilities for delivering process, etc. to meet the demand. Consumers believe that local milk powder does not contain harmful chemicals i.e. dicyandiamide, melamine and animal fat and local milk powder contains only natural ingredients. Therefore, marketing would not be an issue, if production could be increased with the help of government and private sector organizations.

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