A STUDY ON PERCEIVED SEVERITY, BENEFITS AND BARRIERS, SOCIAL IDENTITY AND SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE FOOD CONSUMPTION OF CONSUMERS

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ABSTRACT

Consumers are the focal point in socially responsible or sustainable consumption of food products and it is highly significant in economic, social and environmental perspectives of consumers and nowadays they are highly concentrating on consumption of quality and environmentally sustainable food products. The analysis reveals that perceived benefits and perceived severity are positively and significantly influencing socially responsible food consumption, while, perceived barriers is negatively and significantly influencing socially responsible food consumption of consumers. Perceived benefits have significant, positive and direct influence on social identity of consumers, while, perceived barriers and perceived severity have negative, significant and direct influence on social identity of consumers, while, social identity has significant, positive and direct influence on socially responsible food consumption of consumers. Thus, the findings proved 6 hypotheses of this study.

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Keywords: *Perceived Barriers, Perceived Benefits, Perceived Severity, Social Identity, Socially Responsible Consumption.*

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Introduction

In the past few decades, strategies, programmes and initiatives are taken place for sustainable production and consumption amongst consumers in almost all nations across the world. The circular economy is significantly contributing to the existing transition in ecology, giving economic benefits and conserving natural and environmental resources for forthcoming generations and among those measures, socially responsible or sustainable food consumption is major one. The food industry is generating and releasing higher quantum of carbon emission that creates considerable damage to environment and exhaustion of scarce natural and environmental resources (Abbate et al. 2023). Hence, various subject matter specialists strongly view that the prevailing food industry is not sustainable (Campbell et al., 2017), for which restructure of creation value is essential for companies for decreasing the utilization of scarce natural resources and pollution of environment and wastage of food is also main concern at global level (Rasool et al. 2021). Hence, security for food is the one among the important issues in all countries (Lombardi et al. 2019) and it is an integral component of any nations (CE; Fassio and Tecco, 2019).

Socially responsible consumption among consumers is specifically featured by higher degree of consideration on welfare of society and preservation of environment along with meeting of their personal and family requirements and it is the judicious consumption activity with the goal of development in a sustainable manner and it is also addressing problems pertaining to society and environment and it is largely relying on preferences and situational and social aspects of consumers. Consumers are the focal point in socially responsible or sustainable consumption of food products (Sun et al. 2021; Prothero et al. 2011) and it is highly significant in economic, social and environmental perspectives of consumers and nowadays they are highly concentrating on consumption of quality and environmentally sustainable food products. The process of production, transportation, marketing and consumption of food products are not

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ignoring practices pertaining to sustainability in the existing situation and insights of consumers on sustainable conception is also playing an important role in the success of operations of companies (Peano et al. 2019).

Socially responsible consumption is giving more attention on personal values and mind sets of consumers in their buying decision and they are also considering other factors in buying of products and it is also referring to the consumers who buy products that create positive impact on their health, others and environment and they are having more chances to state their choices among other products. Besides, responsible consumption with respect to food products is also related to consuming health and quality food items to prevent health problems of them and preserving environmental resources for future. In recent times, consumers are concerning more on their health and choose food products (Brugarolas et al. 2020) which are giving a range of benefits to them, environment and companies and it is leading to improvement in socially responsible consumption amongst consumers with regarding to food products.

Besides, the present day consumers including youngsters demand better environment and sustainable food products for their personal and family consumption (Pham et al. 2019; Peñalosa and López, 2016). Conversely, because of health emergencies, marketing is also experiencing different limitations because of social and cultural issues and proximity to local shops (Sheth, 2020) and consumers are buying food products without negotiating their healthiness (Cavallo et al. 2020) and promotion of place of sale is one among the serious problems in sustainable or responsible food consumption among consumers (Oliveira et al. 2021). Thus, online platforms provide an opportunity for promoting and selling of food products and are significantly and positively influencing socially responsible food consumption amidst consumers (Cachero-Martínez, 2020). In addition, attitude, knowledge, social pressure, autonomy and status are also affecting socially responsible consumption of food items amongst consumers (Latip et al. 2020). Besides, there is no study is carried out relating to structural relation amidst perceived severity, benefits and barriers, social identity and socially responsible food consumption of consumers particularly in Tamil Nadu state in India. Hence, this research is done in Tamil Nadu state of India among consumers to bridge a research gap.

Theoretical Background

- ### Socially Responsible Food Consumption and Perceived Severity

Consumers are in general responding to various risks on the basis of their perception on them because their knowledge on different risks are not objective and it is varying among them (Lejano and Stokols, 2021; Paek and Hove, 2017). Each and every consumer perceives different risks in different ways and it is a probable subjective loss that affect his or her health (Chen and Wang, 2022; Paek and Hove, 2017). When risk is not known, consumers view that it is newer and not experienced one particularly in the health crisis situation (Slovic et al. 1984). Risk perceived by consumers is affecting buying of food products through offline or online (Leung and Cai, 2021) and it is also influencing consumption of food items (Chen and Wang, 2022). Socially responsible consumption of food products guides consumers properly for buying and consuming quality food products that improve their quality of life and also conserve their environment.

Perceived severity is insight of individual persons on gravity of danger and to what extent it will affect them (Milne et al. 2000) and it is influencing their intend towards vaccination (Baghiani-Moghadam et al. 2015) in the milieu of health behaviour of individual consumers (Myers and Goodwin, 2011). Perceived severity is positively influencing buying and consumption of organic or environment friendly food products and health condition of consumers (Wang et al. 2021).Hence, perceived severity is positively influencing socially responsible food consumption of consumers (Leyva-Hernández et al. 2023; Guidry et al. 2021).

- ### Socially Responsible Food Consumption and Perceived Benefits

The benefits derived from food products are affecting socially responsible consumption of consumers (Ellen, 1994; Ellen et al., 1991). The perceived benefits are the individual evaluation which they make about exclusive personal disadvantages and advantages whey they are acting as responsible to society (Lin and Hsu, 2015). The behaviour of consumers towards responsible to society is demonstrated by definite beliefs on perceived benefits (Yarimoglu and Binboga, 2019; Lin and Niu, 2018; Lin and Hsu, 2015; Zhao et al. 2014). When consumers perceive that there are benefits derived from food products, they are highly moving towards socially responsible food consumption and they are positively influencing socially responsible food consumption of consumers (Leyva-Hernández et al. 2023; Testa et al. 2019; Samoggia and Riedel, 2019; Pawaskar et al. 2018).

- **Socially Responsible Food Consumption and Perceived Barriers**

When consumers are health conscious, they are facing barriers and benefits in consumption of food items. The barriers are prices of food items, lack of time for traveling to certain places and to buy food products that are sustainable in nature. Those sustainable food products are brining changes and modifying consumption of habits towards socially responsible citizens. Besides, inadequate information, non availability of trustworthy information on food products, absence of belief on policies of firms relating to social responsibility, obsolescence of food products and lack of legislation and protection of consumers and eating habits and difficulty in changing consumption pattern (Leng et al. 2017) are other barriers faced by consumers in socially responsible food consumption. (Lima et al. 2021). Therefore, perceived barriers are negatively influencing socially responsible food consumption among consumers (Leyva-Hernández et al. 2023; Cheah et al. 2020).

- **External Stimuli and Social Identity**

The health belief model demonstrates that preventive health behaviour of consumers is aimed to attain their health goal by means of self motivation (Maiman and Becker, 1974) and it also analyzes the health behaviour of consumers in uncertainty situations (Becker et al. 1974). Consumers are exhibiting preventive health behaviour based on their views on vulnerability of their health condition. The evaluation of possibility and efficiency of decreasing their ill effects by adopting health behaviour by consumers is superior to expenses and barriers. Self motivation of consumers and suggestions will give benefits to them for reducing their ill effects of health issues and improving their health status (Rosenstock et al. 1988). Further, perceived barriers, benefits and severity are significantly predicting health behaviour (Myers and Goodwin, 2011) and or social identity (Guidry et al. 2021) of consumers and those aspects pertaining to knowledge and features of consumers are affecting their convictions and motivate their health behaviour (Mercadante and Law, 2021). Additionally, perceived severity, benefits, and barriers are also influencing social identity of consumers (Leyva-Hernández et al. 2023; Wang et al. 2021).

- **Social Identity as a Mediator**

As per stimulus organism response model, the stimulus is leading to responsible behaviour (Mehrabian and Russell, 1974). Identity is significantly predicting socially responsible consumption of consumers (Johnson and Chattaraman, 2021) and it is acting as mediator among socially responsible consumption of consumers and stimuli comes from external sources (Mutum et al. 2021). Social identity of consumers is an ethical values of consumers that is predicting their readiness to buy and consume sustainable or organic food products (Talwar et al. 2021) and those external stimuli are influencing socially responsible food consumption along with social identity as mediator (Liu et al. 2021). Perceived severity is influencing socially responsible food consumption with mediating effect of their social identity (Leyva-Hernández et al. 2023; Wang et al. 2021).

To attain sustainable and health life, consumers give due importance to benefits and barriers relating to their buying and consumption of food products as they assess disadvantages and advantages in consuming those food products. The economic and personal barriers as perceived barriers are significantly influencing socially responsible food consumption of consumers with mediating effect of their social identity (Leyva-Hernández et al. 2023; Wang et al. 2021; Mutum et al. 2021; Liu et al. 2021; Leng et al. 2017). Besides, benefits are significantly influencing socially responsible food consumption among consumers and social identity is acting as mediator (Leyva-Hernández et al. 2023; Mutum et al. 2021; Liu et al. 2021; Wang et al. 2021; Samoggia and Riedel, 2019).

Hypotheses of the Study

With the abovementioned theoretical information, the hypotheses are constructed and administrated for testing and they are:

H₁: Perceived severity positively influence socially responsible food consumption of consumers.

H₂: Perceived benefits positively influence socially responsible food consumption of consumers.

H₃: Perceived barriers positively influence socially responsible food consumption of consumers.

H₄: Perceived severity is positively influencing social identity of consumers.

H₅: Perceived benefits are positively influencing social identity of consumers.

H₆: Perceived barriers are positively influencing social identity of consumers.

H₇: Social identity moderates relation amongst perceived severity and socially responsible food consumption of consumers.

H₈: Social identity moderates relation amongst perceived benefits and socially responsible food consumption of consumers.

H₉: Social identity moderates relation amongst perceived barriers and socially responsible food consumption of consumers.

Methodology

Tamil Nadu state in India had chosen for conducting the present study. Random sampling technique had used for selection of consumers. The structured questionnaire had sent to 900 consumers across different places in Tamil Nadu state and after careful securitization of questionnaire, 325 usable questionnaires were considered and used in the analysis. Mean, SD, correlation and regression analysis and Structural Equation Model had used to analyze the data gathered from consumers.

Measurement of Scale

The scale pertaining to perceived severity, perceived benefits and socially responsible food consumption used by Myers and Goodwin (2011), perceived barriers used by Nguyen et al. (2016) and social identity used by Johnson and Chattaraman (2021) had adopted and used for this study and this research employed a five-point Likert scale (totally agree to totally disagree) to assess the variables in constructs. The research model adopted for this study is displayed in Figure - 1.

Figure 1: Research Model for this Study
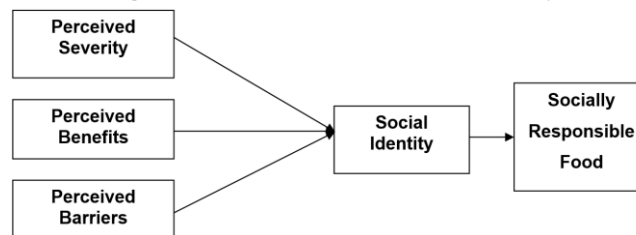
Results

- **Profile of Consumers**

Amidst 325 consumers, 53.23% of them are males, while, 46.77% of them are females, 36.00% of them are in 36-45 years of age, while, 9.23% of them are in below 25 years of age, 38.77% of them are holding higher secondary, while, 10.15% of them are holding post graduation, 35.38% of them are having income of Rs.30,001- Rs.40,000, while, 16.31% of them are having income of more than Rs.50,000 per month and 88.62% of them are married, while, 11.38% of them are unmarried (Table 1).

Table 1: Profile of Consumers

Profile	Frequency	%
Gender		
Male	173	53.23
Female	152	46.77
Age (Years)		
Below 25	30	9.23
26-35	111	34.15
36-45	117	36.00
Above 45	67	20.62
Education		
Secondary	79	24.31
Higher Secondary	126	38.77
Under Graduation	87	26.77
Post Graduation	33	10.15
Income Per Month		
Less than Rs.30,000	65	20.00
Rs.30,001- Rs.40,000	115	35.38
Rs.40,001- Rs.50,000	92	28.31
More than Rs.50,000	53	16.31
Marital Status		
Married	288	88.62
Unmarried	37	11.38

- **Descriptive Statistics of Constructs**

There exists high and positive correlation (r = 0.59) amidst perceived benefits and responsible food consumption among consumers (Table 2). The correlation coefficients are less than 0.70 for all constructs and it is revealing that multicollinearity is absent among the constructs.

Table 2: Mean, SD and Coefficients of Correlation

Constructs	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
Perceived Severity	3.64	0.61	1				
Perceived Benefits	3.95	0.38	0.46**	1			
Perceived Barriers	3.82	0.53	0.41**	-0.42**	1		
Social Identity	3.86	0.47	0.43**	0.48**	0.39**	1	
Responsible Food Consumption	3.98	0.36	0.53**	0.59**	-0.51**	0.56**	1

** Significant in 1`% level

- **Reliability and Validity**

The reliability and validity for constructs are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Reliability and Validity

Constructs	CR	AVE	DV
Perceived Severity	0.73	0.75	0.71
Perceived Benefits	0.76	0.78	0.72
Perceived Barriers	0.72	0.73	0.67
Social Identity	0.74	0.71	0.69
Responsible Food Consumption	0.78	0.79	0.76

From the above table, it is apparent that the Composite Reliability (CR) values for the constructs are above 0.70. The Average Variance Extracted (AVE) values are bigger than 0.50 and the Discriminant Validity (DV) values are greater than 0.60 and they are revealing that the constructs included in this study demonstrate an excellent convergent validity.

- Influence of perceived severity, perceived benefits and perceived barriers on socially responsible food consumption of consumers

Regression analysis is employed to study influence of perceived severity, perceived benefits and perceived barriers on socially responsible food consumption of consumers and the outcomes are shown in Table 4. In this model, perceived severity, perceived benefits and perceived barriers are included as independent variables and socially responsible food consumption of consumers is included as dependent variable because these independent variables have significant influence on socially responsible food consumption of consumers.

Table 4: Outcomes of Regression Analysis

Particulars	Regression Co-efficient (Unstandardized)
Intercept	19.339**
Perceived Severity	.624**
Perceived Benefits	.912**
Perceived Barriers	-.431**
R Squared	0.41
Adjusted R Squared	0.39
F-Value (ANOVA Test)	9.193**

** Significant in 1 level

The regression coefficients of perceived severity (β = 0.624), perceived benefits (β = 0.912) and perceived barriers (β = -0.431) are significant in 1% level and this model is significant in 1% level (R Squared = 0.41; Adjusted R Squared = 0.39; F = 9.193) and it explains that 39.00% of variation in socially responsible food consumption of consumers. It is inferred that perceived benefits and perceived severity are significantly and positively influencing socially responsible food consumption, while, perceived barriers is negatively and significantly influencing socially responsible food consumption of consumers in 1% level. Keeping other variables constant, 1% increase in perceived benefits, the socially responsible food consumption of consumers will be increased by 0.91% and 1% increase in perceived severity, the socially responsible food consumption of consumers will be increased by 0.62% and 1% increase in perceived barriers, the socially responsible food consumption of consumers will be decreased by 0.43%.

- **Structural relation amidst perceived severity, benefits and barriers, social identity and socially responsible food consumption of consumers**

The Structural Equation Model (SEM) is built to structural relation amidst perceived severity, benefits and barriers, social identity and socially responsible food consumption of consumers and the outcome is shown in Table 5.

Table 5: Structural Path Coefficients- Standardized

Path	Coefficients (Standardized)	CR	P-Value
SID ← PBA	-.582	14.156	***
SID ← PSE	-.217	5.159	***
SID ← PBE	.330	7.391	***
SRFC ← SID	.769	17.901	***

The SEM shows that the standardized coefficient for Social Identity (SID) against Perceived Barriers (PBA) is -0.582, the standardized coefficient for Social Identity (SID) against Perceived Severity (PSE) is -0.217 and the standardized coefficient for Social Identity (SID) against Perceived Benefits (PBE) is 0.330 and these are significant I % level. Thus, perceived benefits have significant, positive and direct influence on social identity of consumers, while, perceived barriers and perceived severity have significant, negative and direct influence on social identity of consumers in 1% level

Besides, the standardized coefficient for Socially Responsible Food Consumption (SRFC) against Social Identity (SID) is 0.769 which is significant in 1% level. Hence, social identity has positive, direct and significant influence on socially responsible food consumption of consumers in 1% level. The Chi-square value is 4.328 and it is not significant explicating that the model is in good fit. GFI is 0.98 and CFI is 0.96 and these measures are explaining that the model is in good fit. RMR is 0.09 and RMSEA is 0.04 and these values are illustrating the model is in good fit. The path diagram for socially responsible food consumption of consumers is shown in Figure-2.

Figure 2: Path Diagram for Socially Responsible Food Consumption of Consumers
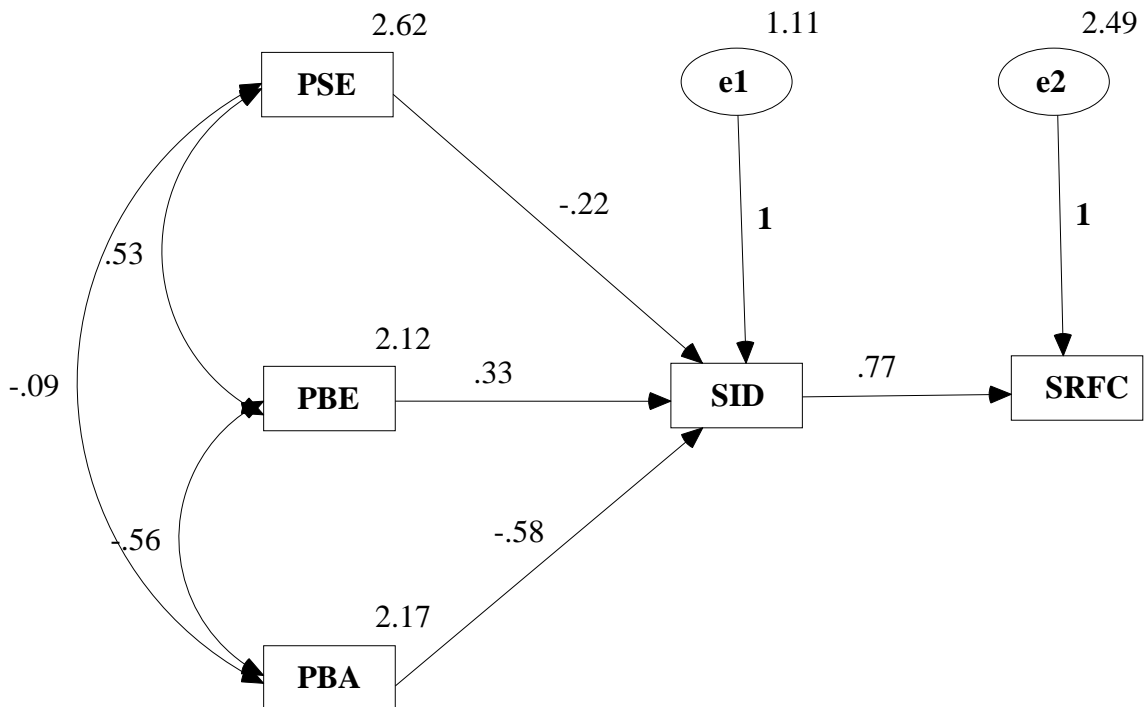
Conclusions and Discussion

The finding of this study show that perceived benefits are significantly and positively influencing socially responsible food consumption of consumers and this finding is confirmed by the studies of Leyva-Hernández et al. (2023), Testa et al. (2019), Samoggia and Riedel (2019) and Pawaskar et al.

(2018). Further, perceived severity is significantly and positively influencing socially responsible food consumption among consumers and this outcome is supported by the findings of Leyva-Hernández et al. (2023), Guidry et al. (2021) and Wang et al. (2021). Meanwhile, perceived barriers are negatively and significantly influencing socially responsible food consumption of consumers and this finding is confirmed by research studied carried out by Leyva-Hernández et al. (2023) and Cheah et al. (2020). Furthermore, perceived benefits have significant, positive and direct influence on social identity of consumers, while, perceived barriers and perceived severity have significant, negative and direct influence on social identity of consumers, while, social identity has positive, direct and significant influence on socially responsible food consumption of consumers and this outcome is supported by the findings of Leyva-Hernández et al. (2023), Mutum et al. (2021), Liu et al. (2021), Wang et al. (2021), Samoggia and Riedel, (2019) and Leng et al. (2017).

Limitation and Agenda for Future Research

The present study is focusing mainly on structural relation amidst perceived severity, benefits and barriers, social identity and socially responsible food consumption of consumers in Tamil Nadu. The present study is limited to consumers in Tamil Nadu and the sample size is also limited to 325 only. The future research may be taken as environmental knowledge as a mediator amidst external stimuli and socially responsible food consumption amongst consumers in both urban and rural areas separately in Tamil Nadu and also in other regions of India and the nation as a whole.

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