



## **CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC MARKETING PRACTICES IN CONFECTIONERY BUSINESS: A STUDY ON ATTRACTING RURAL CONSUMER IN MADURAI DISTRICT**

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### **Abstract**

*Sweets are essential for family gatherings, holidays, and even daily life since they make people happy while they consume. Making tasty, superior candies is a top priority for the confectionery industry. Traditional sweets are often presented with innovative designs and packaging. Festive celebrations and rising earnings are the main drivers of rising consumer demand in rural areas. In order to attract price conscious consumers, confectionery companies are concentrating on inexpensive packaging, utilizing local influencers, and increasing distribution through well-known retailers and wholesalers. However, confectionery shop owners confront numerous difficulties in attracting and keeping customers, particularly in rural locations. The purpose of this study is to investigate the current marketing tactics used by candy companies to reach rural customers. Using simple random sampling, 352 respondents were chosen from rural areas in and around Tamil Nadu's Madurai district. The demographic characteristics of medium scale and large scale business owners were analysed using descriptive statistical techniques, ANOVA, Correlation and Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) in order to better understand how strategic actions help address challenges, create impact, and improve the success of business owners in attracting customers to buy more products. The results show that poor product literacy and low brand recognition are major obstacles. Affordable prices, however, have a favorable impact on customers' decisions to buy.*

**Key Words:** *Strategic Marketing Practices, Marketing Challenges, Rural Customers, Business Success, Consumer Attraction.*

### **Introduction**

Food and confectionery industries form an essential part of daily life, meeting basic needs and bringing happiness to people. These industries have developed enormously due to changing consumer lifestyles. Consumers are now willing to spend more beyond traditional food items, especially to satisfy the needs and wants of their children. People of all age groups consume sweets such as toffees, candies, chewing gums, jellies, chocolates, gummies, fudge, coco mittai, and bakery products like cakes, coconut burfi, jangri, Black Forest and White Forest. These products are fast moving in the market. Due to increasing competition, food processing industries are now focusing on rural consumers, who remain relatively untapped by many competitors. Rural markets in India, particularly in regions like Madurai district of Tamil Nadu, present unique opportunities as well as challenges for confectionery businesses.

### **Confectionery Business**

Sweet food products are manufactured, distributed and marketed through agencies, wholesalers and retailers. These products are mainly designed for celebrations such as family and community festivals, as well as for everyday enjoyment, rather than for nutritional purposes. They are sold at prices ranging from low to high, making them accessible to people from different economic groups. This business focuses on creating appealing taste, attractive colors, unique product designs, and innovative packaging, often with complementary offers, to attract customers.

### **Business Challenges**

Confectionery businessmen face many hurdles in sustaining themselves in the market and attracting consumers. Factors such as lack of awareness, impulse buying behavior of rural customers, inadequate distribution infrastructure, supply chain constraints, competition from unorganized local players, and fluctuating demand make it difficult to retain consumers in rural areas. Therefore, it is important for marketers to analyze these challenges and address them by implementing effective strategic marketing practices. This is essential for achieving continuous growth and maintaining a strong position in the competitive market.

### **Marketing Strategy**

Both competition and opportunities exist in the confectionery business environment in rural areas. Marketers should face competition effectively and make use of available opportunities. Confectionery businesses focus on highlighting their brand names to increase consumer confidence, utilizing local influencers, and increasing distribution through well known retailers and wholesalers which encourages them to purchase more. Workers involved in marketing ensure that products reach both urban and rural consumers efficiently. Businessmen and marketers also provide complementary offers at affordable prices, giving top priority to customer satisfaction.

### **Nature of Consumer In Rural Area**

Most consumers prefer low-unit sachets at affordable prices. They often treat these as samples, tasting the product before purchasing larger quantities or bigger packages. Therefore, marketers need to build consumer confidence and create a strong brand image among them. Marketers should adopt innovative strategies such as promotional campaigns to increase product familiarity. Word-of-mouth plays an important role among rural consumers. Ensuring that products are easily available near common areas also encourages impulse purchases.

### **Statement of The Problem**

Numerous obstacles hinder the confectionery industry's expansion and market penetration in Madurai district's rural areas. Organized confectionery brands struggle to establish a strong presence in these markets despite rising consumption of products like toffees, candies, chocolates, chewing gums, jellies, gummies, fudge, and traditional sweets like coco mittai, coconut burfi, and bakery items like cakes, jangri, Black Forest, and White Forest. This problem is caused by a number of variables, such as rural consumers' significant tendency for impulsive purchases, low product awareness and price sensitivity. The availability of products in remote places is further limited by the high cost of packaging, inadequate distribution networks and inefficient supply chains. Market competition is heightened by the existence of unorganized competitors in the area who frequently provide more affordable options. Building long term client loyalty is especially difficult for businesses in rural areas due to fluctuating demand and supply patterns. To increase rural consumption, marketers have implemented a number of distribution and marketing strategies, but their efficacy has been uneven. To increase market penetration, customer retention, and sustainable growth for confectionery products in the rural Madurai district, it is necessary to critically analyze current obstacles and assess strategic marketing strategies.

### **Study Area**

#### **Rural Blocks & Village Areas**

1. **Melur&Kottampatti:** Known for agricultural villages.
2. **Vadipatti&Alanganallur:** Rural areas located towards the north, with numerous village.
3. **Thirumangalam&Kalligudi:** Southern rural areas with significant development in business.
4. **Usilampatti&Chellampatti:** Western region known for agricultural rural development.

## Literature Reviews

Kowsalya, K., & Murugesan, P. (2025) this study focuses on preparing a blueprint for success in the market and attracting customers. The purpose of this study is to investigate current marketing competition in reaching rural customers.

Aldakhil, A. M., & Abro, M. (2024) their thesis proclaimed that proper planning, organizing, and controlling of marketing activities lead to business success. This is the right way to withstand competition in the market.

Smith, S., & Wincent, U. (2024) In rural locations, where poor infrastructure, a lack of product and business literacy, and limited access to marketing channels make business growth more challenging, shop owners confront many obstacles in their efforts to draw in and keep clients.

Manisha, T., & Madhumitha, J. (2024) The study focuses on nutritious sweet-based value-added food products, particularly those that are ready to eat. This makes them appealing and practical options for a variety of consumers looking for readily available and healthful meal options.

Amano, R. (2023) food processing sectors have grown significantly as a result of changing customer preferences. Spending more money on non-traditional food items is becoming more common among consumers, especially when it comes to satisfying their kids' tastes.

Wang, G., & Gunasekaran, A. (2023) their research study revealed that milk products face competition in rural areas due to the dominance of middlemen. The cost of production and marketing expenses are high, and the inadequate literacy level of farmers is also a major drawback.

William, J. (2022) Strategic management plays a significant role in traders' business life. It provides different perspectives to handle situations, utilize existing resources effectively, and adapt to changes in market trends.

Chen, L., & Karel, L. (2022) their study showed that environmental scanning helps businesses withstand challenges in the rural market. Strategies boost business activities and lead to profit generation. The study also found that customer satisfaction provides more opportunities to achieve targets.

Ydav, S., & Singh, H. (2021) Small-scale business owners face significant challenges in attracting and retaining customers, especially in rural areas. This study aims to examine the existing marketing strategies adopted by toy manufacturing firms to effectively connect with rural consumers and improve their market reach, competitiveness, and long-term business sustainability.

Waqas, M., & Khan, R. (2021) Bakery goods are in great demand and are regularly consumed, which causes them to move quickly in the market. Food processing companies are turning their attention to rural consumers, who are still largely untouched by many rivals, as a result of growing rivalry. This change presents new growth prospects, allowing businesses to increase their market share and boost profitability.

Witzel, J., & Peschel, U. (2020) Owners of small businesses face several challenges in drawing in and retaining clients, especially in rural areas. Their study's goal is to find out how toy manufacturers now promote to rural consumers.

Ricciardi, N., & Storchi, F. (2009) Garments are primarily created for use during celebrations such as family and community festivals, as well as for regular daily wear, rather than serving any functional necessity beyond comfort and style. They are available across a wide price range, making them affordable and accessible to individuals from diverse economic backgrounds.

Bloemhof, J., & Mallidis, Z. (2019) This study concentrates on the textile business. In rural areas, the confectionery sector presents both challenges and growth prospects. Marketers need to respond to competition strategically while leveraging existing opportunities to strengthen their position and improve business performance.

Miute, S., & Wang, K. (2019) Marketing personnel play a key role in ensuring the efficient distribution of products to both urban and rural consumers. In addition, business owners and marketers offer value-added deals at reasonable prices, while placing strong emphasis on achieving high levels of customer satisfaction.

Nenito, J., & Benito, Ó. (2018) this study focused the marketing channels. Due to poor infrastructure, low levels of product and business awareness, and limited access to efficient marketing channels, store owners in rural areas confront several difficulties in drawing in and keeping consumers, all of which impede business growth.

### **Research Objectives**

1. To understand the demographic characteristics of the respondents.
2. To analyze the challenges faced by the respondents.
3. To examine the marketing strategies used by confectionery businessmen to attract rural consumers in Madurai District.
4. To assess the impact of strategic marketing practices on attracting rural consumers in Madurai District.
5. To provide suggestions to businessmen, traders, and future researchers.

### **Research Methodology**

The organized methods used to achieve the study's goals are described in the research methodology. The demographic profile of the respondents and their use of strategic marketing techniques to draw in rural customers are examined using a descriptive study design. This method makes it easier to conduct a thorough evaluation of the marketing tactics employed by marketers and the ways in which strategic efforts enhance retention of customers and business performance.

The impact of challenges, marketing strategies, and promotional activities on drawing in and keeping consumers is assessed using appropriate analytical tools. A well designed questionnaire with a five-point Likert scale is used to gather primary data. Simple random sampling is used to pick 352 respondents from particular rural Madurai district areas; 88 participants are chosen from each area to guarantee equal representation.

The data are regarded as reliable and relevant for accomplishing the objectives of the study because they were collected directly from respondents.

**Table No 1.1: Classifications of Respondents From Selected Rural Area In Madurai Districts**

Rural Blocks & Village Areas	No of Respondents (Village Wise)	% of Respondents	Size of Business	No of Respondents (Size Wise)
Melur & Kottampatti	88	25%	Medium Scale Business men	44
			Large Scale Business men	44
Vadipatti & Alanganallur	88	25%	Medium Scale Business men	44
			Large Scale Business men	44
Thirumangalam & Kalligudi	88	25%	Medium Scale Business men	44
			Large Scale Business men	44
Usilampatti & Chellampatti	88	25%	Medium Scale Business men	44
			Large Scale Business men	44
Total	352	100%	-	352

Source: Primary data

### Test For Reliability

**Table No 1.2: Cronbach's Alpha Test For Questionnaire Constructs**

S.No.	Construct	No. of Items	Cronbach Alpha
1.	Marketing Challenges	4	0.807
2.	Strategic marketing Practices	5	0.759
3.	Consumer attracting	5	0.836

Source: Primary data

All of the Cronbach's Alpha values in the table are over the acceptable level of 0.70, indicating the reliability of the study instrument. Online marketing challenges, the independent variable, has an alpha coefficient of 0.807. The mediating variable, strategic marketing practices, shows a Cronbach's Alpha value of 0.759. In the meantime, consumer attraction, the dependent variable, has an alpha value of 0.836. Overall, these findings support a high degree of internal consistency and show the validity of the study's measuring scales.

### Results And Analysis

#### Descriptive Statistics

One important analytical approach for summarizing and presenting respondent demographics, such as age and business experience, is descriptive statistics. It also aids in analyzing how these demographic characteristics relate to other study variables.

**Table No 2.1 Classification of The Respondents on The Basis of Their Age**

Personal Date	Frequency	Percent
Below 25	16	4.5
26-35	72	20.5
36-45	84	23.9
46-55	95	27.0
Above 55	85	24.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>352</b>	<b>100</b>

The above table reveals the age-wise classification of businessmen engaged in medium and large-scale businesses. About 4.5 percent of the respondents belong to the below 25 years age group. Around 20.5 percent fall within the 26–35 years age group. Approximately 23.9 percent of the respondents are in the 36–45 years category. A higher proportion, 27 percent, belongs to the 46–55 years age group, while 24.1 percent are above 55 years of age. The majority of respondents fall within the 46–55 years age group.

**Table No 2.2 Classification of The Respondents on The Basis of Their Experience**

Personal Date	Frequency	Percent
Below 5 Years	33	9.4
6 Years To 10 Years	62	17.6
11 Years To 15 Years	85	24.1
16 Years To 20 Years	73	20.7
Above 20 Years	99	28.12
Total	352	100

**Source: Primary data**

The above table presents the experience-wise classification of the respondents. About 9.4 percent of the respondents have below 5 years of experience. Around 17.6 percent have 6 to 10 years of experience, while 24.1 percent fall within the 11 to 15 years category. Approximately 20.7 percent of the respondents have 16 to 20 years of experience, and 28.12 percent have more than 20 years of experience in the confectionery business. The majority of respondents have above 20 years of experience.

**Different Experience Group of Respondents And Implementing Strategies In The Market Field (ANOVA)**

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant difference between the respondents’ experience and the marketing strategies they use.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant difference between the respondents’ experience and the marketing strategies they use.

**Table No 2.3 Experience Groups of Respondents And Implementing Strategies In The Market Field**

ANOVA					
Strategic Marketing Practices					
	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	143.863	5	28.773	3.436	0.005
Within Groups	2897.611	346	8.375		
Total	3041.474	351			

Source: Primary data

The above table explains the relationship between different experience groups of respondents and the implementation of marketing strategies using ANOVA. The p-value is 0.005, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis (H1) is accepted. The results indicate that there is a significant difference between the respondents' experience and the marketing strategies they use.

**Table No 2.4 Descriptive Statistic**

Strategic Marketing Practices								
Experience	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean		Minimum	Maximum
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound		
Below 5 Years	33	16.52	2.333	0.406	15.69	17.34	13	20
6 Years To 10 Years	62	18.08	3.074	0.390	17.30	18.86	12	22
11 Years To 15 Years	85	16.29	2.790	0.303	15.69	16.90	9	22
16 Years To 20 Years	73	16.33	2.848	0.333	15.66	16.99	10	23
Above 20 Years	99	16.88	3.070	0.312	16.26	17.49	8	24
Total	352	16.80	2.944	0.157	16.50	17.11	8	24

Source: Primary data

The above table indicates the differences among experience groups of respondents and their strategic practices in business. The overall mean value is 16.80, which shows that the level of strategic practices used by respondents is moderate. Businessmen with 6 to 10 years of experience have the highest mean value of 18.08 compared to other experience groups. In contrast, respondents with 11 to 15 years of experience have a mean value of 16.29, which is lower than that of the other groups.

### Correlation Between Experience of The Respondents And Ability To Face Challenges And Overcome

**H<sub>0</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between the respondents’ experience and their ability to face challenges.

**H<sub>1</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between the respondents’ experience and their ability to face challenges.

**Table No 3.1 Correlation: Experience Of The Respondents And Ability To Face Challenges And Overcome**

Correlations			
		Classification of the respondents on the basis of experience	Ability to face Challenges
Classification of the respondents on the basis of experience	Pearson Correlation	1	0.683
	Sig. (2-tailed)		0.001
	N	352	352
Ability to face Challenges	Pearson Correlation	0.683	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.001	
	N	352	352
Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

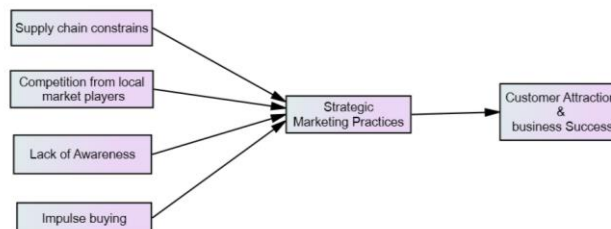
**Source: Primary data**

The above table shows the relationship between the respondents’ experience and their ability to face challenges. The p-value is 0.001. The null hypothesis is rejected at the one percent level of significance, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. The results show that there is a significant relationship between the respondents’ experience and their ability to face challenges.

### Structural Equation Modeling

This study uses structural equation modeling (SEM) to examine how exogenous variables affect endogenous variables. It is used to investigate how Madurai District's strategic marketing techniques affect rural consumers' attractiveness. These variables are linked and their correlations explained by the mediating role of intervention tactics used by confectionary businessmen.

### Path Diagram



**Fig: 1.1 Path Diagram**

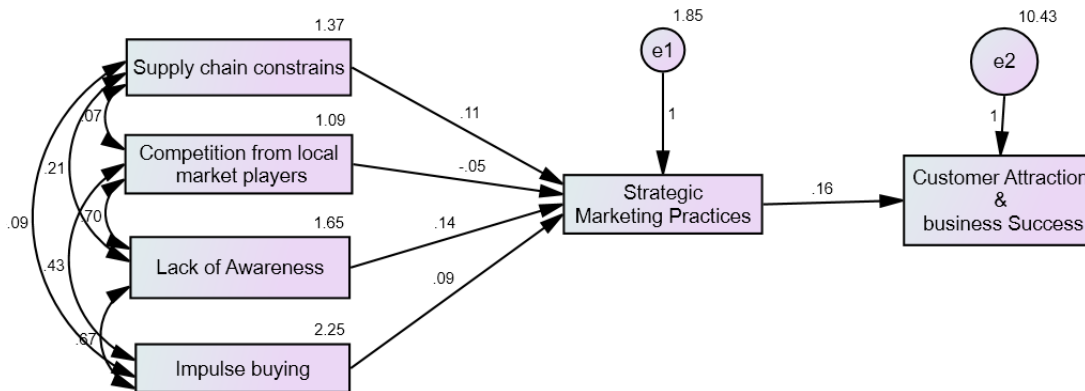
**Table : 4.1 CMIN**

Model	NPAR	CMIN	DF	P	CMIN/DF
Default model	17	15.690	4	0.142	3.922
Saturated model	21	0.000	0		
Independence model	6	218.991	15	0.000	14.599

Source: Primary data

The above results indicate that the CMIN value is 15.690 and the p-value is 0.142, which is above the accepted threshold. The degree of freedom is 4, and the CMIN/DF ratio is 3.922. These findings suggest that the model demonstrates a good fit, indicating that the observed data aligns well with the proposed structural framework.

**SEM**



**Fig: 1.2** Impact of challenges faced by the respondents, strategic marketing practices on attracting rural consumers in Madurai District.

**Table : 4.2 Goodness of Fit**

Model	RMR	GFI	AGFI	PGFI
Default model	0.982	0.972	0.953	0.985
Saturated model	0.000	1.000		
Independence model	0.384	0.824	0.753	0.588

The above table presents the goodness-of-fit indices, including AGFI, PGFI, and RMR. The values are close to one, indicating a good fit. The Default Model shows a relatively high RMR value of 0.982, which reflects a notable residual between the observed and predicted covariance matrices.

**Table : 4.3 Root Mean Square Error of Approximation**

Model	RMSEA	LO 90	HI 90	PCLOSE
Default model	0.040	0.098	0.188	0.600
Independence model	0.197	.174	.220	0.000

The Root Mean Square Error of Approximation (RMSEA) score of 0.040, which is less than the recommended requirement of 0.08, indicates an excellent model fit. The PCLOSE score of 0.600, which indicates a close match with the observed data, further supports the model's suitability.

**Table : 4.4 Regression Weights**

			<b>Estimate</b>	<b>S.E.</b>	<b>C.R.</b>	<b>P</b>
S1	<---	Challenge 1	0.109	0.063	1.735	0.033
S1	<---	Challenge 2	-.049	0.082	-.594	0.553
S1	<---	Challenges3	0.144	0.069	2.090	0.037
S1	<---	Challenge 4	0.089	0.052	1.967	0.018
Customer Attraction	<---	Marketing strategies	0.162	0.124	1.995	0.032

The above table shows the impact of challenges faced by the respondents on attracting customers through different strategies used by the respondents. S1 - C1 ('P' value is 0.33 and estimate values is 0.109). S1 - C2 ('P' value is 0.533 and estimate is -0.049). S1- C3 ('P' value is 0.37 and estimate is 0.144). S1- C4 ('P' value is 0.18 and estimate is 0.089). Customer attraction – S1 ('P' value is 0.032 and estimate is 0.162). Independent variable that is challenges impacted on business men so they used marketing strategies to attract customers and attain business success.

## Discussion

### Demographic Profile of Respondents

1. About 4.5% of respondents are below 25 years of age, 27% are in the 46–55 years group, and 24.1% are above 55 years. The majority of respondents belong to the 46–55 years age group.
2. Regarding experience, 9.4% have less than 5 years and 28.12% have more than 20 years of experience in the confectionery business. The majority of respondents have over 20 years of experience.

### Experience and Marketing Strategies (ANOVA)

1. ANOVA results show a p-value of 0.005, which is less than 0.05. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted. This indicates a significant difference between respondents' experience and the marketing strategies they implement.
2. The overall mean value for strategic marketing practices is 16.80, showing a moderate level of implementation. Respondents with 6–10 years of experience have the highest mean score of 18.08, while those with 11–15 years of experience have the lowest mean of 16.29.

**Experience and Ability to Face Challenges:** The p-value of 0.001 indicates a significant relationship between respondents' experience and their ability to face challenges. The null hypothesis is rejected at the one percent level of significance, and the alternative hypothesis is accepted.

### Structural Model Fit

1. The CMIN value is 15.690 with a p-value of 0.142, degrees of freedom of 4, and a CMIN/DF ratio of 3.922, indicating a good model fit.
2. Goodness-of-fit indices, including AGFI, PGFI, and RMR, are close to one, reflecting an acceptable fit. The Default Model's RMR value of 0.982 indicates some residual differences between observed and predicted covariance matrices.

3. The RMSEA score of 0.040, which is below the recommended 0.08, and a PCLOSE value of 0.600 further confirm an excellent fit between the model and observed data.

### **Impact of Challenges on Marketing Strategies and Customer Attraction**

Regression analysis shows the following relationships:

- $S1 \leftarrow C1$ : Estimate = 0.109,  $p = 0.033$  (significant positive effect)
- $S1 \leftarrow C2$ : Estimate = -0.049,  $p = 0.553$  (insignificant)
- $S1 \leftarrow C3$ : Estimate = 0.144,  $p = 0.037$  (significant positive effect)
- $S1 \leftarrow C6$ : Estimate = 0.089,  $p = 0.018$  (significant positive effect)
- Customer Attraction  $\leftarrow S1$ : Estimate = 0.162,  $p = 0.032$  (significant positive effect)

### **Implications of The Study**

Based on the findings, it is recommended that confectionery businessmen focus on enhancing their strategic marketing practices, especially those with lower experience, to improve customer attraction and business performance. Training programs and workshops on innovative marketing strategies can help less experienced entrepreneurs adopt effective approaches. Businesses should also develop strategies to address specific challenges in rural markets, such as consumer awareness and competition. Encouraging collaboration and knowledge-sharing among experienced and new businessmen can strengthen marketing capabilities. Regular assessment of marketing strategies' effectiveness and adapting to changing consumer needs will further ensure sustained business growth and customer retention.

### **Conclusion**

Market penetration is further complicated by the erratic demand and impulsive purchasing habits of rural consumers. The results emphasize how crucial it is to match marketing tactics with local market conditions and consumer behavior in order to boost sales, foster customer loyalty and accomplish sustainable growth. The result concludes that challenges faced by businessmen positively influence their use of marketing strategies, which in turn significantly enhance customer attraction. Overall, strategic marketing practices serve as a key driver for business success in the confectionery sector.

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