



Examining the Factors Influencing the Purchasing Behavior of Food Retailers

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
<p>Article History: Received 4 July 2021 Received in revised form 7 November 2021 Accepted 23 December 2021 Available online 25 December 2021</p>	<p>The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that influence the purchasing behavior of retailers. From a research perspective, the study is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive-survey in terms of data type. The statistical population consists of food retailers in Khorramabad, which is unlimited in size. The Cochran formula was used to determine the sample size, resulting in a sample of 348 participants. Data were collected using the questionnaire developed by Sarkar et al. (2016) and Matos (2013). The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by experts and faculty members, and its reliability was verified using Cronbach's alpha. The results indicate that product demand positively and significantly affects supply and delivery quality as well as retailer credibility. Seasonal and holiday product demand also positively influences salesforce behavior and company reputation. Furthermore, company reputation positively impacts brand reputation, profit margin, and individual and social recognition. In addition, salesforce behavior has a significant positive effect on retailer credibility, individual and social recognition, brand reputation, and word-of-mouth advertising, while credibility positively affects profit margin. Conversely, brand reputation does not significantly influence retailer credibility or individual and social recognition, and company reputation does not have a significant effect on retailer credibility.</p>
<p>Keywords: Word-Of-Mouth Advertising, Retailing, Purchasing Behavior, Purchase Intention, Distribution Channel</p>	

1. INTRODUCTION

Today, with the increase in food producers and the transition of markets from monopolistic structures, end consumers have greater choice and purchasing power. Consequently, the roles of marketing, distribution networks, and retailers have become increasingly important. In the past, producers, importers, and both small and large distributors were the primary actors in the distribution of goods and services, while small and medium-sized stores were responsible for directly providing goods and services to customers. However, with the rapid expansion of retail

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stores, marketing to and engaging retailers has become a strategic priority for manufacturing and distribution companies, necessitating targeted measures [1].

Statistics indicate that the retail sector, comprising 530,019 units, employs over 853,899 people nationwide and generates approximately 71,761 billion rials in added value at current prices. Moreover, studies suggest that the contribution of independent retailers to the distribution network currently surpasses that of chain stores.

Despite the importance of retailers within distribution networks, manufacturing companies often design their marketing programs based on end consumers, underestimating the role of retailers. Furthermore, despite their key role in the supply chain, retailers have not been adequately leveraged in brand creation and brand consolidation; in other words, commercial producers are less inclined to target retailers to build strong brand identities [2].

Considering the experience of developed countries and the key role of retail in distribution networks, Iranian producers and distributors must adopt innovative strategies to influence retailers. Market saturation, intensified competition, shifts in consumer preferences, and evolving customer needs have created numerous challenges for Iranian companies. Companies that effectively utilize available resources such as designing and developing new products, offering high-quality goods at competitive prices, implementing effective advertising, and restructuring distribution channels to access an efficient retail network can overcome these challenges and ensure their survival [3]. Therefore, examining the factors that influence retailers' purchase intentions is of critical importance for manufacturing and distribution companies. Research indicates that limited studies have explored the significance of retailers in Iran; hence, investigating the key factors affecting purchase intentions and word-of-mouth advertising among retailers is particularly valuable. Accordingly, the present study seeks to answer the following question: Which factors influence the purchasing behavior of retailers?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Distribution Channels

The topic of distribution and its channels is of paramount importance in today's marketing world. Within the supply chain, the "golden link" of distribution ensures that finished products reach the end consumer. For manufacturing companies, selecting the appropriate type of distribution channel is a critical decision, as it significantly affects the success of a product in the target market [4].

Intermediaries play a crucial role in distribution channels. These intermediaries whether organizations or individuals facilitate the transfer of ownership from producers to end consumers, creating time, place, and ownership utility for the consumer. While intermediaries incur costs, direct interaction between producers and end consumers may sometimes be more expensive. Ultimately, although intermediaries can theoretically be eliminated, the functions they perform cannot be disregarded [4].

Companies' decisions depend on the type of distribution channel, which may be horizontal or vertical. In a horizontal structure, the number and type of intermediaries at a specific level are determined, whereas in a vertical structure, dependencies exist among companies and channel members. Decisions regarding quantities at different levels are also made in this context. From Stern's perspective, the tasks performed by channel members to achieve distribution objectives are among the most influential factors on distribution systems. Therefore, analyzing the roles, relationships, and flows among channel members is essential. In recent years, identifying factors affecting distribution channel efficiency and planning for their control and optimization has attracted considerable attention, prompting many companies to investigate these factors [4].

2.2. Retailing

Retailers can be classified into various types: store-based retailing, non-store retailing, and retail institutions. Kotler identifies direct selling, direct marketing, automated selling, and service procurement as components of non-store retailing [5].

The rapid growth of retail establishments has made the retail industry highly competitive. Consequently, new management approaches are often required to operate such businesses effectively [6]. The competitive environment among retailers has driven them to offer a wider range of services and benefits to retain customers and increase sales.

One key factor in delivering these services is the sales staff, who directly interact with customers and are among the first to learn about their needs, thereby informing management on how to meet them [7].

Retailers act as intermediaries between wholesalers and consumers and play a crucial role in pricing, speed, and quality of products and services delivered to end users. By improving quality, efficiency, and employing strategies to enhance customer satisfaction and loyalty such as direct mail and tangible rewards retailers create valuable and sustainable sources of competitive advantage for companies [8]. The brand equity of retail stores, defined as consumers' perceptions of stores as strong brands in the domestic market, varies according to the characteristics of local versus chain stores [9].

2.3. Purchase Intention

Consumer behavior encompasses all activities directly related to acquiring, using, and disposing of goods and services, including decision-making processes that occur before and after these actions. Behavioral intention reflects an individual's motivation and commitment to perform a target behavior. The relationship between behavioral intention and actual behavior suggests that individuals are likely to engage in behaviors they intend to perform [10].

According to Lambrecht, behavioral intention is defined as a mental state reflecting an individual's decision to act [11]. Purchase intention refers to the decision to buy a specific good or service, ultimately leading to actual purchasing behavior [12]. Importantly, purchase intention indicates a consumer's willingness to buy a product or service. Choosing a brand, product, or service involves evaluating competing offerings from other providers [13]. Purchase intention measures are often used to predict the likelihood of buying a product within a specified time frame. DeBryan notes that intentional measures can be more effective than behavioral measures in capturing customer decision-making, as purchases may sometimes occur under compulsion [14]. Ajzen's Theory of Planned Behavior posits that behavioral intentions have motivational effects on actual behavior [11], making them the closest predictor of observed behavior.

2.4. Word-of-Mouth Advertising

Positive word-of-mouth (WOM) advertising serves as a vital source of information and can be a powerful factor in consumer decision-making. In modern marketing, WOM must be managed effectively, and conscious strategies should be adopted to capitalize on its benefits. Scholars emphasize the critical importance of WOM for the success of suppliers, with some asserting that it is among the most effective and efficient promotional tools [15].

A unique aspect of verbal advertising that distinguishes it from traditional marketing methods is the positive feedback mechanism between WOM and product sales. Specifically, WOM leads to increased product sales, which in turn generates more word-of-mouth communication, further boosting sales [16]. A salesperson who successfully attracts customers through WOM can persuade them to purchase, foster loyalty, and gain a competitive advantage over other sellers of similar goods and services [17].

2.5. Conceptual Model of the Study

Considering that the model proposed by Sarkar et al. (2016) offers comprehensive coverage of purchasing behavior and encompasses the variables relevant to this study, we have only incorporated the additional variable of word-of-mouth advertising into the model. Therefore, the aforementioned model serves as the conceptual framework for this research. The model is illustrated in Figure 1.

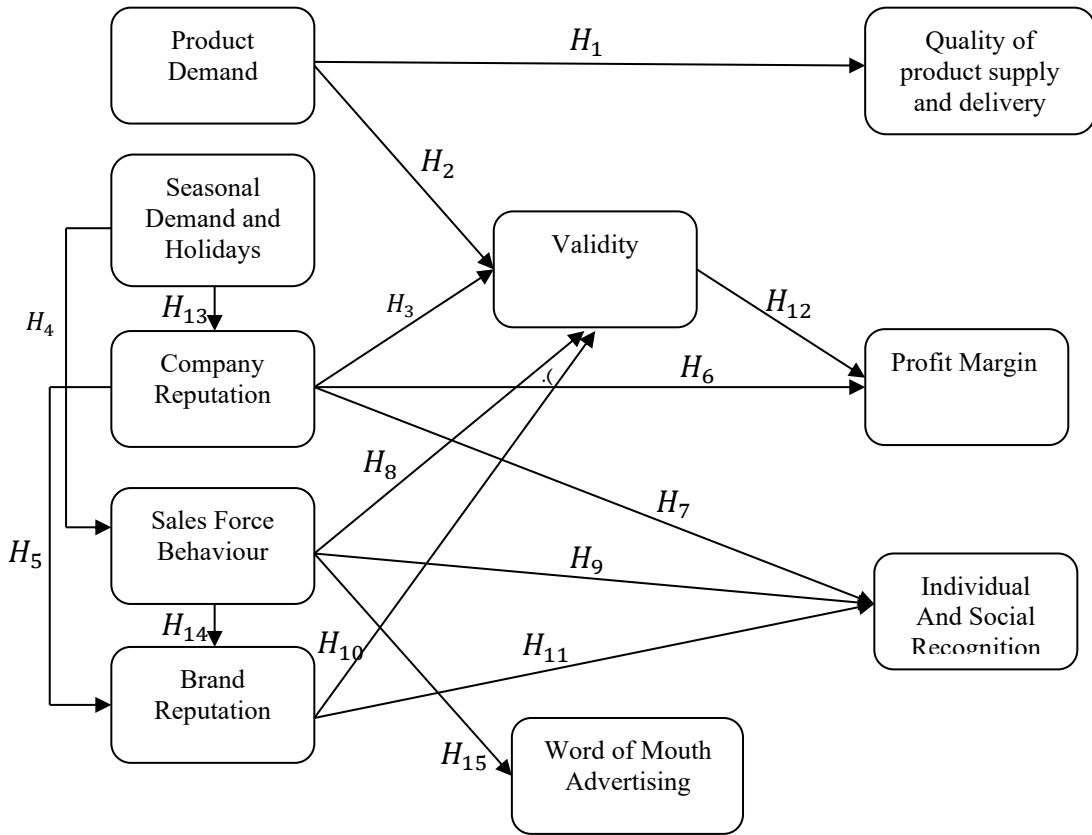


Fig. 1. Conceptual Model of the Study [18]

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present study is applied in terms of purpose and descriptive in terms of research type. Data were collected using a survey-based questionnaire technique. The statistical population consists of retailers in Khorramabad, and cluster sampling was employed.

Given that the population is unlimited, the sample size was determined using the following formula, where $z_{\alpha/2}$ represents the standard normal distribution, which equals 1.96 at a 95% confidence level; δ is the standard deviation, calculated as $R/6$, where R is the range of variation, determined based on the minimum and maximum values of the variable in the population. Here, due to the use of a Likert scale, R/6 is considered equivalent to $4/6$. ϵ denotes the acceptable margin of error, which was set at 0.07 [19].

$$n = \frac{\sigma^2 \cdot z_{\alpha/2}^2}{\epsilon^2} \tag{1}$$

Therefore, the estimated sample size for this study was 348 participants. To measure the variables under investigation, a 61-item questionnaire was employed, covering ten variables: product demand, seasonal and holiday demand, company reputation, salesforce behavior, brand reputation, credibility, supply quality, profit margin, individual and social recognition, and word-of-mouth advertising. The primary data collection tool was the Retailers’

Purchasing Behavior Questionnaire [18], while questions regarding word-of-mouth advertising were adapted from the Word-of-Mouth Advertising Questionnaire [20].

To assess the reliability and consistency of the questionnaires, Cronbach’s alpha test was applied. The obtained alpha values for each variable are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Reliability of Research Variables

Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha	Variable	Cronbach’s Alpha
Product Demand	0.746	Credibility	0.82
Seasonal Demand	0.716	Supply Quality	0.74
Company Reputation	0.80	Profit Margin	0.79
Salesforce Behavior	0.76	Individual & Social Recognition	0.72
Brand Reputation	0.81	Word-of-Mouth Advertising	0.85

As observed, all obtained values are greater than 0.7, indicating that the items related to the study variables are reliable. To assess the validity of the questionnaire, both content validity and construct validity were considered. In this regard, the preliminary questionnaire was reviewed and revised based on the feedback of several experts, including faculty members and professionals in the field, resulting in the final questionnaire. Given the multiple revisions and expert input, it can be asserted that the research instrument possesses sufficient content validity.

For construct validity, factor analysis was performed using SPSS software. Factor loadings for each item were calculated and are presented alongside the corresponding questionnaire item numbers in Table 2.

Table 2. Factor Loadings of Questionnaire Items

Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Variable	Item	Factor Loading	Variable	Item	Factor Loading
Product Demand	17	0.98	Salesforce Behavior	19	0.59	Profit Margin	9	0.63
	18	0.98		33	0.73		10	0.59
	21	0.58		36	0.67		11	0.67
	22	0.66		41	0.64		44	0.54
	25	0.74		51	0.34		46	0.77
	26	0.64		55	0.63		50	0.72
	37	0.53	Brand Reputation	1	0.74		14	0.54
Seasonal Demand	38	0.59	Credibility	2	0.76	Individual & Social Recognition	24	0.75
	40	0.57		4	0.55		27	0.54
	45	0.98		39	0.61		28	0.72
	48	0.57		49	0.77		30	0.71
	54	0.43		57	0.54		31	0.79
Company Reputation	20	0.97	Supply Quality	12	0.81	Word-of-Mouth Advertising	53	0.71
	47	0.97		13	0.68		58	0.51
Company Reputation	3	0.62	Individual & Social Recognition	15	0.66	Word-of-Mouth Advertising	5	0.57
	6	0.40		16	0.58		29	0.57
	32	0.70		23	0.60		59	0.74
	34	0.70		42	0.73		60	0.66
	35	0.56		52	0.65		61	0.71
	43	0.66	7	0.65	8		0.74	

As observed, the factor loadings obtained for all questionnaire items, except for items 6, 51, and 54, are greater than 0.5. This confirms the construct validity of the questionnaire. It should be noted that the aforementioned items were excluded from data analysis due to insufficient factor loadings.

4. DATA ANALYSIS

Based on the demographic and descriptive analysis of the questionnaire, the following results were obtained:

Table 3. Demographic Characteristics of the Sample Members

Component	Sub-component	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	44	12.6%
	Male	304	87.4%
Education	High school or below	153	44%
	Associate degree	110	31.6%
	Bachelor’s degree	79	22.7%
	Master’s degree or higher	6	1.1%
Age	Under 25 years	56	16.1%
	25–35 years	63	18.1%
	35–45 years	172	49.4%
	Above 45 years	57	16.4%

In the present study, hypotheses were tested using the path analysis approach with AMOS 22 software. Path analysis is a statistical method that applies standardized beta coefficients from multiple regression models within structural models. The primary objective of path analysis is to obtain quantitative estimates of causal relationships (either unidirectional or covariate) among a set of variables [21]. Path analysis is applicable only to observed variables. Since all variables in this study are observable, path analysis was employed to examine the relationships among them.

One of the key assumptions for applying path analysis is the normality of the data. To assess this assumption, skewness and kurtosis were calculated for each variable under investigation. The results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Data Normality

Variable	Skewness	Critical Ratio	Kurtosis	Critical Ratio
Product Demand	0.44	1.31	-0.63	-0.63
Seasonal Demand	1.02	1.31	0.88	0.88
Company Reputation	0.38	1.31	0.021	0.021
Salesforce Behavior	0.31	1.31	-0.58	-0.58
Brand Reputation	0.41	1.31	-0.48	-0.48
Credibility	0.27	1.31	-0.05	-0.05
Supply Quality	0.06	1.31	-0.39	-0.39
Profit Margin	0.12	1.31	-0.76	-0.76
Individual & Social Recognition	0.16	1.31	-0.88	-0.88
Word-of-Mouth Advertising	0.71	1.31	0.08	0.08

Data normality is confirmed when skewness and kurtosis values fall within the range of ± 2 . As shown in Table 4, all variables in this study meet this criterion. Therefore, the normality assumption is satisfied, and path analysis can be applied to examine the conceptual model and test the hypotheses.

Prior to hypothesis testing, it is essential to evaluate the fit of the conceptual model. To assess the model’s adequacy with the observed data, various fit indices were calculated. In this study, the model fit was examined based on the most widely recognized indices recommended by researchers.

Table 5. Fit Indices of the Conceptual Model

Fit Index	Acceptable Range	Estimated Value	Result
CFI	Greater than 0.90	0.922	Confirmed
IFI	Greater than 0.90	0.934	Confirmed
NFI	Greater than 0.90	0.905	Confirmed
CMIN/DF	Between 1 and 3	2.05	Confirmed
RMSEA	Less than 0.09	0.051	Confirmed

To test the significance of the hypotheses, two indices were employed: the critical ratio (CR) and the p-value. At a significance level of 0.05, the critical ratio must exceed 1.96; any parameter with a CR below this threshold is considered non-significant in the model. Additionally, p-values below 0.05 indicate that the calculated regression weights differ significantly from zero at a 95% confidence level. Based on the results of the model analysis, the hypotheses were examined, and the findings are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Results of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Standardized Coefficient (β)	CR	p-value	Result
H1: Product demand → Supply and delivery quality	0.24	4.57	***	Supported
H2: Product demand → Retailer credibility	0.37	8.23	***	Supported
H3: Company reputation → Retailer credibility	0.03	0.53	0.59	Not Supported
H4: Seasonal and holiday demand → Salesforce behavior	0.32	6.20	***	Supported
H5: Company reputation → Brand reputation	0.16	3.04	***	Supported
H6: Company reputation → Profit margin	0.38	7.80	***	Supported
H7: Company reputation → Individual & social recognition	0.20	4.07	***	Supported
H8: Salesforce behavior → Retailer credibility	0.26	5.45	***	Supported
H9: Salesforce behavior → Individual & social recognition	0.31	6.07	***	Supported
H10: Brand reputation → Retailer credibility	0.08	1.67	0.09	Not Supported
H11: Brand reputation → Individual & social recognition	0.06	1.19	0.23	Not Supported
H12: Credibility → Profit margin	0.20	4.21	***	Supported
H13: Seasonal and holiday demand → Company reputation	0.16	3.08	***	Supported
H14: Salesforce behavior → Brand reputation	0.19	3.63	***	Supported
H15: Salesforce behavior → Word-of-mouth advertising	0.35	6.99	***	Supported

Note: ***p < 0.001

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the key conclusions and practical recommendations are summarized as follows:

1. Effect of Product Demand on Supply and Delivery Quality (H1)

Since the first hypothesis indicating a positive effect of product demand on supply and delivery quality is supported, it is recommended that retailers:

- Order products that other retailers are purchasing.
- Prioritize products with high consumer demand.
- Purchase products that sales representatives bring along, ensuring immediate delivery and avoiding delays.

2. Effect of Product Demand on Retailer Credibility (H2)

Given that the second hypothesis highlighting a positive impact of product demand on retailer credibility is supported, retailers are advised to:

- Maintain good relationships with wholesalers to obtain products on credit or with deferred payments, thus alleviating financial and credibility pressures.
- Consider bank loans with favorable interest rates to meet payment obligations to wholesalers without penalties.

3. Effect of Company Reputation on Retailer Credibility (H3)

As the third hypothesis was not supported, the results suggest that at the retail level, company reputation does not significantly influence retailer credibility. Retailers are therefore advised not to overpay for products from highly reputed companies, as the benefit is minimal at this level. Further research at higher levels (e.g., wholesalers or manufacturers) may yield different outcomes.

4. Effect of Seasonal and Holiday Demand on Salesforce Behavior (H4)

With the fourth hypothesis supported, it is recommended that retail salesforces leverage Customer Relationship Management (CRM) techniques during holidays and peak seasons to maximize sales, as demand is typically higher during these periods.

5. Effect of Company Reputation on Brand Reputation (H5)

Since this hypothesis is supported, retailers should prioritize purchasing and promoting products with high brand reputation from companies with strong corporate reputations.

6. Effect of Company Reputation on Profit Margin (H6)

Given the positive impact of company reputation on profit margin, retailers are advised to order products from well-known companies and consider adjusting prices moderately to enhance profits without reducing customer demand.

7. Effect of Company Reputation on Individual and Social Recognition (H7)

As this hypothesis is supported, sales personnel should maintain a professional and prestigious appearance, such as wearing appropriate attire, to positively influence consumer perceptions, especially in small retail contexts where profit is the main objective.

8. Effect of Salesforce Behavior on Retailer Credibility (H8)

With H8 supported, retailers are encouraged to order products from sales representatives who demonstrate effective interpersonal behavior to negotiate better discounts and terms.

9. Effect of Salesforce Behavior on Individual and Social Recognition (H9)

Since this hypothesis is supported, retailers should provide training to their sales personnel to better understand and respond to the social conditions of customers, including proper guidance on product use.

10. Effect of Brand Reputation on Retailer Credibility (H10)

As this hypothesis was not supported, similar to H3, retailers should avoid paying premium prices for products solely based on brand reputation, as brand reputation has minimal effect on retailer credibility at this level.

11. Effect of Brand Reputation on Individual and Social Recognition (H11)

Likewise, retailers are advised not to prioritize ordering products solely based on brand reputation, since this factor does not significantly influence individual or social recognition.

12. Effect of Credibility on Profit Margin (H12)

Given the positive relationship, retailers are recommended to purchase in bulk when companies offer high-volume orders at similar prices, as this can increase profit margins.

13. Effect of Seasonal and Holiday Demand on Company Reputation (H13)

Retailers should focus on purchasing products from reputable companies during peak seasons and holidays, as higher sales are expected during these periods.

14. Effect of Salesforce Behavior on Brand Reputation (H14)

Supported results suggest that purchasing products from well-known brands can enhance store attractiveness and draw more customers.

15. Effect of Salesforce Behavior on Word-of-Mouth Advertising (H15)

Retailers and sales personnel should actively promote products they have personally used and found satisfactory. Sales personnel can advertise these products to retailers, who in turn can engage in positive word-of-mouth promotion to end consumers.

Transparency Statement

The data supporting this study are available upon reasonable request to the corresponding author, subject to ethical and confidentiality considerations.

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Declaration of Interest

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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