

Customer Perception and Shopping Behavior towards Supermarkets: An Empirical Study in Tirunelveli Corporation

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Abstract

The Indian supermarket industry is under-going a transformation as a result of shifting consumer preferences and lifestyles. To thrive in this changing context, super markets must prioritize knowing customer profiles through extensive market research, with a focus on demographics, interests, and spending habits. Localizing product assortments to meet regional tastes, increasing health-focused offers, and improving convenience through online services are all critical tactics. Furthermore, using sustainable practices and integrating technology can help to streamline operations and increase consumer engagement. To attract a varied consumer base, product offerings must be culturally sensitive and inclusive, as well as adapted marketing techniques. Creating a great shopping experience and implementing feedback mechanisms can help supermarkets better respond to consumer requirements. Embracing these methods allows supermarkets to position themselves for success in a competitive market.

Keywords: Shifting Consumer Preferences and Lifestyles, Interests and Spending Habits, Adapted Marketing Techniques, Great Shopping Experience

Introduction

The supermarket industry is undergoing significant transformation in response to evolving consumer preferences and lifestyle changes, particularly in India. As supermarkets primarily focus on food-related products, they must adapt their strategies to meet the demands of a diverse and dynamic customer base. Here are some key considerations for supermarkets in this context are Understanding Customer Profiles, Product Assortment and Localization, Health and Wellness Trends, Convenience and Accessibility, Sustainability Practices, Technology Integration, Cultural Sensitivity and Inclusivity, Promotions and Marketing Strategies, Customer Experience, Feedback Mechanisms.

Supermarkets in India must be agile and responsive to the changing landscape of consumer behavior. By focusing on customer needs, embracing technology, and adopting sustainable practices, they can position themselves for success in a competitive market.

Statement of the Problem

In the rapidly evolving retail landscape, understanding customer perception and shopping behavior is crucial for effective marketing

decision-making and strategy formulation. Supermarkets, as a primary shopping destination for many consumers, are influenced by a myriad of factors that drive consumer choice and loyalty. Despite the significance of these factors, there remains a gap in comprehensive research that not only identifies what influences consumers to shop at supermarkets but also examines the demographic characteristics of supermarket shoppers, including age, income, and education levels.

This study aims to address this gap by analyzing the various factors that influence consumer decisions to shop at supermarkets. Additionally, it will explore the demographic profiles of shoppers, their buying behaviors, levels of satisfaction, and the challenges they face during their shopping experiences. By understanding these elements, supermarkets can better tailor their marketing strategies to meet consumer demands and enhance customer satisfaction.

The research will focus on the current scenario of supermarkets within the designated study area, providing insights into consumer preferences and behaviors in the context of contemporary retail dynamics. Ultimately, this study seeks to contribute valuable knowledge that can inform supermarket management and marketing strategies, ensuring they remain competitive & responsive to consumer needs.

Scope of the Study

The study is primarily empirical and exploratory in nature. The research is conducted among customers of supermarkets in the Tirunelveli Corporation. This analysis investigates the factors influencing customer preferences for supermarkets and their shopping behaviors within these establishments.

Objectives of the Study

- To examine the socio-economic profile of customers of supermarkets in the study area.
- To identify the factors influencing customers' shopping preferences for supermarkets.
- To analyze the shopping behaviors of supermarket customers in the study area.
- To evaluate the challenges faced by customers and their perceptions regarding shopping in supermarkets.

Research Design

In this research, Tirunelveli Corporation was designated as the site of investigation. Data were collected exclusively from primary sources. Primary data were gathered from customers of the supermarket in Tirunelveli through the administration of a structured questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed in consultation with the research advisor and informed by pertinent academic literature.

Sample Design

In the present study, the researchers adopted convenience sampling to collect data from 120 customers at a supermarket in Tirunelveli. This method is often preferred for its practicality, particularly under time constraints. While convenience sampling can provide rapid insights, it is crucial to acknowledge that it may not fully capture the diversity of the entire population.

Data Analysis and Results

Socio-Economic Status of Supermarket Customers in the Study Area

To analyze the socio-economic status of supermarket customers in the study area, the researchers typically focus on three key components: Educational levels, occupations, and monthly income levels of the respondents.

Educational Level

Table 1 clearly provides a clear representation of the educational attainments of the respondents.

Table 1 Education Level

S. No.	Educational Status	No. of Respondents	Percent
1.	Primary Education	11	9.2%
2.	Secondary Education	23	19.2%
3.	Higher Secondary	8	6.7%
4.	Graduate	30	25.0%
5.	Postgraduate	48	40.0%
	Total	120	100

Table 1 clearly indicates that the majority of respondents (40%) possess a postgraduate degree, reflecting a high level of education among supermarket customers. Additionally, a significant proportion (25%) of respondents are graduates,

further highlighting the elevated educational attainment of the customer base. Conversely, only 9.2% of respondents have completed primary education, suggesting that the supermarket appeals to a more educated customer segment.

Occupation

Table 2 offers a clear depiction of the respondents' occupations.

Table 2 Respondents by Occupation

S. No.	Occupation	No. of Respondents	Percent
1.	Unemployed	15	12.5%
2.	Business professionals	14	11.7%
3.	Government employee	31	25.8%
4.	Private employee	9	7.5%
5.	Agriculturist	26	21.7%
6.	Professionals	7	5.8%
7.	Daily wager	18	15.0%
	Total	120	100

Table 2 clearly demonstrates that the largest occupational group among respondents comprises government employees (25.8%), followed by agriculturists (21.7%). A notable proportion of respondents (15%) are daily wage earners, indicating that the supermarket also appeals to customers from lower-income backgrounds. Business professionals, private employees, and other professionals represent a smaller segment of the customer base.

Monthly Income

Table 3 clearly provides a clear overview of the monthly income levels of the respondents.

Table 3 Monthly Income

S. No.	Income	No. of Respondents	Percent
1.	Upto Rs. 10,000	41	34.2%
2.	Rs.10,000-20,000	18	15.0%
3.	Rs.20,000-30,000	11	9.2%
4.	Rs.30,000-40,000	12	10.0%
5.	Rs.40,000-50,000	13	10.8%
6.	Above Rs.50,000	25	20.8%
	Total	120	100

Table 3 clearly illustrates that the majority of respondents (34.2%) have a monthly income of upto

Rs. 10,000, suggesting that the supermarket attracts a significant number of customers from lower-income backgrounds. Conversely, a substantial proportion of respondents (20.8%) report a monthly income exceeding Rs. 50,000, indicating that the supermarket also appeals to customers from higher-income backgrounds. The income distribution is relatively evenly distributed across the various income categories, reflecting a diverse customer base in terms of income.

Overall, the socio-economic profile of supermarket customers in the study area suggests that they are relatively well-educated, with a diverse range of occupations and income levels. The supermarket appears to attract customers from both lower- and higher-income backgrounds, indicating a broad appeal to a wide range of consumers.

Factors Influencing the Preference for Shopping at Supermarkets

Table 4 Factors Influencing the Preference for Shopping at Supermarkets

S. No.	Factors	Total	Mean score	Rank
1.	Interest in gaining access to new products	223	1.86	8
2.	To stay aligned with emerging trends in the product market	265	2.21	4
3.	Decreased pricing of goods at supermarkets	304	2.53	2
4.	Enhanced quality of products available in supermarkets	257	2.14	6
5.	Compelling advertisements provided by supermarkets	268	2.23	3
6.	Sales promotion activities, including special offers and discounts	245	2.04	7
7.	Comfortable atmosphere and satisfactory shopping experience	263	2.19	5
8.	Prestige and social status linked to shopping at supermarkets	317	2.64	1

Based on the data provided in table 4, the factors influencing the preference for shopping at supermarkets are summarized as follows:

Prestige and social status linked to shopping at supermarkets: This factor has the highest mean score of 2.64, indicating that consumers place significant importance on the social status associated with shopping at supermarkets. It ranks first among the factors.

Decreased pricing of goods at supermarkets: With a mean score of 2.53, this factor ranks second. It suggests that consumers are attracted to supermarkets due to competitive pricing.

Compelling advertisements provided by supermarkets: This factor ranks third with a mean score of 2.23, indicating that effective advertising plays a crucial role in attracting customers.

To stay aligned with emerging trends in the product market: This factor ranks fourth with a mean score of 2.21, showing that consumers are interested in keeping up with new trends.

Comfortable atmosphere and satisfactory shopping experience: With a mean score of 2.19, this factor ranks fifth, highlighting the importance of a pleasant shopping environment.

Enhanced quality of products available in supermarkets: This factor ranks sixth with a mean score of 2.14, indicating that product quality is a consideration for shoppers.

Sales promotion activities, including special offers and discounts: This factor ranks seventh with a mean score of 2.04, suggesting that while promotions are important, they are not as influential as other factors.

Interest in gaining access to new products: This factor has the lowest mean score of 1.86 and ranks eighth, indicating that while some consumers value new products, it is not a primary reason for shopping at supermarkets.

The most influential factors for consumers when choosing to shop at supermarkets are related to social status, pricing, and advertising, while aspects like product quality and access to new products are less significant.

Shopping Behaviors of Supermarket Customers in the Study Area

To analyze the shopping behaviors of supermarket customers, concentrate on three key components: total expenditure incurred by respondents at the supermarket, the preferred mode of payment among respondents, and the purchasing frequency of respondents.

Total Expenditure

Table 5 Total Expenditure Incurred by the Respondents at the Supermarkets

S. No.	Amount spent in rupees	No. of Respondents	Percent
1.	Rs.1,000-2,000	32	26.7%
2.	Rs.2,000-3,000	42	35.0%
3.	Rs.3,000-4,000	22	18.3%
4.	Rs.4,000-5,000	11	9.2%
5.	Above Rs. 5,000	13	10.8%
	Total	120	100

Table 5 clearly indicates that the total expenditure incurred by respondents at supermarkets is categorized into various ranges. The majority of respondents (35.0%) spent between Rs.2,000 and 3,000, followed by 26.7% who spent between Rs.1,000 and 2,000, and 18.3% who spent between Rs.3,000 and 4,000. The remaining respondents are distributed as follows: 9.2% spent between Rs. 4,000 and 5,000 and 10.8% spent above Rs. 5,000.

This data indicates a significant portion of respondents are spending within the lower to mid-range categories, suggesting a focus on budget-conscious shopping habits among the surveyed population.

Preferred Mode of Payment

Table 6 Preferred Mode of Payment among the Respondents

S. No.	Mode of payment	No. of Respondents	Percent
1.	Cash transactions	58	48.3%
2.	Credit / Debit card	33	27.5%
3.	Online funds transfer	14	11.7%
4.	UPI	11	9.2%
5.	Others	4	3.3%
	Total	120	100

Based on the data presented in Table 6, the preferred mode of payment among respondents at supermarkets can be summarized as follows:

Cash Transactions: The most preferred mode of payment, chosen by 48.3% of respondents, indicating a strong preference for traditional payment methods.

Credit / Debit Card: The second most popular option, with 27.5% of respondents favoring this method, suggesting a significant acceptance of card payments.

Online Funds Transfer: Selected by 11.7% of respondents, this indicates a growing but still limited preference for digital banking solutions.

UPI: With 9.2% of respondents opting for these platforms, it shows a moderate interest in mobile and online payment systems.

Others: Only 3.3% of respondents chose alternative payment methods, indicating that most respondents prefer the options listed above.

The data suggests that while cash remains the dominant payment method among respondents, there is a notable acceptance of credit and debit cards. Online payment methods are less favored but may represent an area for potential growth as digital payment solutions continue to evolve.

Frequency of Purchases

Table 7 Frequency of Purchases Undertaken by Respondents

S. No.	Frequency of Purchase	No. of Respondents	Percent
1.	Daily	6	5.0%
2.	Weekly	12	10.0%
3.	Monthly	58	48.3%
4.	Special occasion	19	15.8%
5.	Others	25	20.8%
	Total	120	100

Table 7 presents a detailed breakdown of the frequency of purchases made by respondents, highlighting their shopping habits and preferences.

Monthly Purchases: The most common frequency of purchase among respondents is monthly, indicating that many individuals prefer to shop less frequently, possibly for larger quantities or more significant items.

Need-Based Purchases: A substantial portion of respondents (20.8%) indicated that they make purchases based on need. This suggests a practical approach to shopping, where consumers prioritize necessity over frequency.

Special Occasion Purchases: Purchases made for special occasions account for 15.8% of the responses. This reflects a tendency to save for specific events, such as holidays or celebrations.

Weekly Purchases: Only 10.0% of respondents reported making weekly purchases, indicating that regular shopping is not a prevalent behavior among this group.

Daily Purchases: The least common frequency is daily purchases, with only 5.0% of respondents engaging in this behavior. This suggests that most respondents do not shop on a daily basis, possibly due to lifestyle choices or budget constraints.

The data indicates that the majority of respondents prefer to make purchases on a monthly basis, with a significant number also shopping based on immediate needs. This information can be valuable for businesses and marketers aiming to tailor their strategies to align with consumer purchasing habits. Understanding these patterns can help in developing targeted promotions and inventory management that cater to the preferences of the consumer base.

Challenges Encountered by Customers and their Perceptions of Shopping in Supermarkets

Table 8 Challenges faced by Customers and their Perceptions Regarding Shopping in Supermarkets – Garrett Ranking Technique

S. No.	Factors	Mean score	Rank
1.	Elevated Prices in Comparison to Local Stores	4.63	X
2.	Prolonged Delivery Times for Home Deliveries	4.70	IX
3.	Inadequate Employee Cooperation	5.40	VI
4.	Limited Payment Methods	5.58	III
5.	Insufficient Parking Facilities	5.25	VIII
6.	Deficient Hygiene Standards Within the Store	5.46	V

7.	Frequent Relocation of Product Placement	5.30	VII
8.	Absence of Branded Goods	5.51	IV
9.	Unsatisfactory Product Quality	6.65	I
10.	Disorganized Arrangement of Goods	6.51	II

The data presented in table 8 outlines the challenges faced by customers when shopping in supermarkets, ranked using the Garrett ranking technique. Below is a detailed analysis of the challenges, their mean scores, and their ranks, along with insights into customer perceptions.

Unsatisfactory Product Quality (Rank I, Mean Score: 6.65): This is the most significant challenge for customers, indicating that they often find the quality of products lacking. Supermarkets should prioritize quality control and sourcing to enhance customer satisfaction.

Disorganized Arrangement of Goods (Rank II, Mean Score: 6.51): A disorganized store layout can lead to frustration and inefficiency in shopping. Improving store organization and signage can help customers find products more easily.

Limited Payment Methods (Rank III, Mean Score: 5.58): Customers desire more payment options, which can enhance convenience and encourage purchases. Supermarkets should consider integrating various payment methods, including digital wallets and contactless payments.

Absence of Branded Goods (Rank IV, Mean Score: 5.51): The lack of branded products can deter customers who prefer specific brands. Supermarkets should evaluate their product offerings to include popular brands that meet customer preferences.

Deficient Hygiene Standards within the Store (Rank V, Mean Score: 5.46): Hygiene is a critical concern, especially in the wake of increased health awareness. Supermarkets must maintain high cleanliness standards to ensure customer safety and comfort.

Inadequate Employee Cooperation (Rank VI, Mean Score: 5.40): Customers expect helpful and cooperative staff. Training employees to provide better customer service can improve the shopping experience.

Frequent Relocation of Product Placement (Rank VII, Mean Score: 5.30): Constantly changing product locations can confuse customers. Supermarkets should minimize unnecessary changes to product placement to enhance shopping efficiency.

Insufficient Parking Facilities (Rank VIII, Mean Score: 5.25): Parking availability is a concern, particularly in urban areas. Supermarkets may need to assess their parking facilities and consider expanding them if feasible.

Prolonged Delivery Times for Home Deliveries (Rank IX, Mean Score: 4.70): While delivery times are a concern, they rank lower than other issues. Improving logistics and delivery processes can enhance customer satisfaction for online shopping.

Elevated Prices in Comparison to Local Stores (Rank X, Mean Score: 4.63): Price sensitivity is present but is perceived as less of a challenge compared to product quality and organization. Supermarkets should consider competitive pricing strategies while maintaining quality.

The analysis highlights that product quality and store organization are the most pressing challenges for customers in supermarkets. Addressing these issues, along with improving payment options and hygiene standards, can significantly enhance the overall shopping experience and customer satisfaction. Supermarkets that focus on these areas are likely to see increased customer loyalty and positive perceptions.

Findings

Socio-Economic Profile of Customers

Education: Significant majority of respondents (40%) hold postgraduate degrees, and 25% are graduates, indicating a well-educated customer base. Only 9.2% have completed primary education.

Occupation: The largest group of respondents are government employees (25.8%), followed by agriculturists (21.7%) and daily wage earners (15%). This suggests a diverse occupational background.

Income Levels: The income distribution shows that 34.2% of respondents earn up to Rs. 10,000 monthly, while 20.8% earn over Rs. 50,000, indicating a broad appeal to both lower- and higher-income customers.

Factors Influencing Shopping Preferences

The study identifies several key factors influencing customers' decisions to shop at supermarkets, ranked by mean scores:

- Prestige and Social Status (Mean Score: 2.64)
- Decreased Pricing of Goods (Mean Score: 2.53)
- Compelling Advertisements (Mean Score: 2.23)
- Alignment with Emerging Trends (Mean Score: 2.21)
- Comfortable Atmosphere (Mean Score: 2.19)
- Enhanced Product Quality (Mean Score: 2.14)
- Sales Promotions (Mean Score: 2.04)
- Access to New Products (Mean Score: 1.86)

Expenditure Patterns

Spending Habits: The majority of respondents (35.0%) spend between Rs. 2,000 and 3,000, indicating a focus on budget-conscious shopping.

Payment Methods: Cash transactions are the most preferred (48.3%), followed by credit/debit cards (27.5%). Online payment methods are less favored but show potential for growth.

Shopping Frequency

Monthly Purchases: The most common shopping frequency is monthly (48.3%), followed by need-based purchases (20.8%). This suggests that consumers prefer to shop less frequently, possibly for larger quantities.

Challenges Faced by Customers

Using the Garrett ranking technique, the study identifies the following challenges:

- Unsatisfactory Product Quality (Mean Score: 6.65)
- Disorganized Arrangement of Goods (Mean Score: 6.51)
- Limited Payment Methods (Mean Score: 5.58)
- Absence of Branded Goods (Mean Score: 5.51)
- Deficient Hygiene Standards (Mean Score: 5.46)
- Inadequate Employee Cooperation (Mean Score: 5.40)
- Frequent Relocation of Product Placement (Mean Score: 5.30)
- Insufficient Parking Facilities (Mean Score: 5.25)
- Prolonged Delivery Times (Mean Score: 4.70)
- Elevated Prices Compared to Local Stores (Mean Score: 4.63)

Suggestions

Supermarket managers can take the following strategic steps to address the highlighted difficulties and improve customer satisfaction:

Improve product quality: Implement tight quality control procedures and evaluate supplier standards on a regular basis to guarantee that products satisfy customers' expectations. Engage customers via feedback methods to better understand their quality problems.

Improve store organization: Rework store layouts to improve navigation and product placements. Clear signage and organized product groups can improve the shopping experience. To avoid customer confusion, examine product placements on a regular basis and minimize any needless modifications. To meet the increased need for convenience, expand payment options to include digital wallets, contactless payments, and mobile payment solutions.

Increased branded goods availability: Consider expanding the product mix to include popular and trusted brands that appeal to client preferences, hence increasing customer loyalty.

Maintain high hygiene standards: Provide regular hygiene training to employees and ensure that cleanliness is prioritized cleanliness throughout the store. Visible cleanliness has the potential to drastically improve customer perceptions.

Improve customer support: To ensure that staff members are informed, accommodating, and attentive to the demands of customers, invest in employee training programs.

Take care of delivery and parking issues: Examine parking facilities and, if need, think about enlarging them. Optimize home delivery logistics to cut down on delivery times and boost client satisfaction.

Conclusion

The study sheds light on the socioeconomic profile, buying habits, preferences, and issues experienced by supermarket customers in the study area. The findings show that, while customers are generally well-educated and diversified in terms of wealth and occupation, they encounter major obstacles relating to product quality, store

organization, and payment methods. By proactively addressing these difficulties, supermarket managers may improve the overall shopping experience, develop consumer loyalty, and strengthen their market position. Implementing the offered tactics will not only meet customer expectations, but will also help the supermarket succeed in the long run.

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