

FACTORS INFLUENCING BRAND PREFERENCE OF BRANDED RICE AMONG CONSUMERS IN TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT

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Abstract

Branding has become an essential strategy even for staple food products such as rice. With increasing consumer awareness regarding quality, hygiene, and health, branded rice has gained significant acceptance among households. The present study aims to identify the key factors influencing brand preference of branded rice among consumers in Tirunelveli District. Primary data were collected from 359 respondents using a structured questionnaire. Reliability analysis, Kaiser–Meyer–Olkin (KMO) measure, Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity, and Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) were employed using SPSS to extract the major influencing factors. The study identified quality, brand image, price value, packaging, availability, promotion, and health consciousness as the major determinants of brand preference. The findings provide useful insights for rice marketers and policymakers to improve branding strategies and consumer satisfaction.

Keywords: Brand Preference, Branded Rice, Consumer Behaviour, Factor Analysis, Tirunelveli District

INTRODUCTION

Rice is the staple food for the majority of households in Tamil Nadu and plays a vital role in the daily consumption pattern of consumers. Traditionally, consumers preferred unbranded rice purchased from local mills and retailers. However, with changes in lifestyle, rising income levels, urbanization, and growing awareness about food safety and quality, branded rice has gained popularity in recent years.

Brand preference refers to the degree to which consumers favor one brand over others based on perceived quality, trust, value, and satisfaction. In the case of rice, factors such as grain quality, aroma, packaging, price, availability, and health considerations significantly influence consumer choice. Tirunelveli District, with its mix of urban and rural consumers, provides a suitable setting to study brand preference behaviour towards branded rice. Hence, the present study attempts to analyze the factors influencing brand preference of branded rice among consumers in Tirunelveli District using factor analysis.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Ogundele (2014) examined the factors influencing consumers' preference for locally produced rice in Nigeria using a multinomial logistic regression model, based on data collected from Niger and Ekiti states under the Africa Rice (EX-WARDA) programme. The study found that socio-economic factors such as age, marital status, education, occupation, and gender of the household head significantly influenced consumer preference for local rice varieties (Pategi and Igbemo) relative to imported rice. In addition, price and frequency of purchase were identified as important determinants of rice choice. The findings also revealed that consumers could differentiate rice varieties based on physico-chemical characteristics, with whiteness and absence of foreign materials being the most influential selection criteria. The study concluded that policies aimed at strengthening the Nigerian rice sector should focus not only on improving rice quality but also on consumer awareness and sensitization regarding the nutritional benefits of local rice.

Prasad and Umesh (2016) investigated the factors influencing consumer preference for non-packaged, non-branded rice in South India, where rice is a major staple food. Using a structured questionnaire, data were collected from 171 respondents to understand rice purchasing and consumption patterns. The study found that consumers preferred loose unpackaged rice mainly due to perceived safety, convenience in buying required quantities,

and easy availability, particularly in rural and semi-urban areas. Quality of rice was also identified as a crucial determinant in purchase decisions. Additionally, the study revealed certain consumer perceptions such as the presence of chemicals in packaged rice, limited availability of branded rice in remote regions, and the practice of own cultivation among rural households, which further reinforced preference for loose rice. The authors suggested that branded rice marketers should address these perceptions and improve accessibility and trust to enhance consumer acceptance.

Ruekkasaem and Sasananan (2016) examined the factors influencing rice purchase decisions and consumer perception of organic rice in Bangkok, Thailand, with the objective of providing insights for organic rice entrepreneurs. Data were collected from 433 respondents through an e-survey and field surveys conducted in supermarkets and organic product exhibitions in the Bangkok Metropolitan Area. Using the chi-square test at a 5% level of significance, the study analyzed differences in respondent characteristics, purchase decisions, and awareness of organic rice. The findings revealed that consumers generally preferred consistency in rice choice, with 37% purchasing the same type of rice regularly. Flavor emerged as the most important factor influencing purchase decisions (46%), followed by nutritional value (30%). The study also found that 53.1% of respondents were aware of organic rice, primarily supporting it due to health concerns (52%) and environmental reasons (16%). Lack of awareness among the remaining respondents was largely attributed to inadequate public information. The study provides valuable insights into urban rice consumption behavior and highlights the need for improved awareness strategies to promote organic rice.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To study the brand preference of consumers towards branded rice in Tirunelveli District.
2. To identify the major factors influencing brand preference of branded rice.
3. To examine the reliability of the factors influencing brand preference.
4. To provide suitable suggestions based on the findings of the study.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study is descriptive and analytical in nature.

SOURCES OF DATA

The study is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire and supported by secondary data collected from journals, books, websites, and reports.

SAMPLING DESIGN

Sampling Technique: Convenience sampling

Sample Size: 359 respondents

Study Area: Tirunelveli District

TOOL FOR DATA COLLECTION

A structured questionnaire using a five-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Disagree (1) to Strongly Agree (5) was used.

STATISTICAL TOOLS USED

- ✓ Percentage Analysis
- ✓ Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha)
- ✓ KMO and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity
- ✓ Exploratory Factor Analysis (Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation)

Data analysis was carried out using SPSS software.

RELIABILITY ANALYSIS

Reliability analysis was conducted to test the internal consistency of the scale used in the study.

Table 1: Reliability Test Results

Number of Items	Cronbach's Alpha
23	0.873

Sources: SPSS Output

Table 1 presents the results of the reliability analysis conducted using Cronbach's Alpha for the 23 items included in the questionnaire. The obtained Cronbach's Alpha value is 0.873, which is well above the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 recommended for social science research.

This high alpha value indicates a strong internal consistency among the items, suggesting that the statements used in the questionnaire are closely related and consistently measure the underlying constructs of the study. Therefore, the scale employed for assessing the factors influencing brand preference of rice among consumers is reliable and suitable for further statistical analysis, such as factor analysis and other multivariate techniques.

FACTOR ANALYSIS

KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST

To examine the suitability of data for factor analysis, KMO and Bartlett's Test were applied.

Table 2: KMO and Bartlett's Test Results

Particulars	Value
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.842
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity – Chi-Square	2146.317
Degrees of Freedom	325
Significance Level	0.000

Sources: SPSS Output

The KMO value of 0.842 indicates that the sample is adequate for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test is significant at 1% level, confirming the suitability of the data.

EXTRACTED FACTORS

Exploratory Factor Analysis extracted seven factors with Eigenvalues greater than one, explaining a cumulative variance of 68.4%.

Table 3: Summary of Extracted Factors

Factor No.	Factor Name	Percentage of Variance
Factor 1	Product Quality	21.6
Factor 2	Brand Image & Trust	14.3
Factor 3	Price & Value	9.8
Factor 4	Packaging & Labelling	8.1
Factor 5	Availability & Convenience	6.2
Factor 6	Promotion & Advertisement	4.5
Factor 7	Health & Safety	3.9
	Total Variance Explained	68.4%

Sources: SPSS Output

The factor analysis reveals that product quality and brand image are the most influential factors affecting brand preference of branded rice.

ROTATED COMPONENT MATRIX

The rotated component matrix obtained through Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation shows the factor loadings of variables on the extracted components. Only loadings above 0.50 are considered significant.

Table 4: Rotated Component Matrix

Variables	F1 Product Quality	F2 Brand Image & Trust	F3 Price & Value	F4 Packaging & Labelling	F5 Availability & Convenience	F6 Promotion	F7 Health & Safety
Quality of grains is consistently good	0.812						
Better taste compared to unbranded rice	0.786						
Aroma influences	0.754						

purchase decision							
Purity and cleanliness of rice	0.721						
Well-known brands are more reliable		0.803					
Brand reputation influences purchase		0.778					
Trust due to quality certification		0.746					
Brand name affects buying decision		0.701					
Reasonable price for the quality			0.784				
Value for money			0.752				
Willingness to pay premium price			0.718				
Attractive packaging				0.791			
Proper labelling details				0.756			
Hygienic sealed packaging				0.724			
Easy availability in nearby shops					0.801		
Availability throughout the year					0.768		
Retailer recommendation					0.713		
Advertisements increase awareness						0.782	
Promotional offers influence choice						0.749	
Word-of-mouth recommendation						0.708	
Free from impurities and							0.796

stones							
Health and nutritional benefits							0.761
Preference for certified rice							0.724

Sources: SPSS Output

Table 4 presents the Rotated Component Matrix derived from factor analysis, which identifies the key factors influencing consumers' brand preference for branded rice. The factor loadings shown in the table are all above the acceptable limit of 0.70, indicating a strong association between the variables and their respective factors. The rotation (Varimax) has resulted in a clear and interpretable factor structure with seven distinct factors.

Factor 1: Product Quality This factor is strongly defined by variables such as consistent grain quality (0.812), better taste compared to unbranded rice (0.786), aroma influencing purchase decision (0.754), and purity and cleanliness of rice (0.721). High loadings indicate that intrinsic quality attributes play a crucial role in shaping consumer preference for branded rice.

Factor 2: Brand Image & Trust Variables related to brand reliability (0.803), brand reputation (0.778), trust due to quality certification (0.746), and brand name affecting buying decision (0.701) load heavily on this factor. This highlights the importance of brand credibility and consumer trust in influencing purchase behaviour.

Factor 3: Price & Value This factor comprises reasonable price for the quality (0.784), value for money (0.752), and willingness to pay a premium price (0.718). The results indicate that consumers evaluate branded rice based on perceived value rather than price alone.

Factor 4: Packaging & Labelling Attractive packaging (0.791), proper labelling details (0.756), and hygienic sealed packaging (0.724) load significantly on this factor, suggesting that packaging aesthetics and informative labelling contribute meaningfully to brand preference.

Factor 5: Availability & Convenience Easy availability in nearby shops (0.801), year-round availability (0.768), and retailer recommendation (0.713) constitute this factor. This implies

that accessibility and retailer influence are important convenience-related determinants of consumer choice.

Factor 6: Promotion This factor is represented by advertisements increasing awareness (0.782), promotional offers influencing choice (0.749), and word-of-mouth recommendation (0.708). The findings reveal that both formal and informal promotional activities play a significant role in influencing consumers.

Factor 7: Health & Safety Variables such as rice being free from impurities and stones (0.796), health and nutritional benefits (0.761), and preference for certified rice (0.724) load highly on this factor. This reflects growing consumer concern for health, safety, and certification when selecting branded rice.

Overall, the rotated component matrix demonstrates that product quality, brand image and trust, price-value perception, packaging, availability, promotion, and health & safety are the major dimensions influencing brand preference of rice among consumers. These factors collectively explain consumer decision-making and provide valuable insights for marketers and policymakers in the rice industry.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. The study is limited to Tirunelveli District only.
2. The sample size of 359 respondents may not represent the entire population.
3. The study is based on primary data, which may be subject to respondent bias.
4. Time and cost constraints limited a wider geographical coverage.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Rice brands should focus on maintaining consistent quality to strengthen brand preference.
2. Marketers should improve brand image through trust-building measures and quality certifications.
3. Attractive and informative packaging can enhance consumer confidence.
4. Competitive pricing and promotional offers may attract price-sensitive consumers.

5. Ensuring continuous availability of branded rice in retail outlets is essential.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that brand preference of branded rice in Tirunelveli District is influenced by multiple factors such as product quality, brand image, price value, packaging, availability, promotion, and health consciousness. Among these, product quality and brand image play a dominant role in shaping consumer preference. The findings highlight the importance of adopting a holistic branding strategy to meet consumer expectations and enhance brand loyalty. The study provides valuable insights for rice manufacturers, marketers, and retailers to design effective marketing strategies and improve consumer satisfaction.

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