

Factors Influencing Consumer Brand Preferences for Milk Powder: A Study in Kurunegala District of Sri Lanka

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Abstract

Sri Lanka's rising demand for milk powder continues to exceed local production, leading to a strong reliance on imported brands. Recent incidents of product contamination and frequent price fluctuations have altered consumer purchasing patterns, yet limited empirical evidence exists on the determinants of brand preference in this sector. This study examines the key factors influencing consumer brand preference for domestic and imported milk powder in the Kurunegala District. Specifically, it explores how price, brand availability, advertising, and trust shape consumer decisions in an emerging market context. A structured questionnaire was distributed among a stratified random sample of 384 consumers from three major urban centres - Kurunegala, Narammala, and Giriulla. Data were analysed using Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) and multiple regression via AMOS in SPSS to ensure validity and reliability. All constructs demonstrated strong internal consistency (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.79$). The model explained 65% of the variance in brand preference ($R^2 = 0.65$), confirming that all hypothesized relationships were statistically significant. Findings reveal that trust and price are the most significant predictors of brand preference, followed by availability and advertising. The results highlight that brand credibility and affordability are central to developing consumer loyalty toward milk powder brands. These insights provide valuable guidance for marketers and policymakers to strengthen local brand competitiveness and consumer trust. The study contributes to the understanding of consumer behavior in food product markets within developing economies.

Keywords: advertising, brand availability, brand preference, brand price, consumer preference, trust