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### CONSUMER BELIEF AND ATTITUDE TOWARDS DARK CHOCOLATES AMONG INDIAN CUSTOMERS

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#### ABSTRACT

Dark chocolates are considered a healthier option among the other type of chocolates. However, in India, the bitter sweet taste is not easily accepted. Nevertheless, in the past few years, consumption of dark chocolates has improved due to increased awareness about the health benefits conferred by it. A cross-sectional consumer survey consisting of 186 consumers was conducted online. The study went to analyze the prevailing consumer beliefs and attitude towards dark chocolates. 62 percent agree that dark chocolates are good for health. High percentage of cocoa content of the dark chocolate, followed by the brand of the dark chocolate were considered as an important factors that influences the purchase of dark chocolates among the consumers. Innovative compositional changes in the product were expected by the consumers who were willing to pay a higher price for it.

#### KEYWORDS

Dark chocolate, Cocoa, Sweet-bitter taste, Consumer acceptance and Consumer awareness.

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#### INTRODUCTION

Chocolate industry in India has come a long way since 1990s. From the traditional taste of sweets, so called as “mitai”, there has been a gradual shift from the consumption of the traditional ‘mitai’ to chocolates for both gifting and consumption purposes. In early 1990s, Cadbury’s advertisement campaign refined the concept of chocolates, which shifted its focus from ‘just for kids’ to ‘kid in all of us’<sup>12</sup>. The chocolate market in India is steadily growing with at the rate of 18-20 percent annually and is estimated to be close to rupees 3200 crore.

India is considered to be the fastest growing region in the world chocolate market with an annual growth rate of 9.8 percent<sup>16</sup>. Over the last five years, the annual per capita consumption of chocolate in India has increased three fold. The per capita consumption of chocolates in India is comparatively lower than the countries in the west. It is estimated that the chocolate consumption in India will increase by 3 percent by 2020<sup>17</sup>. The chocolate industry in India has being highly benefitted by the country's economic boom and because of increased growth in consumer spending. Factors that affects the consumer behavioral pattern is mainly due to changing lifestyle, new found mall culture, launch of new products at an affordable price, increased awareness through social media, advertisements and various promotional campaigns. Yet, another important factor that has fueled the growth of this industry is the emerging trend of gifting chocolates for various occasion<sup>6</sup>.

Another fact to be noticed is that 70 percent of the consumption is limited to urban consumers<sup>7</sup>. Most of the multinationals active in India are also actively marketing to rural India, where penetration is lower than the average for the country. The consumption is mainly restricted to milk chocolate than any other type of chocolates in the recent past. But with increased level of health consciousness and awareness among people, there has been a slow increase in the demand for dark chocolate. Among the major three types of chocolates, that is, milk, white and dark chocolate; dark chocolate is considered to be healthier than the other two. Dark chocolate provides some specific health benefits like, increase in high density lipoprotein level; decrease in the oxidative reaction of low density lipoprotein; improve the elasticity of the blood flow and improve in insulin resistance<sup>8</sup>. The bittersweet taste of dark chocolate is mainly due to its flavonoid content, which aids in reducing the risk of cardiovascular diseases, cancer, stroke and even premature aging<sup>4</sup>. There are several bioactive compounds present in the chocolate that promote alertness, lessen the anxiety, reduces the pain sensitivity and promote relaxation<sup>8,11</sup>. A daily dose of 30 calories has been found to be effective in lowering the blood pressure

without any weight gain or any other adverse effect<sup>18</sup>. The objective of the study was to identify, the general perception about dark chocolates among Indian customers and the level of awareness about the various health benefits of dark chocolate.

## MATERIAL AND METHODS

An online questionnaire survey on the dark chocolate consumption was created using Google Forms. The data for the main study was collected in the context of a consumer survey. Respondents of the study represented different cohorts of population. The questionnaire contained of 21 questions consisting of both multiple choice questions and open ended questions. The questions dealt on the consumer's attitude, their opinions about dark chocolate and their knowledge about the various health benefits of consuming a dark chocolate.

The data thus collected was then studied using various statistical analysis using MS-Excel 2016. Data was analyzed using ANOVA at  $p < 0.05$ . Correlation of various parameters were also done to check any relationship between any two factors.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A total of 186 responses were received, out of the 200 mails sent, which showed the rate of 92.5% of participation. Out of the 185 respondents, 55.7% were females and 44.3% males. Major respondents were under the age of 10-25 (55.1%), followed by 25-40 (39.5%), 40-55 (3.25%) and above 55 (2.15%). Consumption pattern among the gender group are tabulated in Table No.1.

Results show that ladies purchase dark chocolate than men (Figure No.1). Statistical significant differences ( $p < 0.05$ ) was found in consumption of dark chocolates among the gender groups. It is not only in India, that such difference arises. In a study conducted in U.S and Spain showed that women were 22 times more likely to choose chocolate than men<sup>1</sup>.

Purchase need not be intended for own consumption. Gifting of chocolates has become a custom in the modern society. Looking into the reason for purchasing, people do purchase dark chocolate for their own consumption however, over the decade

there is an increasing trend of chocolate gifting for various festive seasons. The results reveals (Table No.2) that gifting trend is seen more in males than females. Never the less, there are people (53% females and 49% males) who purchase chocolates for both the reasons, that is, for gifting and own consumption.

However, while purchasing, some of the respondents agreed that they are health conscious. The data results however showed that less number of people are conscious when they procure the chocolates. As per the analysis it was known that, when it comes to own consumption, males are more conscious while purchasing than females. The health conscious nature of the customers shows the level of awareness among the people, their inclination towards a particular product and their presence of mind during purchasing. Moreover, health consciousness is a determinant for a healthy lifestyle<sup>5</sup>.

Chocolate is not a natural product and hence its appeal would depend on the individual constituents present in it, along the different combinations chosen for the particular product type. Various conflicts have arisen in the modern society, about the fact that humans are less driven to eat by internal energy deficits and more by anticipatory pleasure of eating. It provides an instant enjoyment and pleasure, and hence it is considered one of the favorite foods that is consumed during comfort eating<sup>19</sup>. Among the responses, higher percentage of them (33%) (Figure No.2) wish to consume chocolates when they are happy followed by the temptation to consume a chocolate when they see someone else consuming it. The psychology of chocolate consumption depends on both internal (moods, attitude) and external (relationships, socioeconomic status)<sup>19</sup>. Chocolate contains many active biological compounds. The amount of caffeine in chocolate is much smaller than the amount that is present in the coffee and tea. This stimulant (caffeine) gives one a boost. Many people crave for dark chocolate for emotional reason<sup>1</sup>. Usually one craves for chocolates and its carbohydrates load in order to increase the serotonin level and hence, improve one's mood<sup>14</sup>. Chocolate influence the body's neurotransmitters, which soothe the brain and helps one feel calm and

relaxed. The fat in the chocolate causes the release of endorphins. This brain chemical help in the uplifting your spirit. Both sugar and fat can improve the mood as they can raise the level of both serotonin and endorphin. It has been speculated that chocolate craving may occur in certain people due to stress-induced magnesium deficiency<sup>1</sup>.

Brand specificity of the customers determines their trust in the quality of the product. Few brands offer products at a premium cost. From the Indian perspective, the brand which people follow, gives a glimpse of their social status. Over the decades, there has been a shift of consumption from necessities to luxury consumption<sup>13</sup>. Indian consumers recognise that a brand adds up the value of a product<sup>15</sup>. Premium, handsome chocolates are being seen as moment of daily, self-indulgent luxury, because consumers want glamour in their everyday lives<sup>3</sup>. Even as consumers become more cost conscious, when it comes to treating themselves, chocolates are always regarded as recession proof. From the responses received, people are well aware of the various brands that are available in the market along with the flavors offered.

With huge variety of flavors available in the market, dark chocolates with fruits and nuts combination is majorly preferred (29%). This is followed by dark chocolate flavored with nuts, plain, roasted almonds, caramel, mint, fruits and rice crunches (Figure No.5). Considering the major factors which influences the purchasing of dark chocolates it was found as per the responses, that people consider the percent cocoa content in a dark chocolate as the major factor which influences the buying of dark chocolates than the brand of the dark chocolate.

Cocoa percentage of a dark chocolate is the most critical important which distinguishes it from the others. Higher percent of cocoa in dark chocolate renders the product quite bitter in taste. Cocoa percentage is the most important attribute that is valued by the consumers<sup>2</sup>, and 70 percent of cocoa has the most preference among customers. Brand of the dark chocolate plays a crucial role as brand imprints the preception about the product to the people. When it comes to consumer's choice, the brand matters. People may prefer organic product

because these products are eco-friendly and thus limit the negative impact on environment.

Consumer satisfaction of a product is essential for marketing purposes. It is a critical parameter for the success of the product. 69 percent of the respondents agreed that they are satisfied with the products available in the market while, 31 percent of respondents are not.

Customized products have now become a trend over the past few years, with an increased percent of people venturing into entrepreneurial business. A customized product provides a customer the product specifically designed for their interest. Customized goods are affordable, unique as it stands out from the crowd and most importantly, people nowadays love to flaunt about unique things they own<sup>20</sup>. This new trend not only boosts up the business. This allows the customers to design their product that caters to their palate. 47 percent of the respondents would like to have a dark chocolate that is low in fat and sugar; and no dairy. While, 35 percent of them like to have dark chocolate with low fat, 14 percent would like to have low sugar dark chocolate and only 4 percent of them would like to have pure dark chocolate without any milk solid added to it (Figure No.8).

Indian consumers are price sensitive<sup>10</sup>. The results from the survey show that 39 percent of respondents were willing to pay a higher amount for a formulated healthy chocolate. 35 percent of them weren't sure about their decision, while 26 percent of them were not ready to pay for it (Figure No.9). When a new product is launched in the market, it is essential that the customer is willing to buy the product in spite of the higher cost. According to the survey, 41 percent of people are willing to pay a higher price for a formulated health chocolate. In developing countries, consumer behavior is shaped both by tradition and modernity. Consumers might still be in pursuit of the best value, even if their income increases. However, price might act as a barrier for consumption of ethically produced goods in low-income countries like India<sup>9</sup>. This can be justified as 27 percent of people are not ready to accept any rise in the price of a commodity while, 32 percent aren't sure about their decision. However, at

times, products can be rejected by the consumer's dislike of bitter taste due to high cocoa content as stated by one of the participants. Human beings are born with innate attitudes towards the sweet taste. So, this shows that, for any product to be accepted by the consumers, the organoleptic property should be met first.

Consumer awareness about the product is a mark of its popularity. Dark chocolates confer numerous health benefits. Generally, it is known that dark chocolates are healthiest among the other types of chocolates that is, milk chocolate and dark chocolate. However, there are specific health benefits of consuming dark chocolate, which are scientifically proven facts that are not known to people. Figure No.10 summarizes the awareness level among the respondents.

However, while analysing the data obtained from respondents about their level of awareness about the various health benefits conferred by dark chocolates showed that the level of consumer awareness is quite less ( $p < 0.05$ ).

Nevertheless, few of the parameters were correlated to check any relationship existing between the two. Price sensitivity and knowledge that dark chocolates are good for health showed a positive correlation of 0.955. Thus, it can be inferred that though the consumers may accept the fact that the product made is really good for them, but at the same time price of the commodity should be checked. The product should show the promised result for which they have paid a higher price.

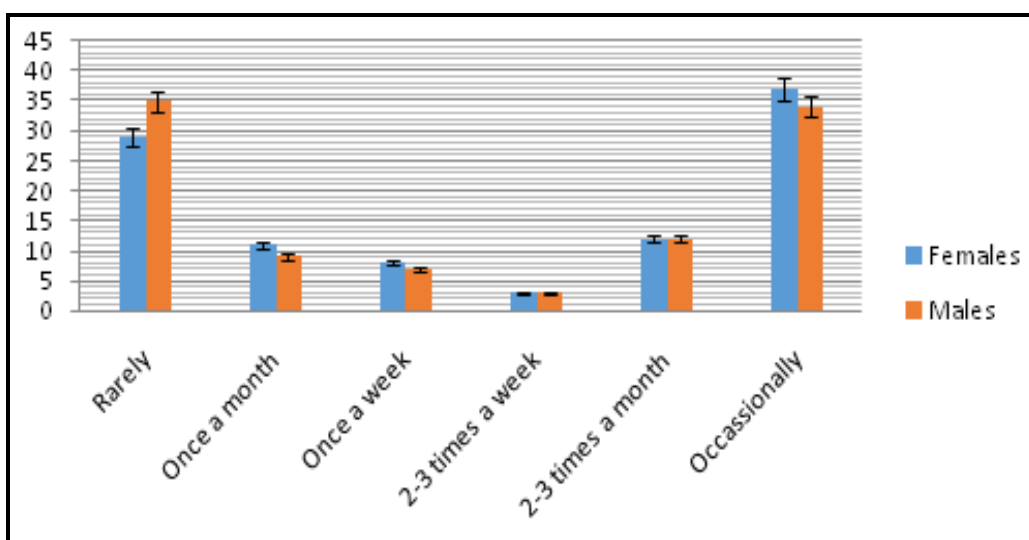
Correlating market satisfaction and price, the results so obtained showed a positive correlation of 0.73, which shows that for any customer to be satisfied with the product, the price should be moderate.

**Table No.1: Consumption frequency of Dark Chocolates**

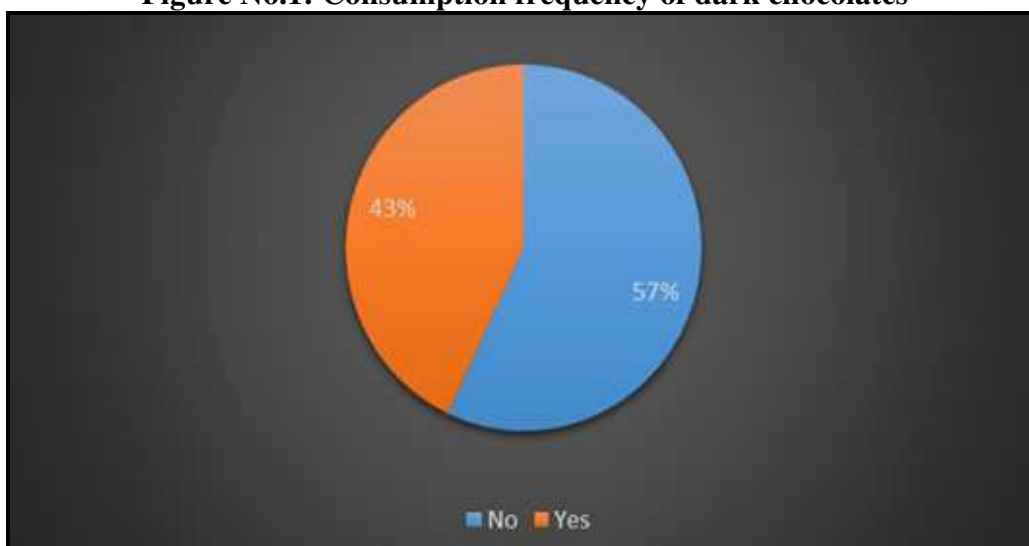
S.No	Frequency	Females (%)	Males (%)
1	Rarely	29	35
2	Once a month	11	9
3	Once a week	8	7
4	2-3 times a week	3	3
5	2-3 times a month	12	12
6	Occasionally	37	34

**Table No.2: Purchase reason**

S.No	Reason for Purchase	Females (%)	Males (%)
1	Gifting	18	24
2	Own Consumption	29	27
3	Both the above reason	53	49



**Figure No.1: Consumption frequency of dark chocolates**



**Figure No.2: Health conscious during purchase**

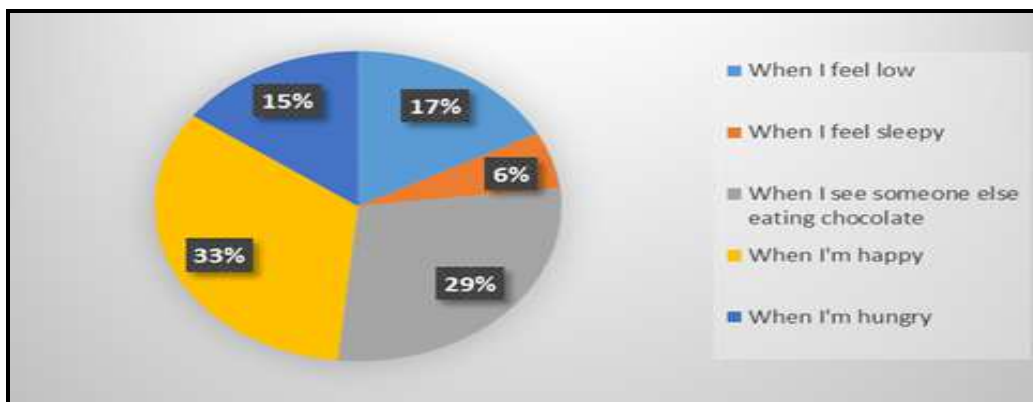


Figure No.3: Mood to eat a dark chocolate

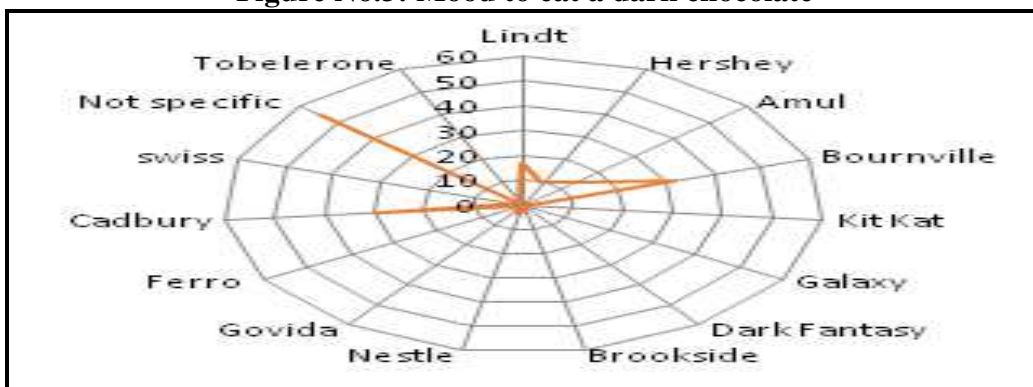


Figure No.4: Brand preference among the respondents

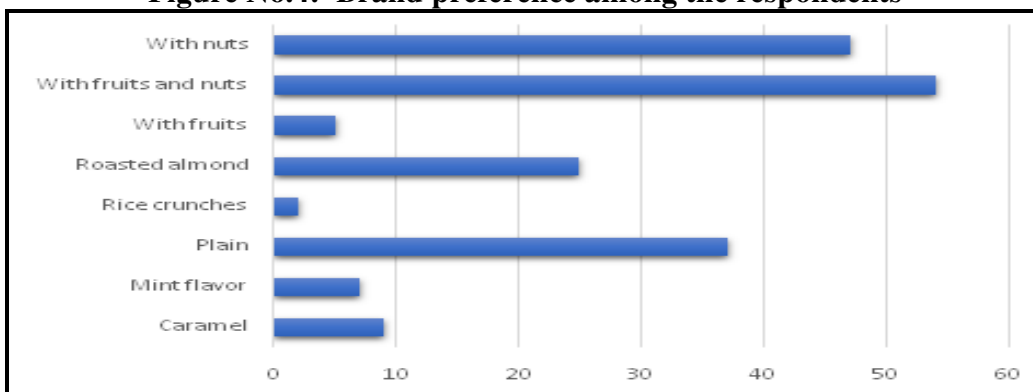


Figure No.5: Flavor preference of the respondents

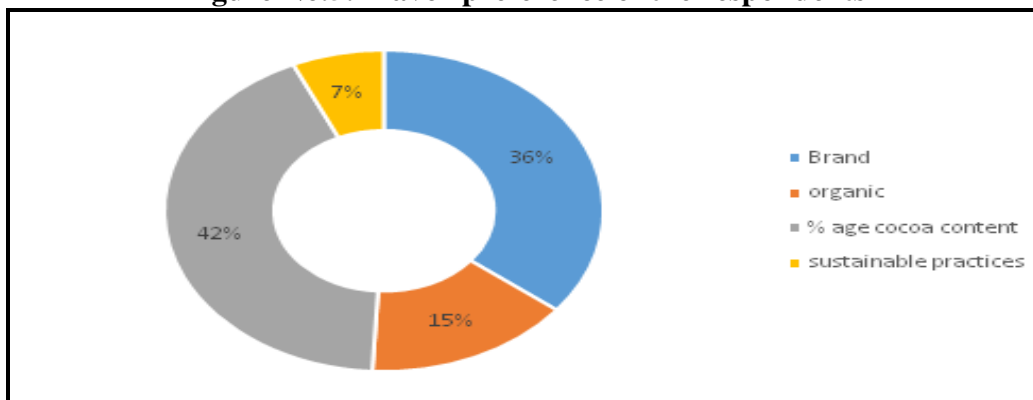
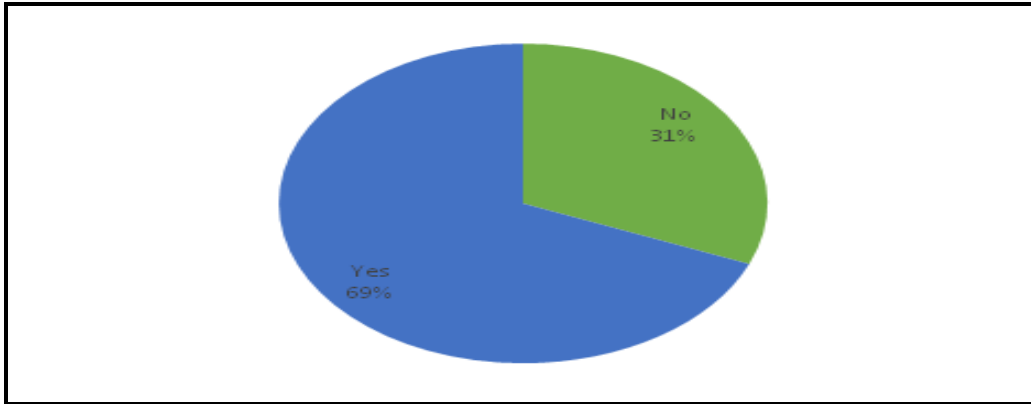
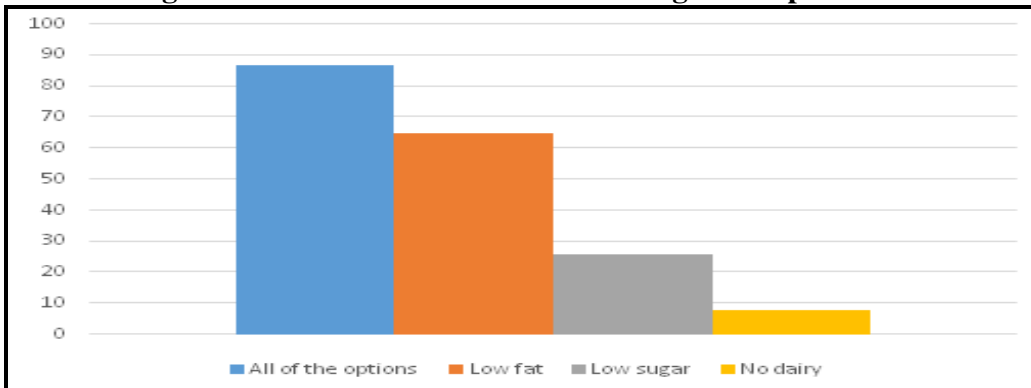


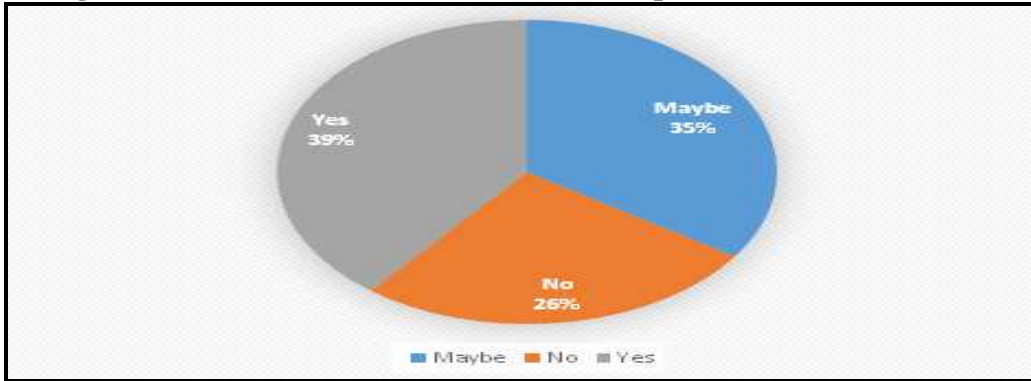
Figure No.6: Factor consideration during purchase of dark chocolate



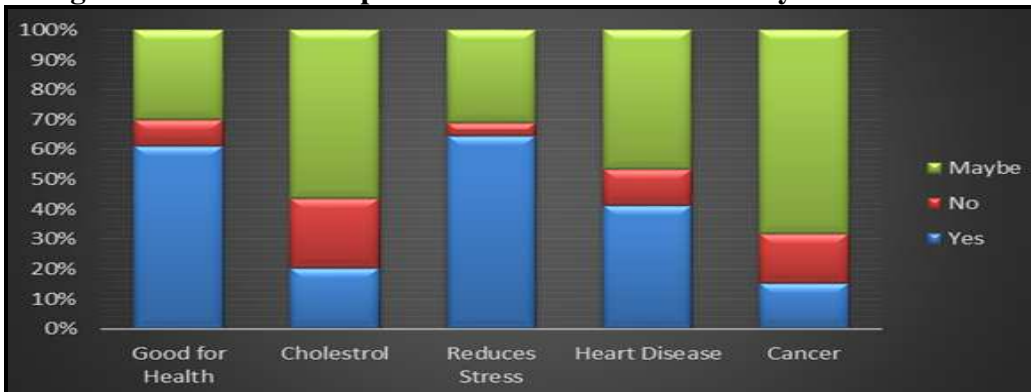
**Figure No.7: Market satisfaction among the respondents**



**Figure No.8: Variation in dark chocolates expected in dark chocolates**



**Figure No.9: Price acceptance for a formulated healthy dark chocolate**



**Figure No.10: Level of awareness among respondents**

## CONCLUSION

The study showed that the consumer viewpoint about dark chocolate was good as they accept the product to be good for health. They look for the cocoa percentage present in the dark chocolate when they purchase one from the market. However, they aren't much specific about the brand they choose. Bournville is the most preferred one among the other brands available in the market. People need customized goods and hence they would like to have a dark chocolate which is low in fat, sugar and no dairy. This indicates high level of acceptance of pure dark chocolate, even though it is bitter in taste. On the other hand, it was discovered that the level of consumer awareness about the various health benefits of dark chocolate was quite less ( $p < 0.05$ ). This shows the need for spreading more awareness about benefits of consumption of dark chocolate, as they are scientifically proven facts.

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST

We declare that we have no conflict of interest.

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