"A Comparative Study of Consumer Preference for Packaged and Loose Grocery Items at DMart, Amaravati"

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ABSTRACT: A key element of retail store performance is customer satisfaction, which has an impact on brand loyalty and customer retention. This study looks at customer satisfaction at D-Mart in Amravati City, focusing on key factors such as product availability, pricing, store atmosphere, personnel behavior, and overall shopping experience. A survey was conducted with 100 respondents using the convenience sampling technique to gather the views and expectations of the customers. The findings indicate that customer satisfaction is significantly impacted by discounts, product variety, and affordability. Nonetheless, there is potential for improvement in areas such as billing efficiency and customer service. The study makes recommendations for enhancing the customer experience to ensure long-term loyalty and business growth.

KEYWORDS: Customer satisfaction, shopping experience, loyalty, product variety, store atmosphere, customer service, quality of service.

I. INTRODUCTION

Consumer preference plays an important role in the success of retail businesses. In grocery retail, consumers usually choose between packaged items and loose items. Packaged items are branded and pre-packed products, while loose items are sold without packaging and are usually weighed at the time of purchase. Stores like D-Mart offer both options to meet the needs of different customers. Studying consumer preference helps retailers understand what customers like, why they choose certain products, and how their choices are influenced by factors such as price, quality, convenience, and health concerns.

Consumer preference refers to the choices and priorities of consumers while selecting products. These preferences are shaped by personal needs, income level, lifestyle, and perceived value of the product. Some consumers focus on low prices, while others prefer branded or high-quality items. Understanding these preferences helps retailers plan better pricing, product display, and promotional strategies.

Several factors influence consumer preference in grocery shopping. Price is a major factor, as price-sensitive consumers often prefer loose items because they can buy only the required quantity at a lower cost. Quality perception also affects choice; packaged items are trusted for consistent quality and hygiene, while loose items are preferred for freshness. Brand loyalty encourages consumers to repeatedly buy packaged goods from trusted brands. Convenience is another key factor, as packaged items save time and are easy to store. Health consciousness also plays a role, with many consumers preferring loose items as they are considered natural and less processed.

Packaged grocery items are pre-sealed and branded products such as cereals, pulses, oils, and snacks. They offer standardized quantity, clear labeling, longer shelf life, and hygiene. However, they are often more expensive and raise environmental concerns due to excess packaging. Loose grocery items include fruits, vegetables, grains, and spices sold without packaging. They are cost-effective, fresh, flexible in quantity, and environmentally friendly, but may raise hygiene and storage concerns.

Retailers like D-Mart influence consumer preferences through store layout, pricing offers, quality control, and consumer education. Proper product placement, discounts, and clear information help customers make informed choices. Studying consumer preference is important for improving marketing strategies, managing inventory efficiently, increasing customer satisfaction, and supporting sustainable retail practices. However, analyzing preferences is challenging due to changing consumer trends, individual differences, and the influence of promotions and availability.

II.   LITERATURE REVIEW

(Kumar, Deva Guru & Sridharan, 2024) Kumar et al. assessed consumer satisfaction in a South Indian retail locale (Erode, Tamil Nadu) with respect to organised retail satisfaction. They found that factors like staff behaviour, product assortment, store cleanliness and pricing influenced satisfaction, and that demographic profile influenced how consumers rated satisfaction. They observed that up-to-date store design and in-store service were key to retaining middle-income shoppers. They concluded that regional chains needed to adapt service-quality attributes to local consumer expectations for better satisfaction outcomes.

(Shrivastava, 2024) Shrivastava carried out a comparative study of customer satisfaction across leading retailers in India and found variation in satisfaction factors such as product quality, pricing, service experience and brand reputation across different formats. They observed that while pricing remained primary for value-seeking shoppers, experience and brand image were critical for premium segments. They concluded that retailers needed to segment customers and tailor satisfaction strategies accordingly. They recommended that omnichannel capabilities and seamless service would become the differentiators in future retail satisfaction.

(Ghadge, Dixit & Madhavi, 2023) Ghadge et al. examined customer satisfaction at D-Mart in Panvel and analysed key factors such as product variety, pricing, store layout, and staff behaviour. They found that customers appreciated the value pricing model but felt there were limitations in ambience and staff interaction. They observed that store layout and product availability emerged as significant influences on satisfaction levels. They concluded that D-Mart-style retail chains needed to balance cost-leadership with service enhancements to maintain customer loyalty.

(Mohsin, Sahni, Kashyap, James & Sagar, 2023) Mohsin et al. investigated factors influencing customer satisfaction at organised retail outlets (with reference to Reliance Smart in NCR). They found that store attributes (such as convenience, product availability and promotional offers) significantly influenced satisfaction, and that demographic variables (especially gender) affected buying decisions. They observed that technologically enabled services and modern store formats contributed positively to satisfaction. They concluded that organised grocery retailers must tailor store experiences and service features to different demographic segments to enhance satisfaction.

III.   COMPANY PROFILE

D Mart

Radhakishan Damani created the Indian retail company Avenue Supermarts Limited, sometimes referred to as DMart, which has its main office in Mumbai. It runs 377 outlets in 12 states and union territories as of September 2024. The corporation had 59,961 contract employees and 13,971 permanent employees as of March 2024.

DMart was founded in 2000, and in 2002 it set its shop in Mumbai's Powai neighbourhood. Using an everyday low-price model and a "slow expansion" approach, it reached 29 outlets in Gujarat and Maharashtra by 2010. DMart ran bigger stores than other supermarkets, frequently owning them instead of renting them.

With 65 outlets by 2013, including ones in Hyderabad and Bangalore, it came in third place in terms of retail revenue, after Future Group and Reliance Retail. By 2016, DMart had opened 112 locations in many states and introduced DMart Ready, an online retailer.

The company became the 65th most valuable Indian company when it went public in March 2017 and made its debut on the NSE and BSE. By 2018, it has spread to Daman, Tamil Nadu, Rajasthan, Punjab, and Delhi NCR.

IV.   METHODOLOGY

Research Methodology

Research involves a thorough investigation aimed at discovering new information in any field. In the context of research design and data collection, this section outlines the methodology, including data sources and tools used for gathering information.

Research Plan

A research design serves as a blueprint for collecting and analyzing data to achieve the study's objectives efficiently. It defines key aspects such as what, where, when, and how the research will be conducted. A well-structured research design ensures systematic data collection and analysis, guiding the study towards meaningful conclusions.

A) Data Sources and Methods

The data required for this study is collected from customers of D-Mart in Amravati.

B) Primary Data

Primary data refers to fresh and original information collected for the first time. Since this study involves descriptive research, data will be gathered through a structured questionnaire.

C) Secondary Data

Secondary data consists of information that has already been collected and analyzed by others. Sources for this study include newspapers, journals, magazines, textbooks, and websites.

D) Sampling Procedure

Sampling involves determining the sample unit, size, and technique. The sampling unit consists of selected elements from the population that will be studied.

E) Study Population

The target population for this research includes customers of D-Mart in Amravati.

Research Objective

1. To study the current consumer preferences for packaged and loose grocery items among customers shopping at D-Mart in Amaravati city

2. To compare the changes in consumer preferences over time (e.g., before and after COVID-19 or in recent years) between packaged and loose grocery item
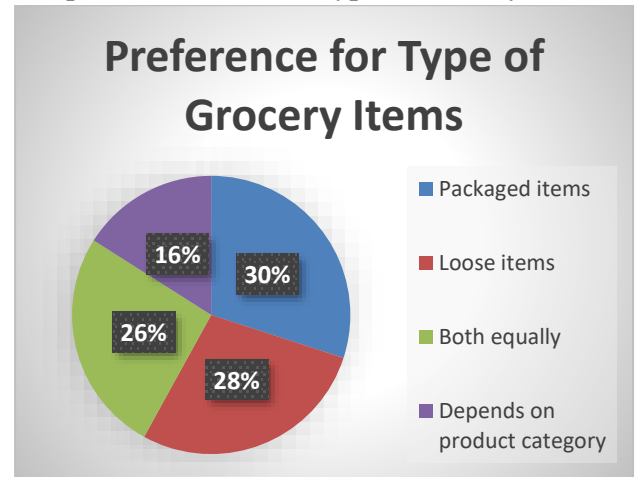
Hypothesis

Null Hypothesis (H₀):

There is no significant difference in consumer preference between packaged and loose grocery items among customers of D-Mart in Amaravati City.

Alternative Hypothesis (H₁):

There is a significant difference in consumer preference between packaged and loose grocery items among customers of D-Mart in Amaravati City.
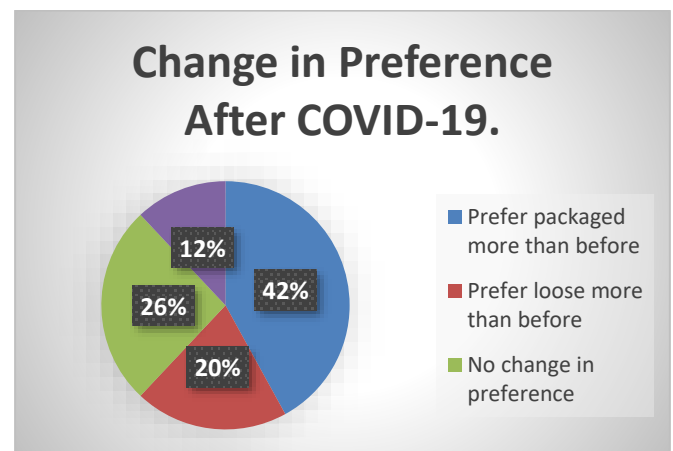
V. INTERPRETATIONS

Graph 1 Preference for Type of Grocery Items

Interpretation :-
From the above table, it is interpreted that 30% respondents prefer packaged items, while 28% respondents prefer loose items. Further, 26% respondents prefer both equally, and 16% respondents stated that their preference depends on the product category.

Graph no. 2 - Change in Preference After COVID-19

Interpretation:- From the above table, it is interpreted that 42% respondents now prefer packaged items more than before COVID-19. About 20% respondents prefer loose items more, while 26% respondents reported no change in preference. Further, 12% respondents stated that it depends on the product.

VI. CONCLUSION

From the study, it can be concluded that there is a clear difference in consumer preference between packaged and loose grocery items at D-Mart. Customers do not follow a single pattern; instead, their choice depends on the type of product and personal needs. Packaged items are mostly preferred for hygiene, safety, and convenience, while loose items are chosen for freshness,

flexibility, and lower price. The hypothesis test confirms that consumer preference is not the same for all customers, proving that packaged and loose items are chosen differently. Therefore, D-Mart should continue offering both options to satisfy the needs of all types of customers.

FINDINGS

The study shows that customers shopping at D-Mart in Amaravati City have different preferences for packaged and loose grocery items. Some customers prefer packaged items because they feel they are more hygienic, branded, and convenient to use. Many respondents also said that after COVID-19, their preference for packaged items has increased due to health and safety concerns. At the same time, a good number of customers still prefer loose items, especially for fruits, vegetables, and grains, because they feel these items are fresher and cheaper. The findings also show that factors like price, hygiene, quality, brand, and convenience strongly influence buying decisions. In-store promotions and discounts offered by D-Mart also affect customer choices to a large extent.

SUGGESTIONS

D-Mart should maintain a proper balance between packaged and loose grocery items to meet the expectations of different customers. More attention should be given to maintaining cleanliness and hygiene in loose item sections to reduce customer health concerns. The store can also provide clear information boards about freshness, pricing, and quality to help customers make better choices. Attractive offers and discounts on both packaged and loose items can further increase customer satisfaction. Lastly, D-Mart should regularly study customer preferences so that it can improve its services and stay updated with changing consumer needs.

VII. REFERENCES

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[5] https://www.dmart.in — DMart's official site for online shopping and store information.

[6] Another official corporate site often referenced is: http://www.dmartindia.com — the company's main corporate website.