

A STUDY ON CUSTOMER PREFERENCE AND BRAND LOYALTY WITH REFERENCE TO MAHARAJA RICE MILL PRIVATE LIMITED, KANGEYAM

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine customer preferences and brand loyalty with reference to Maharaja Rice Mill Private Limited, Kangeyam. In an increasingly competitive rice milling industry, understanding the factors that influence consumer choice and loyalty is critical for sustaining market share and fostering long-term growth. This research investigates key determinants such as product quality, price perception, brand image, customer satisfaction, and service consistency that shape preferences among rice mill customers. Through a combination of structured questionnaires and statistical analyses, primary data were collected from a representative sample of customers in and around Kangeyam town. The findings reveal that product quality and consistent supply are the strongest predictors of brand preference, whereas perceived value and trust significantly contribute to customer loyalty. The study also highlights that customers with high satisfaction levels demonstrate stronger repurchase intentions and positive word-of-mouth behaviour. Based on the results, strategic suggestions are offered to enhance customer retention and strengthen the brand position of Maharaja Rice Mill in the regional market. This research contributes to the limited body of literature on customer behaviour in the rice milling sector and provides actionable insights for practitioners seeking to improve competitive performance.

Keywords:

Customer Preference, Brand Loyalty, Customer Satisfaction, Brand Image, Product Quality

INTRODUCTION

Maharaja Rice Industries is an esteemed Indian company specializing in the production, export, and supply of rice. Established by Mr. P. Duraisamy Gounder, the company initially began with a small rice mill that, through his unwavering dedication, grew to achieve a production capacity of up to 40 tonnes per day. In 1980, the founder expanded his endeavours by founding Shanmuga Modern Rice Mill, Production House – 1, dedicated to delivering top-quality rice varieties. Subsequently, in 1989, the establishment of Maharaja Modern Rice Mill, Production House furthered the mission of providing high-quality rice in significant quantities across India. The combined efforts of his two sons, D. Eswar Moorthy and D. Rakkiappasamy, propelled Maharaja Rice Industries to new heights, boasting a remarkable production capacity of 100 tonnes per day. Presently, the company is outfitted with state-of-the-art machinery capable of processing 600 metric tonnes of paddy daily and storing up to 70,000 metric tonnes.

Notably, a cutting-edge 3- MW power plant operates efficiently using solar and wind energy, thus promoting electricity conservation.

Renowned as the largest non-basmati rice producers in Tamil Nadu, we offer a vast assortment of rice varieties such as Boiled Raja bogam rice, Thanjavur Ponni rice, Deluxe Ponni rice, Sona rice, Steamed rice, Raw rice, idly kara, jeera rice, basmati rice, and Kranthi kara rice throughout India. Embracing innovation, we integrate Japanese technology machines for large-scale rice production. Our success is underpinned by our unwavering commitment to taste, pricing, quality, and customer satisfaction. Upholding principles of excellence, we strive to continually improve, setting the standard in the industry. With an extensive network across India, our MAHARAJA BRAND RICE enjoys widespread recognition both domestically and internationally. Through years of diligent effort, we have cultivated advanced infrastructure for manufacturing, processing, and packaging, ensuring our commitment to excellence in delivering delicious and nutritious Indian rice varieties to customers worldwide

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Maharaja Rice Mill Private Limited Company, a key player in the rice processing industry, has been facing several operational and managerial challenges that are affecting its productivity and profitability. Despite steady demand for rice products in both domestic and export markets, the company's current systems for inventory control, production planning, quality assurance, and cost management have shown limitations in handling increased workload and competition.

OBJECTIVES

- To study the factors influencing customer preference towards Maharaja Rice Mill products.
- To assess the level of brand loyalty among customers of Maharaja Rice Mill.
- To analyse the relationship between customer preference and brand loyalty.
- To identify the problems faced by customers while purchasing Maharaja Rice Mill products.
- To suggest suitable measures to improve customer satisfaction and brand loyalty towards Maharaja Rice Mill.

Review of Literature

Understanding customer preference and brand loyalty has been a central theme in marketing research across industries. Over the years, scholars have attempted to explore how product quality, brand image, customer satisfaction, price perception, and other factors influence consumer decisions and loyalty behaviour.

Kotler and Keller (2016) highlighted that customer preferences are shaped by a combination of psychological, cultural, social, and personal factors, which in turn influence purchase decisions and brand loyalty. They emphasized that satisfaction and perceived value play a significant role in forging long-term loyalty (Kotler & Keller, 2016).

Omar and Musa (2012) investigated the relationship between brand image and customer loyalty in the food processing sector. Their findings suggested that a positive brand image significantly enhances consumer trust and loyalty, leading to repeat purchases and higher retention. The study further noted that customers tend to associate high-quality production and consistent service with stronger brand allegiance.

According to Aaker (1991), brand loyalty simplifies marketing efforts and lowers customer turnover, which is especially critical in highly competitive markets. Aaker's model of brand equity identified loyalty as a core dimension that drives customer commitment and resistance to competitive offerings.

In a study of consumer behaviour in agricultural product markets, Singh and Kaur (2018) found that product quality and price were the most influential factors affecting customer preferences. Their research also indicated that customers show higher loyalty toward brands that consistently deliver quality products at reasonable prices.

Sheth, Mittal, and Newman (1999) discussed the role of customer satisfaction as a mediator between product attributes and loyalty. Their work suggested that satisfied customers are more likely to repeat purchases, exhibit higher brand loyalty, and recommend the brand to others.

In the retail food industry, research by Lin and Wang (2006) confirmed that perceived value and satisfaction significantly influence repurchase intentions. They pointed out that value-for-money perception, rather than absolute price, was a more accurate predictor of loyalty.

Although extensive studies exist on consumer preferences and loyalty in general markets, there is limited research focusing specifically on the rice milling industry in India. A few localized studies (e.g., Reddy & Kumar, 2020) underscore that in commodity markets such as rice, factors like mill reputation, consistent product quality, and trustworthiness are key determinants of customer loyalty.

This review indicates that while general theories of consumer behaviour and brand loyalty are well established, sector-specific insights related to rice mills—especially at the regional level—are sparse. Therefore, this study seeks to bridge the literature gap by examining how customer preference and loyalty manifest in the context of Maharaja Rice Mill Private Limited in Kangeyam.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

RESEARCH DESIGN

Research design is the overall plan that outlines how the research is conducted to achieve the study objectives. It provides a structured framework for collecting, measuring, and analysing data related to the research problem. The present study adopts a descriptive research design, as it aims to describe the factors influencing customer preference and brand loyalty towards Maharaja Rice Mill Private Limited. Descriptive research is suitable for studies where the researcher wants to understand characteristics, opinions, attitudes, and behaviour of customers.

This research design helps in:

- Identifying customer satisfaction levels
- Understanding purchasing behaviour
- Analysing factors such as quality, price, packaging, availability, and brand image
- Measuring brand loyalty among customers

The study is based on primary data collected through a structured questionnaire and secondary data collected from company records, websites, journals, and reports. The collected data is analysed using appropriate statistical tools to draw meaningful conclusions and suggestions.

METHOD OF COLLECTION

It has two types

1. Primary data
2. Secondary data

Primary data:

Primary data means data which is fresh collected data. Primary data mainly been collected through personal interviews, surveys etc.

SAMPLING

POPULATION

The aggregate elementary units in the survey are referred to as the population. Here it covers the entire employees of Maharaja Rice Mill Private Limited Kangayam.

Sample Size: The study based only on the employee engage Total number of samples taken for the study is 145 respondents.

SAMPLING UNIT: Sampling unit is in Kangayam.

Sample design: Convenience sampling techniques were used for the study.

Instrument Design

The instrument design for this study was structured to systematically collect primary data regarding customer preference and brand loyalty towards Maharaja Rice Mill Private Limited, Kangayam. A well-structured questionnaire was developed to ensure reliability, validity, and clarity of responses. The instrument was designed based on research objectives, review of literature, and relevant brand loyalty models.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Between Respondent Gender and Main Reason for Preference

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Based on the 154 valid responses collected, the descriptive statistics between Gender and Main Reason Influencing Preference are presented below.

Gender-wise Distribution

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Female	73	47.4%
Male	81	52.6%
Total	154	100%

Interpretation:

The majority of respondents are male (52.6%), while 47.4% are female, indicating a fairly balanced gender representation in the study.

Frequency Distribution – Main Reason for Preference

Main Reason	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Valid Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Quality of rice	86	55.8	55.8	55.8
Brand reputation	18	11.7	11.7	67.5
Taste and aroma	15	9.7	9.7	77.2
Availability	14	9.1	9.1	86.3
Price	11	7.1	7.1	93.4
Packaging	5	3.2	3.2	96.6
Discounts / Promotional offers	5	3.2	3.2	100.0
Total	154	100.0	100.0	—

Interpretation:

The frequency distribution reveals that quality of rice (55.8%) is the most dominant factor influencing customer preference. Brand reputation (11.7%) and taste and aroma (9.7%) are secondary influencing factors. Availability (9.1%) and price (7.1%) have moderate influence, whereas packaging and promotional offers (3.2% each) have minimal impact on customer preference.

The cumulative percentage shows that more than 75% of respondents prefer the brand due to quality, brand reputation, and taste combined.

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION TABLES & INTERPRETATION

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Sample Size: 154 Respondents

Frequency Distribution – Gender

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Male	81	52.6
Female	73	47.4
Total	154	100%

Interpretation:

The majority of respondents are male (52.6%), followed by female respondents (47.4%). The gender distribution is relatively balanced, ensuring equal representation in the study.

Frequency Distribution – Age

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Below 25	102	66.2
25–35	36	23.4
36–45	9	5.8
Above 45	7	4.6
Total	154	100%

Interpretation:

Most respondents (66.2%) belong to the Below 25 age group, indicating that the study mainly represents young consumers.

Frequency Distribution – Main Reason for Preference

Main Reason	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Quality of rice	86	55.8
Brand reputation	18	11.7
Taste and aroma	15	9.7
Availability	14	9.1
Price	11	7.1
Packaging	5	3.2
Discounts / Promotional offers	5	3.2
Total	154	100%

Interpretation:

The majority of respondents (55.8%) prefer the product mainly due to quality of rice. Other influencing factors such as brand reputation (11.7%) and taste (9.7%) have moderate impact. Price and promotional offers play a comparatively minor role.

Frequency Distribution – Satisfaction Level

Satisfaction Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Highly satisfied	64	41.6
Satisfied	63	40.9
Neutral	19	12.3
Dissatisfied	5	3.2
Highly dissatisfied	3	2.0
Total	154	100%

Interpretation:

A majority of respondents (82.5%) are either highly satisfied or satisfied with the product varieties. This indicates strong customer satisfaction and positive brand perception.

Frequency Distribution – Purchase Frequency

Purchase Frequency	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Always	72	46.8
Often	38	24.7
Sometimes	28	18.2
Rarely	10	6.5
Never	6	3.9
Total	154	100%

Interpretation:

Nearly 71.5% of respondents purchase the product either always or often, indicating strong repeat purchase behavior and customer loyalty.

ANOVA Table (SPSS Format)

Source of Variation	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	18.462	4	4.615	5.284	0.001
Within Groups	130.118	149	0.873		
Total	148.580	153			

Interpretation

The one-way ANOVA analysis revealed a statistically significant difference among the groups ($F = 5.284, p < 0.05$). As the significance value is 0.001, which is less than the standard threshold of 0.05, the null hypothesis is rejected. Therefore, it can be concluded that the grouping factor significantly influences customer buying behaviour and contributes to brand loyalty towards Maharaja Rice Mill Private Limited

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

1. The majority of respondents are actively involved in household purchase decisions related to rice.
2. Quality of rice is identified as the most influential factor affecting customer preference.
3. Brand reputation plays a significant role in shaping consumer trust and repeat purchase behaviour.
4. Taste and aroma are important product attributes contributing to customer satisfaction.
5. Price is considered important; however, customers prioritize quality over price.
6. Product availability in local retail outlets positively influences buying decisions.
7. Packaging has a comparatively lower impact on purchase preference.
8. Promotional offers and discounts have minimal influence on long-term brand loyalty.
9. A high percentage of respondents purchase the brand regularly (Always/Often), indicating repeat buying behaviour.
10. Customer satisfaction shows a positive relationship with frequency of purchase.
11. Chi-square analysis indicates no significant association between gender and the main reason for buying rice.
12. ANOVA results reveal a statistically significant difference in purchase frequency across satisfaction levels ($p < 0.05$).
13. Highly satisfied customers demonstrate stronger brand loyalty compared to neutral or dissatisfied customers.
14. Word-of-mouth recommendations significantly contribute to brand growth and customer acquisition.
15. Overall, product quality and customer satisfaction are the primary drivers of brand loyalty toward Maharaja Rice Mill products.

SUGGESTIONS

1. Maintain consistent product quality to sustain customer trust and long-term loyalty.
2. Enhance brand promotion activities through digital marketing, local advertising, and retail visibility.
3. Ensure continuous product availability across retail outlets to prevent brand switching.
4. Introduce customer loyalty programs to encourage repeat purchases.
5. Strengthen customer relationship management by regularly collecting feedback and addressing complaints promptly.
6. Adopt competitive pricing strategies to attract both quality-conscious and price-sensitive consumers.
7. Improve packaging design and information clarity to increase product appeal and differentiation.
8. Expand distribution channels to nearby towns and semi-urban markets for market growth.
9. Offer periodic promotional schemes to increase short-term sales and brand awareness.
10. Focus on innovation and product diversification to meet changing consumer preferences and enhance competitive advantage.

CONCLUSION

The present study examined customer preference and brand loyalty towards Maharaja Rice Mill Private Limited in Kangeyam, with a sample of 154 respondents. The analysis was conducted using descriptive statistics, chi-square test, correlation analysis, and ANOVA to understand the relationship between demographic factors, customer satisfaction, and purchase behaviour. The findings reveal that product quality is the most significant factor influencing customer preference. Attributes such as taste, aroma, and brand reputation also contribute positively to consumer choice. While price remains an important consideration, the majority of respondents prioritize quality over cost, indicating a value-driven purchasing behaviour. The statistical results indicate that demographic variables such as gender do not significantly influence the primary reason for purchase. However, customer satisfaction shows a strong and positive relationship with purchase frequency. The ANOVA results confirm that higher satisfaction levels significantly increase repeat buying behaviour, thereby strengthening brand loyalty. The study concludes that customer satisfaction acts as a key mediator between product quality and brand loyalty. Consistent quality, availability, and effective brand positioning have enabled Maharaja Rice Mill to build a stable customer base in the regional market. Overall, the research highlights that sustaining superior product standards and enhancing customer engagement strategies are essential for maintaining long-term competitive advantage and ensuring continued brand loyalty in the rice market.

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