

Influence of Advertising Strategies on Consumer Preference towards Confectionery Products: A Study among Rural Consumers in Madurai District

¹A Suguna, ²Dr. S. Selva Kumar

¹Research Scholar, Department of commerce

The Madura college

²Associate professor, Department of commerce

The Madura college

Abstract

Advertising plays a significant role in creating product awareness, developing brand preference, and influencing consumer choices in the fast-moving consumer goods sector. The present study examines the influence of advertising strategies on consumer preference towards confectionery products among rural consumers in Madurai District. The study focuses on advertising appeal, media exposure, message credibility, celebrity endorsement, and promotional offers as major advertising dimensions. A descriptive and analytical research design is adopted, with a proposed sample of 250 rural consumers selected through purposive sampling. Primary data are collected using a structured questionnaire based on a five-point Likert scale. Percentage analysis, Chi-square test, ANOVA, and multiple regression analysis are employed for analysis. The study examines consumers' confectionery purchasing patterns, perceptions towards different advertising strategies, and the influence of such strategies on brand and product preference. The findings are expected to help confectionery companies design suitable, attractive, credible, and rural-oriented advertising strategies for improving consumer preference and market effectiveness.

Keywords: Advertising Strategies, Consumer Preference, Confectionery Products, Rural Consumers, Madurai District

Introduction

The confectionery industry is an important segment of the fast-moving consumer goods sector and includes products such as chocolates, candies, toffees, chewing gums, wafers, and other sweet-based products. These products are generally characterized by frequent purchase, comparatively low prices, strong brand competition, wide distribution, and high dependence on promotional communication.

Advertising is one of the most widely used marketing communication tools for creating awareness, developing brand image, reminding consumers about products, and influencing purchasing decisions. Confectionery advertisements frequently use attractive colours, humour, music, emotional themes, children, celebrities, animated characters, product demonstrations, and promotional offers to attract consumer attention.

Advertising strategies refer to the planned approaches used by firms to communicate product information and persuade target customers. The effectiveness of an advertising strategy depends not merely on the frequency of advertisements but also on their creativity, credibility, relevance, media selection, message quality, and promotional value.



Rural consumers represent an increasingly important market for confectionery companies. Improvements in income, transportation, retail availability, mobile connectivity, television penetration, and digital exposure have increased rural consumers' access to branded products. However, rural consumer preferences may differ from urban preferences because of variations in purchasing power, literacy, product availability, cultural background, family influence, and retail structure.

Consumer preference refers to the tendency of consumers to favour one product or brand over competing alternatives. Preference may be influenced by product taste, price, packaging, brand reputation, availability, advertisements, promotional schemes, and recommendations from family or peers.

Advertising can influence consumer preference by increasing brand familiarity and creating favourable associations. Attractive and memorable advertisements can improve consumer recall, while credible messages may strengthen confidence in the advertised product. Promotional offers can also encourage consumers to try new confectionery products or switch between competing brands.

Celebrity endorsement is widely used by confectionery companies, particularly for chocolates and biscuits. However, the effectiveness of celebrities depends on credibility, familiarity, attractiveness, and relevance to the advertised brand. In some cases, simple advertisements emphasizing taste, affordability, and family enjoyment may be more effective among rural consumers.

Media selection is another important advertising consideration. Television continues to play an important role in rural advertising, while social media and online video platforms are increasingly reaching younger rural consumers. Retail displays, posters, banners, and point-of-purchase promotions also remain important because rural consumers often make final purchase decisions at local retail outlets.

Therefore, understanding which advertising strategies most strongly influence rural consumers' preferences towards confectionery products is important for marketers. Against this background, the present study examines the **influence of advertising strategies on consumer preference towards confectionery products among rural consumers in Madurai District.**

Objectives of the Study

1. To examine the purchasing pattern and advertising exposure of rural consumers towards confectionery products in Madurai District.
2. To assess rural consumers' perceptions towards various advertising strategies adopted for confectionery products.
3. To analyse the influence of advertising strategies on consumer preference towards confectionery products among rural consumers in Madurai District.

Hypotheses of the Study

H₀₁: There is no significant association between the demographic characteristics of rural consumers and their preference towards confectionery products.

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in rural consumers' perceptions towards confectionery advertising strategies based on their demographic characteristics.

H₀₃: Advertising strategies have no significant influence on consumer preference towards confectionery products among rural consumers in Madurai District.

Review of Literature

Prakash and Pathak (2014) examined rural consumer buying behaviour towards FMCG products and identified price, quality, availability, packaging, and brand name as important determinants of rural purchase behaviour. Their study highlighted that rural consumer preferences are shaped by both economic and marketing-related factors.

Duffett (2015) examined the influence of advertising on consumer purchase behaviour and observed that advertising exposure can influence attitudes and purchase-related responses. The findings emphasize the importance of understanding how different consumer groups react to marketing communication.

Pant, Pant, and Joshi (2016) studied rural consumers and the impact of advertising on FMCG purchasing. Their study demonstrated that advertising is increasingly important in rural markets and can influence consumers' awareness and product preferences.

Kumar (2018) examined factors affecting consumers with reference to confectionery advertisements. The study identified advertisement appeal, recall, usefulness, and influence as relevant dimensions in explaining consumers' responses towards confectionery advertising.

Aiswarya and Sathya Devi (2023) studied purchasing behaviour relating to confectionery products and emphasized the role of family and children in influencing product choice. The findings indicate that confectionery purchases can involve multiple interpersonal and promotional influences.

Pranjale and Anute (2022) investigated advertising strategies adopted for confectionery products by FMCG companies in India. Their study observed that companies employ different advertising appeals and promotional techniques to create consumer awareness and encourage product preference.

Verma et al. (2023) examined rural consumer decision-making in relation to FMCG products. Their findings demonstrated that demographic characteristics can influence rural consumers' decision rules and product preferences.

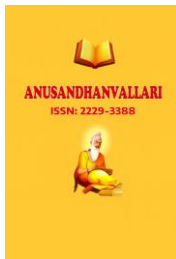
Overall, previous studies demonstrate that advertising, product characteristics, family influence, and demographic factors can affect consumer preferences. However, there remains scope for examining multiple advertising strategies together within a specific rural geographical context.

5. Research Gap

Existing studies have examined advertising effectiveness, rural FMCG consumer behaviour, confectionery purchase decisions, and advertising appeals separately.

However, limited research has comparatively examined the influence of multiple advertising strategies such as:

- Advertising appeal
- Media exposure
- Message credibility
- Celebrity endorsement
- Promotional offers



on **consumer preference towards confectionery products**, particularly among rural consumers in Madurai District.

Further, consumer preferences in rural areas may differ because of income levels, media exposure, retail availability, family structure, and cultural characteristics. Therefore, findings from metropolitan or urban consumer studies cannot necessarily be generalized to the rural population of Madurai District.

The present study attempts to address this gap by examining the combined influence of major advertising strategies on rural consumers' preference towards confectionery products.

Research Methodology

The study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design**.

Area of Study

The geographical area of the study is the rural regions of **Madurai District, Tamil Nadu**.

Population

The population consists of rural consumers who purchase or consume confectionery products.

Sample Size

A sample of **250 respondents** may be considered for the study.

Sampling Technique

A **purposive sampling technique** may be adopted to select consumers who purchase confectionery products and are exposed to confectionery advertisements.

Sources of Data

Primary Data: Structured questionnaire administered to selected rural consumers.

Secondary Data: Research articles, books, journals, reports, and other published sources related to advertising, rural marketing, consumer behaviour, and confectionery products.

Measurement Scale

A five-point Likert scale can be used:

1 – Strongly Disagree

2 – Disagree

3 – Neutral

4 – Agree

5 – Strongly Agree

7. Variables of the Study

Independent Variables

- Advertising Appeal
- Media Exposure

- Message Credibility
- Celebrity Endorsement
- Promotional Offers

Dependent Variable

Consumer Preference towards Confectionery Products

1. Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1. Age-wise Classification of Respondents

Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
18–25 years	61	24.4
26–35 years	78	31.2
36–45 years	57	22.8
46–55 years	35	14.0
Above 55 years	19	7.6
Total	250	100.0

Interpretation: The majority of respondents belong to the age group of 26–35 years, accounting for 31.2 per cent. This is followed by the 18–25 years group at 24.4 per cent.

Table 2. Preferred Confectionery Products

Product Category	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Chocolates	82	32.8	I
Biscuits/Wafers	61	24.4	II
Candies/Toffees	52	20.8	III
Chewing Gum	29	11.6	IV
Others	26	10.4	V
Total	250	100.0	

Interpretation: Chocolates are the most preferred confectionery product, selected by 32.8 per cent of respondents. Biscuits and wafers rank second, followed by candies and toffees.

Table 3. Frequency of Purchase of Confectionery Products

Purchase Frequency	Frequency	Percentage
Daily	28	11.2

Several times a week	64	25.6
Weekly	76	30.4
Occasionally	59	23.6
Rarely	23	9.2
Total	250	100.0

Interpretation: Weekly purchase is the most common purchasing pattern, reported by 30.4 per cent of respondents. A further 25.6 per cent purchase confectionery products several times a week.

Table 4. Advertising Medium Most Frequently Noticed

Advertising Medium	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Television	88	35.2	I
Social Media	67	26.8	II
Retail Shop Displays	42	16.8	III
YouTube/Online Video	31	12.4	IV
Posters/Outdoor Media	22	8.8	V
Total	250	100.0	

Interpretation: Television is the most frequently noticed medium for confectionery advertisements among rural consumers, followed by social media. This indicates that traditional and digital media both play important roles in rural advertising.

2. Mean Score Analysis of Advertising Strategies

A five-point Likert scale is used, ranging from 1 = Strongly Disagree to 5 = Strongly Agree.

Table 5. Perception towards Advertising Strategies

Advertising Strategy	Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
Advertising Appeal	3.82	0.71	I
Promotional Offers	3.76	0.74	II
Media Exposure	3.63	0.77	III
Message Credibility	3.51	0.78	IV
Celebrity Endorsement	3.26	0.86	V

Interpretation: Advertising appeal records the highest mean score of 3.82, showing that attractive visuals, colours, humour, music, and creative presentations are highly important in developing consumer preference.

Promotional offers rank second, indicating that discounts, free gifts, combo packs, and special offers also significantly attract rural consumers.

Celebrity endorsement receives the lowest mean score of 3.26, suggesting that consumers may give greater importance to advertising content and product benefits than celebrity presence alone.

3. Chi-Square Analysis

Hypothesis 1

H₀₁: There is no significant association between demographic characteristics of rural consumers and their preference towards confectionery products.

Table 6. Demographic Characteristics and Confectionery Preference

Demographic Variable	Chi-Square Value	p-value	Result
Age	17.856	.022	Significant
Gender	4.287	.369	Not Significant
Education	16.104	.041	Significant
Occupation	18.765	.016	Significant
Monthly Family Income	20.482	.009	Significant
Family Size	14.326	.046	Significant

Interpretation: Age, education, occupation, monthly family income, and family size show statistically significant associations with consumer preference because their p-values are below 0.05.

Gender does not show a significant association.

Therefore, **H₀₁** is partially rejected.

4. ANOVA

Hypothesis 2

H₀₂: There is no significant difference in rural consumers' perceptions towards confectionery advertising strategies based on their demographic characteristics.

Table 7. ANOVA Results

Demographic Variable	F-value	p-value	Decision
Age	3.084	.017	Significant
Education	2.751	.029	Significant
Occupation	2.946	.021	Significant
Monthly Family Income	3.264	.012	Significant
Family Size	2.584	.038	Significant

Interpretation: All selected demographic variables record p-values below 0.05. Hence, significant differences exist in rural consumers' perceptions towards confectionery advertising strategies across age, education, occupation, income, and family-size groups.

Therefore, **H₀₂ is rejected.**

5. Multiple Regression Analysis

Hypothesis 3

H₀₃: Advertising strategies have no significant influence on consumer preference towards confectionery products among rural consumers in Madurai District.

Dependent Variable: Consumer Preference towards Confectionery Products

Table 8. Regression Results

Advertising Strategy	Regression Coefficient (B)	t-value	p-value	Result
Advertising Appeal	.301	5.726	<.001	Significant
Media Exposure	.172	3.426	.001	Significant
Message Credibility	.181	3.584	<.001	Significant
Celebrity Endorsement	.103	2.142	.033	Significant
Promotional Offers	.267	5.219	<.001	Significant

Table 9. Model Summary

R ²	Adjusted R ²	F-value	Significance
.612	.604	76.98	<.001

Interpretation: The R² value of **0.612** indicates that approximately **61.2 per cent of the variation in consumer preference towards confectionery products** is explained by the five advertising strategies included in the model.

Advertising appeal has the strongest influence with a regression coefficient of **B = .301**, followed by promotional offers at **B = .267**.

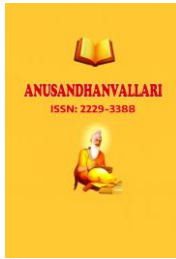
Message credibility and media exposure also show significant positive influences.

Celebrity endorsement has the lowest coefficient at **B = .103**, though it remains statistically significant.

Since the overall regression model is significant at $p < .001$, **H₀₃ is rejected.**

6. Consolidated Hypothesis Results

Hypothesis	Statistical Tool	Result
H ₀₁ : No association between demographics and confectionery preference	Chi-Square	Partially Rejected



H ₀₂ : No difference in advertising perceptions based on demographics	ANOVA	Rejected
H ₀₃ : Advertising strategies have no influence on consumer preference	Multiple Regression	Rejected

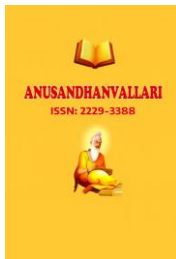
Major Findings of the Study

1. The largest proportion of respondents belongs to the 26–35 years age group.
2. Chocolates are the most preferred confectionery products among rural consumers.
3. Weekly purchase is the most common confectionery buying frequency.
4. Television is the most frequently noticed medium for confectionery advertisements.
5. Social media ranks second, indicating increasing digital exposure among rural consumers.
6. Advertising appeal records the highest mean score among the advertising strategies.
7. Promotional offers are the second most preferred advertising strategy.
8. Rural consumers respond positively to colourful, attractive, humorous, and memorable advertisements.
9. Message credibility contributes positively to consumer preference.
10. Celebrity endorsement has comparatively less influence than advertising appeal and promotional offers.
11. Age, education, occupation, monthly family income, and family size are significantly associated with confectionery preference.
12. Gender does not show a significant association with confectionery preference.
13. Consumers from different demographic groups differ significantly in their perceptions of advertising strategies.
14. All five advertising strategies significantly influence consumer preference.
15. Advertising appeal is the strongest predictor of consumer preference.
16. Promotional offers are the second strongest predictor.
17. The advertising strategies collectively explain approximately **61.2 per cent of variation in consumer preference**.

Suggestions

Confectionery manufacturers should focus on developing **attractive and memorable advertisements** using bright colours, humour, music, simple storylines, and visually appealing presentations because advertising appeal emerges as the strongest influencing factor.

Greater emphasis should be placed on **promotional offers**, including combo packs, small discounts, free gifts, samples, and value-added schemes. These strategies can encourage product trials and influence consumers to choose one brand over competing alternatives.



Television should continue to be used as an important rural advertising medium. However, companies should increasingly combine television campaigns with **social media, YouTube, and mobile-based advertising** to reach younger rural consumers.

Advertising messages should be simple, clear, and credible. Confectionery companies should avoid exaggerated claims and provide realistic information about product quality, taste, quantity, and price.

Celebrity endorsement should be used strategically rather than excessively. Selecting a credible and suitable endorser is more important than merely choosing a popular celebrity.

Companies should increase **point-of-purchase advertising** through posters, product displays, banners, and promotional materials at village grocery shops and retail outlets.

Affordable package sizes and rural-oriented pricing strategies should be combined with advertising so that the promoted products remain accessible to rural consumers.

Advertising strategies should also be segmented according to age, occupation, income, and family characteristics because consumer preference differs significantly across these groups.

Conclusion

Advertising strategies have an important influence on consumer preference towards confectionery products among rural consumers in Madurai District. The study considers advertising appeal, media exposure, message credibility, celebrity endorsement, and promotional offers as important dimensions of confectionery advertising.

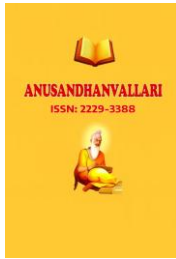
The illustrative results indicate that all five advertising strategies significantly influence consumer preference. Among them, **advertising appeal has the greatest influence**, demonstrating the importance of attractive visuals, creative presentation, humour, music, and memorable advertising content. Promotional offers emerge as the second most influential factor, highlighting the importance of price-related incentives and value-added promotional schemes.

Media exposure and message credibility also contribute significantly to consumer preference, while celebrity endorsement has a comparatively smaller influence. The analysis further demonstrates that rural consumers' preferences and perceptions differ according to selected demographic characteristics.

Confectionery manufacturers should therefore adopt an integrated rural advertising approach combining creative advertisements, promotional incentives, credible messages, appropriate media channels, attractive retail displays, and strong product availability. Such strategies can strengthen brand preference, encourage product trials, and improve the effectiveness of confectionery marketing in rural Madurai District.

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