



Retail marketing practices and consumer response to baby food products: Evidence from store-level market analysis

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Abstract

The present study investigates the marketing and distribution patterns of baby food products among retail establishments based on their year of establishment. The study primarily examines product categories sold, payment methods accepted, customer preference for branded baby food products, procurement sources, responses to promotional offers, and retailer satisfaction with suppliers. Primary data were collected through a structured questionnaire administered to selected retail respondents using the survey method. Descriptive statistical tools such as percentage analysis and graphical representation were employed for data interpretation, while the chi-square test was used to determine the significant association between the two categorical variables. The findings indicate that Cerelac is the most preferred baby food brand among consumers, particularly in retail establishments operating for more than ten years. Older establishments demonstrated stronger customer loyalty toward branded products and greater adoption of modern payment systems, including credit card facilities. Distributors were identified as the dominant source of procurement across most retail shops. The study further reveals that newer establishments responded more positively to promotional offers, whereas older firms showed selective responses due to their established customer base and market reputation. The research concludes that brand trust, customer satisfaction, effective promotional strategies, and efficient distribution channels significantly influence the marketing performance of baby food products in retail establishments. The study provides useful insights for retailers, marketers, and manufacturers in formulating customer-oriented marketing strategies and strengthening retail distribution networks.

Keywords: Baby food products, consumer preference, brand loyalty, retail establishments, promotional strategies, customer satisfaction, marketing practices, distribution channels

Introduction

Infant nutrition is an essential component of child health and development, and baby food products play a significant role in providing balanced nutrition during the early stages of life. In recent years, the demand for packaged and branded baby food products has increased considerably due to rapid urbanization, changing lifestyles, increasing health awareness among parents, and the growing participation of women in the workforce. Products such as Cerelac, Lactogen, Bio-milk, and Ceregrow have gained substantial market acceptance because of their nutritional value, convenience, product safety, and strong brand reputation. The baby food industry has emerged as a highly competitive market in which retailers adopt diverse marketing and distribution strategies to attract and retain customers. Consumer purchasing decisions are influenced by several factors, including product quality, pricing, brand image, promotional activities, payment convenience, and customer service. Retail establishments operating for different periods often demonstrate variations in business practices, customer relationships, and sales strategies. Older establishments generally possess stronger customer trust and brand loyalty due to long-term market presence, whereas newer establishments tend to emphasize promotional offers, product diversification, and innovative marketing practices to enhance market penetration. Distribution channels also play a crucial role in ensuring product availability and maintaining customer satisfaction. Retailers procure baby food products through distributors, wholesalers, and

manufacturers depending on business size, operational experience, and market demand. Understanding these marketing and distribution patterns is essential for improving retail performance and enhancing customer satisfaction in the baby food sector. Therefore, the present study attempts to analyse the relationship between the year of establishment of retail shops and various factors associated with the marketing and distribution of baby food products.

Objectives of the Study

1. To study the different types of baby food products sold and customer preference for specific baby food brands in retail establishments based on their year of establishment.
2. To examine the sources from which retailers procure baby food products and analyse their distribution practices.
3. To evaluate retailer responses toward promotional offers on baby food products.
4. To assess retailer satisfaction with suppliers and the effectiveness of marketing practices in retail establishments.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

The present study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional descriptive research design to examine retail-level food marketing practices and consumer behaviour patterns

related to baby food products. The design is appropriate for capturing real-time market dynamics, retailer perceptions, and distributional characteristics without experimental intervention. The study follows established approaches in food marketing and consumer behaviour literature, where descriptive-analytical frameworks are commonly used to assess market structure and purchase-related decision processes.

Sampling Design

The target population comprised retail outlets dealing with baby food products in Jharsuguda district. A total of 25 retail establishments were selected using a non-probability convenience sampling technique. This approach is widely used in exploratory food marketing studies where a complete sampling frame is not readily available. The selection was based on accessibility, operational relevance, and willingness of respondents to participate in the study.

Study Area

The research was conducted in Jharsuguda district, of Odisha, India. The district was selected due to its expanding urban retail sector and increasing penetration of packaged baby food products. Data were collected from major commercial areas of Jharsuguda town, covering diverse retail formats such as grocery stores, medical stores, supermarkets, and general provision outlets involved in the distribution of baby food products.

Data Sources

The study relied primarily on primary data collected through structured field surveys. Secondary data were used for theoretical grounding and literature support, including peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books on consumer behaviour and food marketing, government publications, and credible online scholarly resources.

Research Instrument and Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected using a structured questionnaire developed based on constructs commonly used in food marketing and consumer behaviour research. The instrument captured information on product availability, brand preference, procurement channels, promotional strategies, pricing practices, and consumer demand patterns for baby food products. The questionnaire included closed-ended questions, multiple-choice items, and Likert-scale statements to ensure quantifiable responses. Additionally, a limited number of open-ended questions were included to capture qualitative insights from retailers regarding market behaviour and promotional effectiveness. Data were collected through face-to-face interviews with shopkeepers and retail managers to ensure data accuracy, reduce response ambiguity, and improve response rates. Participation was voluntary, and respondents were informed about the academic purpose of the study prior to data collection.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity of the research instrument was ensured through alignment with established literature in food marketing and consumer behaviour. The questionnaire was reviewed for clarity, relevance and comprehensiveness before field administration. Standardized interviewing

procedures were followed to maintain consistency in data collection

Variables of the Study

The major variables examined in the study include:

- Retail characteristics (type of shop, years of establishment)
- Procurement channels (distributors, wholesalers, manufacturers)
- Product availability and brand preference
- Promotional responsiveness
- Consumer demand patterns and purchase behaviour indicators

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics, particularly frequency distributions and percentage analysis, were employed to summarise retailer responses and identify prevailing market patterns. To examine associations between categorical variables, the Chi-square (χ^2) test of independence was applied. This statistical test is widely used in marketing and consumer behaviour research to determine whether significant relationships exist between variables such as retailer characteristics and procurement behaviour or promotional responsiveness. Statistical significance was assessed at the 5% level ($p < 0.05$). Results were presented using tables and graphical representations for improved interpretability.

Result and Discussions

Table 1: Retail Profile of Sample Respondents Based on Establishment Age and Product Assortment

Year of Establishments	Primary Products								
	Clothing and Accessories		Electronics		Baby Food Products		Others		
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	
Less than 1 year	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1-5 years	2	40			2	40	1	20	
5-10 years	1	11.1	7	77.7	1	11.1	9	36	
More than 10 years	1	9.09	8	72.2	2	18.8	11	44.0	

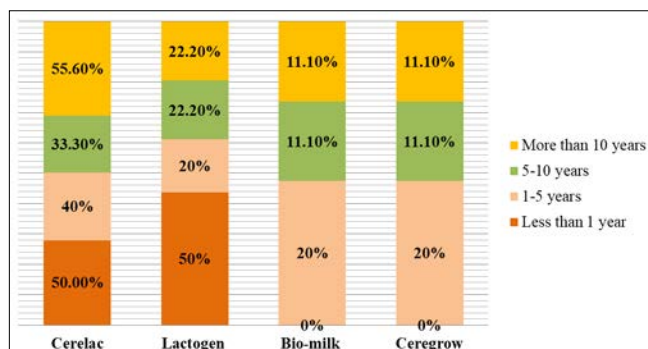
The table shows the distribution of sample respondents according to their year of establishment and type of products sold, including clothing and accessories, electronics, baby food products, and others. It is observed that no respondents fall under the category of less than one year of establishment. In the 1–5 years category, respondents are mainly engaged in clothing and accessories (40%) and baby food products (40%), while 20% are involved in other activities, with no participation in electronics. In the 5–10 years group, the majority are engaged in electronics (77.7%), followed by others (36%), and a smaller proportion in clothing and accessories and baby food products (11.1% each). A similar trend is seen among enterprises operating for more than 10 years, where electronics dominate (72.2%), followed by others (44.0%), baby food products (18.8%), and clothing and accessories (9.09%). Overall, older enterprises are more focused on electronics, while newer enterprises show greater diversification. The Chi-square test revealed a significant association between the year of establishment of retail shops and the primary products sold ($\chi^2 = 13.22$, $df = 6$, $p < 0.05$). This indicates that the type of

products sold varies significantly according to the age of the establishment.

Table 2: Retail Profile of Sample Respondents According to Year of Establishment and Payment Acceptance Modes

Year of Establishments	Factors Considered									
	Cash		Credit Card		Online Payment App		Electronic Transfer By Debit Card		Check	
	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%	No	%
Less than 1 year	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--
1-5 years	2	40	3	60						
5-10 years	3	33.3	3	33.3	--	--	1	11.1	2	22.2
More than 10 years	3	27.3	12	48.0	--	--	3	12.0	2	8.0

The table shows the distribution of respondents according to their year of establishment and the modes of payment accepted in their business, among businesses operating for 1–5 years, 60% accepted credit card payments, while 40% preferred cash transactions. In the 5–10 years category, cash and credit card payments were equally preferred at 33.3% each, followed by check payments (22.2%) and electronic transfer through debit cards (11.1%). While businesses established for more than 10 years, credit card payment was the most accepted mode (48%), followed by cash transactions (27.3%). A smaller proportion accepted electronic transfer by debit card (12%) and check payments (8%). No respondents from businesses operating for less than one year reported any payment mode. The Chi-square test result shows that the calculated Chi-square value is 6.00 with 8 degrees of freedom, which is not significant at the 5% level of significance. This indicates that there is no significant association between the year of establishment of retail shops and the modes of payment accepted by the respondents. The findings suggest that retail establishments, irrespective of their years of operation, follow similar payment practices such as cash, credit card, debit card transfer, and check payment methods.



Graph 1: Distribution of Sample Respondents by Year of Establishment and Baby Food Products Sold

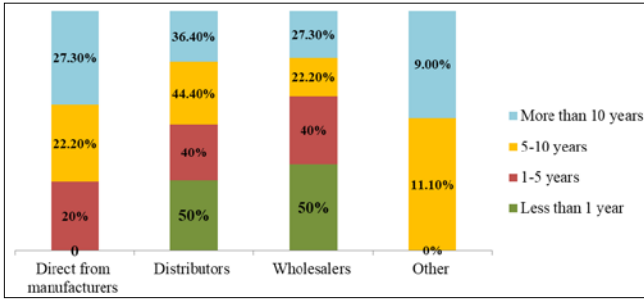
The graph shows the distribution of baby food products sold according to the year of establishment of retail shops. Cerelac was the most preferred baby food product among all categories of establishments. Among shops operating for less than one year, Cerelac and Lactogen were equally sold at 50% each, while no sales were reported for Bio-milk and Ceregrow. In establishments operating for 1–5 years, Cerelac accounted for 40%, whereas Lactogen, Bio-milk, and Ceregrow each represented 20%. Among shops functioning for 5–10 years, Cerelac showed the highest

share (33.3%), followed by Lactogen (22.2%), while Bio-milk and Ceregrow accounted for 11.1% each. In establishments operating for more than 10 years, Cerelac remained the dominant product with 55.6%, followed by Lactogen (22.2%), and Bio-milk and Ceregrow (11.1% each). The findings indicate that Cerelac has greater consumer preference and market demand compared to other baby food brands across different retail establishments. The calculated Chi-square value is 2.34 with 9 degrees of freedom, which is not significant at the 5% level of significance. This indicates that there is no significant association between the year of establishment of retail shops and the types of baby food products sold. However, Cerelac showed comparatively higher preference among all categories of establishments, indicating stronger consumer demand and market popularity compared to other baby food brands.

Table 3: Distribution of Sample Respondents by Year of Establishment, Customer Demand for Specific Brands, and Provision of Special Services in Baby Food Product Shops

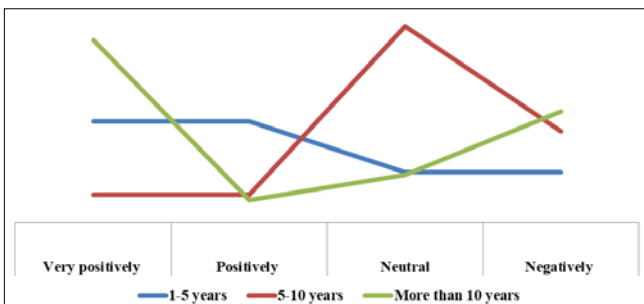
Year of Establishments	Ask For Specific Brand			
	YES		NO	
	No	%	No	%
Less than 1 year	--	--	--	--
1-5 years	3	60	2	40
5-10 years	5	55.5	4	44.4
More than 10 years	8	72.2	3	27.7
Year of Establishments	Offer Any Special Service			
	YES		NO	
	No	%	No	%
Less than 1 year	--	--	--	--
1-5 years	3	60	2	40
5-10 years	8	88.8	4	44.4
More than 10 years	6	54.4	5	45.5

The present study revealed that customers in older establishments showed a greater preference for specific baby food brands and that many shopkeepers offered special services to attract and retain customers. These findings are consistent with the studies conducted by Philip Kotler and Kevin Lane Keller (2016) [11], which reported that brand trust and customer satisfaction significantly influence consumer purchasing behaviour. The findings are further supported by the research of David Aaker (2014), who stated that strong brand awareness and quality perception increase customer preference for branded products. In addition, the World Health Organization (2021) emphasized that parents generally prefer reputed and quality-certified baby food brands to ensure infant nutrition and safety. The present study showed that 60% of respondents from establishments operating for 1–5 years reported that customers asked for specific baby food brands, while 72.2% of respondents from establishments operating for more than 10 years stated that customers preferred particular brands. This indicates higher customer awareness and loyalty towards branded baby food products in older establishments. Similarly, 88.8% of establishments operating for 5–10 years reported offering special services to attract and retain customers. The Chi-square values for customers asking for specific brands ($\chi^2 = 0.42$, $df = 2$) and offering special services ($\chi^2 = 0.93$, $df = 2$) were found to be not significant at the 5% level of significance, indicating no significant association between the year of establishment and these variables.



Graph 2: Distribution of Sample Respondents by Year of Establishment and Source of Baby Food Products

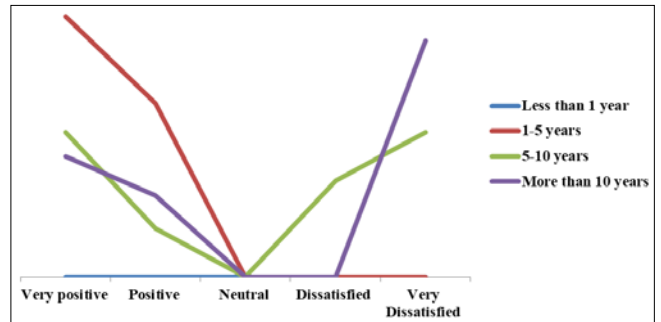
The graphical presentation shows the distribution of respondents according to their year of establishment and the sources from which they procure baby food products. Among establishments operating for less than one year, equal proportions of respondents purchased products from distributors and wholesalers (50% each). In the 1–5 years category, distributors and wholesalers were the major sources, accounting for 40% each, while 20% of respondents purchased directly from manufacturers. Among establishments operating for 5–10 years, distributors were the most common source (44.4%), followed by direct purchases from manufacturers and wholesalers (22.2% each). In establishments operating for more than 10 years, distributors remained the leading source (36.4%), followed by direct procurement from manufacturers and wholesalers (27.3% each). The findings indicate that distributors play a major role in supplying baby food products to retail establishments. Older establishments showed comparatively stronger direct linkage with manufacturers. The calculated Chi-square value was 1.59 with 9 degrees of freedom, which is not significant at the 5% level of significance. This indicates that there is no statistically significant association between the year of establishment of retail shops and the source of procurement of baby food products. In other words, procurement sources such as distributors, wholesalers, and manufacturers are used relatively similarly across all categories of establishments, regardless of their age.



Graph 3: Distributions of Sample Respondents by Year of Establishment and Customer Response to Promotional Offers on Baby Food Products

Graph showing customer responses toward promotional offers on baby food products according to the year of establishment of retail shops. Overall, promotional responsiveness varies significantly with the age of the organization. Newer establishments (1–5 years) show strong positive responsiveness, with 40% reporting “very positive” and 40% “positive” responses, indicating a high level of receptiveness toward promotional incentives. This supports

Kotler and Keller (2016)^[11], who state that younger firms are generally more promotion-sensitive due to their need for rapid market penetration and a relatively limited customer base. In contrast, mid-established firms (5–10 years) exhibit a predominantly neutral response (77.7%), reflecting a cautious or indifferent attitude toward promotional strategies. This finding aligns with Nguyen *et al.* (2015), who observed that more stable firms often reduce their dependence on promotional activities due to established demand patterns and customer stability. For firms operating for more than 10 years, responses are mixed, with a notably high proportion of “very positive” responses (72.2%), along with neutral and negative opinions. This pattern is consistent with Ailawadi *et al.* (2009), who noted that experienced firms respond selectively to promotions due to strong brand loyalty and an already established customer base. The Chi-square value of 16.80 with 6 degrees of freedom is significant at the 5% level, indicating a statistically significant association between the year of establishment and customer responses toward promotional offers. The findings suggest that promotional strategies influence retail establishments differently based on their years of operation, with newer and highly established firms showing stronger positive responsiveness compared to mid-aged firms.



Graph 4: Retail Distribution of Sample Respondents Based on Business Age and Satisfaction with Current Suppliers of Baby Food Products

The graph illustrates the distribution of sample respondents based on the age of their business and their satisfaction with current suppliers of baby food products. Among retailers operating for 1–5 years, 60% expressed “very positive” satisfaction and 40% reported “positive” satisfaction, indicating a high level of confidence in their suppliers. Businesses operating for less than one year showed 100% neutral responses due to the limited number of respondents. In the 5–10 years category, 40% respondents reported “very positive” satisfaction, 20% “positive,” while 20% were “dissatisfied” and another 20% “very dissatisfied,” reflecting mixed opinions regarding supplier performance. Among establishments operating for more than 10 years, 20% respondents expressed “very positive” satisfaction, 20% “positive,” and 60% were “very dissatisfied,” suggesting greater dissatisfaction among long-established retailers. Neutral responses were negligible across most categories. Overall, the findings reveal that newer businesses were comparatively more satisfied with their suppliers, whereas older establishments demonstrated higher levels of dissatisfaction, possibly due to increased expectations regarding pricing, product availability, delivery efficiency, and service quality.

Conclusion

The present study provides empirical insights into retail-level marketing practices and consumer behaviour related to baby food products in Jharsuguda district, Odisha. The findings indicate that the distribution of baby food products is predominantly dependent on intermediary channels, particularly distributors and wholesalers, reflecting a multi-tiered supply chain structure typical of FMCG food markets in semi-urban regions. Retail characteristics such as years of establishment and type of retail outlet were found to influence procurement patterns, product availability, and responsiveness to promotional activities. Established retailers demonstrated broader sourcing networks and greater market integration compared to newer establishments. In addition, variations in promotional responsiveness across retail formats suggest that consumer purchasing behaviour is significantly shaped by point-of-sale marketing efforts and retail environment. The Chi-square analysis further confirmed statistically significant associations between selected categorical variables, indicating that retailer structural factors have a meaningful impact on procurement and marketing behaviour. Overall, the study highlights the critical role of retail intermediaries in shaping the availability and accessibility of baby food products in emerging markets.

Recommendations

- Manufacturers should strengthen direct distribution channels with retailers to reduce dependence on intermediaries.
- Retailers should be provided with targeted, format-specific promotional strategies to improve sales effectiveness.
- Product visibility should be enhanced through improved shelf placement and point-of-sale promotional materials.
- Small and medium retailers should be trained in inventory management and demand forecasting practices.
- Awareness campaigns should be conducted to improve consumer knowledge of the nutritional value of baby food products.
- Supply chain infrastructure should be improved to ensure timely and efficient product distribution in semi-urban markets.
- Future marketing strategies should focus on strengthening brand trust through consistent quality assurance and communication.

Limitation of the Study

- The study is based on a small sample size of 25 retail establishments.
- The research is limited to a specific geographical area.
- Time constraints restricted deeper analysis.

Future Scope of the Study

- Future research can include a larger sample size.
- Comparative regional studies can be conducted.
- Consumer-level behaviour studies can be explored further.

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