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RETAIL CHANNEL STRATEGY AND THE MATERNAL BUYER: SHAPING THE CHILDCARE MARKETING MIX.

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ABSTRACT

The rapidly growing Indian childcare market is predominantly shaped by maternal decision-makers. The Study "Retail Channel Strategy and the Maternal Buyer: Shaping the Childcare Marketing Mix", investigated how the Product, Price, Place, and Promotion (the marketing mix) elements influence mothers' purchasing habits. Analyzing primary survey data from 250 mothers using statistical methods like mean ranking and ANOVA, the findings emphasize safety and quality as non-negotiable priorities. Affordability and discounts significantly drive purchase choices, and mothers navigate between the trust of traditional retail and the convenience of digital platforms. The study concludes that strategies such as influencer marketing and expert endorsements are crucial for building brand trust and driving sales.

KEY WORDS

Maternal Consumer Behaviour, Marketing Mix, Childcare Products, Retail Channels, Consumer Decision-Making, Brand Trust

INTODUCTION

Mothers are the pivotal decision-makers in the childcare market , driving significant consumption and market trends due to evolving lifestyles and increased disposable income. Their purchasing decisions are complex, moving beyond mere product function to prioritize safety , quality, trust, and convenience. This transformation means mothers no longer rely solely on tradition, instead actively utilizing organized retail, e-commerce, and peer recommendations. Consequently, childcare brands must continually rethink and align their marketing mix—product, price, place, and promotion—to meet these high maternal expectations. The shift from trusted traditional outlets to modern digital and hybrid retail channels necessitates a deep understanding of these changing dynamics for successful, consumer-centric strategies.

STATEMENT OF PROBLEM

The rapid growth of India's childcare sector, fueled by urbanization and working mothers, has positioned mothers as key decision-makers navigating diverse retail channels. They no longer rely on tradition; instead, they actively demand safety, quality, and value while comparing products across traditional stores, supermarkets, and e-commerce platforms. Many businesses, however, still rely on conventional marketing methods, failing to address these heightened maternal expectations. This gap between sophisticated consumer demands and outdated market practices necessitates an essential analysis. Therefore, this study aims to analyze how mothers perceive the marketing mix (product

, price, place, and promotion) across various retail channels to inform more effective, consumer-centric business strategies.

OBJECTIVES

- To evaluate the accessibility and effectiveness of different retail channels (online, in-store, hybrid) as part of the place strategy in influencing maternal buying behavior.
- To explore how promotional methods including advertising, influencer marketing, and in-store promotions engage mothers and affect their awareness and consideration of childcare products.

NEED FOR STUDY

The childcare market is expanding due to working mothers, rising incomes, and the diversification of retail channels like e-commerce and supermarkets. As primary decision-makers, mothers now have numerous choices but often find that many businesses still use conventional marketing. This approach fails to address the critical maternal demands for safety, quality, trust, and emotional value. This gap necessitates an analysis of how the marketing mix (product, price, place, and promotion) actually influences maternal purchase behavior. By gaining these insights, brands can effectively tailor strategies, build lasting trust, and secure long-term loyalty in this highly competitive sector.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1 Area of study Coimbatore, Tamilnadu

2 Sample size 250 respondents

3 Sampling method Simple random sampling

4 Data collection Primary data

5 Period of study June 2025 - September 2025

6 Analysis Tools Simple percentage analysis, Descriptive Statistics,

Chi-square, Mean Ranking, ANOVA, t-Test.

LIMITATION OF STUDY

The study is limited to a specific geographic area, so its findings may not represent all maternal consumers across diverse regions. Responses may include personal biases since mothers' decisions are influenced by emotions and past experiences. The study also cannot fully capture external factors like family influence, cultural norms, or market shifts. Additionally, rapid changes in consumer preferences, retail formats, and childcare regulations may affect the long-term relevance of the results, making them context-specific.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The study by **Debra Grace and Aron O' Cass** titled '**Attributions of Service Switching: A Study of Consumers' and Providers' Perceptions of Child-Care Service Delivery**', published in (**2001**)[1], revealed that core service failures (e.g., inadequate facilities, poor staff ratios) were the main reasons for switching. The researchers concluded that strong core service delivery, staff training, and proactive service recovery are vital to reduce switching and boost positive referrals.

The study by **Hugh Waters, Laurel Hatt,** and **David Peters** titled '**Working with the private sector for child health**', published in(**2003**)[2], revealed that the private sector is a major source of child health care in many low- and middle-income countries. The researchers concluded that while the private sector offers promise for improving children's health, many questions remain about the feasibility and impact of these strategies.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

PERCENTAGE ANALYSIS

Demographic profile of the Respondents

Table 4.1.1

Demographic profile of the Maternal respondents

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE	PARTICULARS	NO OF RESPONDENTS	PERCENTAGE
AGE	Under 25	47	18.7
	26-30	**133**	**52.8**
	31-35	54	21.4
	36-40	18	7.1
	Total	252	100.0
EDUCATION	High School	25	9.9
	Graduate	**113**	**44.8**
	Post Graduate	84	33.3
	Professional Degree	30	11.9
	Total	252	100.0
OCCUPATION	Homemaker	92	36.5
	Working Professional	**102**	**40.5**
	Business	27	10.7
	Other	31	12.3
	Total	252	100.0

MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD INCOME	Below 25000	84	33.3
	25001-50000	**108**	**42.9**
	50001-100000	41	16.3
	Above 100000	19	7.5
	Total	252	100.0
NUMBER OF CHILDREN	1	**147**	**58.3**
	2	98	38.9
	3+	7	2.8
	Total	252	100.0
AGE OF YOUNGEST CHILD	0-6 months	43	17.1
	6-12 months	63	25.0
	1-2 years	**83**	**32.9**
	2-5 years	63	25.0
	Total	252	100.0

(Source: Computed)

- Total Respondents are 252 maternal consumers.
- The largest segment belongs to the 26-30 years age group, accounting for 52.8% of the survey participants.
- 18.7% of the respondents are in the age group under 25.
- 21.4% of the respondents fall into the age group of 31-35 years.
- The smallest segment, 7.1%, is represented by the age group of 36-40 years.

CHI SQUARE

Table 4.4.1

Frequency in purchasing baby care products

Demographic Profiles	Groups	Frequency in purchasing baby care products												Chi. square	Sig.
		P1		P2		P3		P4		P5		Total			
		N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%	N	%		
Age	Under 25	2	4.2	7	14.8	28	59.5	8	17.0	2	4.2	47	100	21.944	.038
	26-30	3	2.2	30	22.5	70	53.8	23	17.2	7	5.2	133	100		
	31-35	3	5.5	18	33.3	23	42.5	7	12.9	3	5.5	54	100		
	36-40	1	5.5	4	32.2	5	27.7	3	16.6	5	27.7	18	100		
Education	High School	2	8.0	4	16.0	12	48.0	2	8.0	5	20.0	25	100	14.928	.245
	Graduate	4	3.5	31	27.4	55	48.6	17	15.0	6	5.3	113	100		
	Postgraduate	2	2.3	20	23.8	43	51.1	16	19.0	3	3.5	84	100		
	Professional Degree	1	3.3	4	13.3	16	53.3	6	20.0	3	10.0	30	100		
Occupation	Homemaker	2	2.1	22	23.9	43	46.7	15	16.3	10	10.8	92	100	5.483	.940
	Working Professional	4	3.9	24	23.5	53	51.9	16	15.6	5	4.9	102	100		
	Business	1	3.7	6	22.2	14	51.8	5	18.5	1	3.7	27	100		
	Other	2	6.7	7	22.5	16	51.6	5	16.1	1	3.2	31	100		
	Below 25000	2	2.3	17	20.2	39	46.4	18	21.4	8	9.5	84	100	22.620	.031

Monthly Household Income	25001-50000	4	3.7	32	29.6	57	52.7	13	12.0	2	1.8	108	100		
	50001-100000	3	7.3	9	21.9	18	43.9	8	19.5	3	7.3	41	100		
	Above 100000	0	0	1	5.2	12	63.1	2	10.5	4	21.0	19	100		
Number of Children	1	5	3.4	32	21.7	77	52.3	25	17.0	8	5.4	147	100	2.563	.959
	2	4	4.0	25	25.5	46	46.9	15	15.3	8	8.1	98	100		
	3+	0	0	2	28.5	3	42.8	1	14.2	1	14.2	7	100		
Age of Youngest Child	0-6 months	3	6.9	13	30.2	16	37.2	9	20.9	2	4.6	43	100	13.380	.342
	6-12 months	0	0	15	23.8	35	55.5	8	12.6	5	7.9	63	100		
	1-2 years	5	6.0	17	20.4	46	55.4	10	12.0	5	6.0	83	100		
	2-5 years	1	1.5	14	22.2	29	46.0	14	22.2	5	7.9	63	100		

(Source: Computed)

Most maternal consumers purchase baby care products frequently, regardless of their demographic profile. However, the age of the respondents and their monthly household income are the only demographic factors found to have a significant association with this purchasing frequency, leading to the rejection of the null hypothesis in those cases. Conversely, educational qualification, occupational status, the number of children, and the age of the youngest child were all found to have no significant association with the frequency of purchasing baby care products. Therefore, the chi-square test results indicate that while frequent purchases are common across the board, only age and income significantly influence how frequently these purchases occur

ANOVA

Table 4.5.1

Influence of Buying Behaviour Steps for Baby Care Products

Demographic profiles	Groups	Influence of Buying Behaviour Steps for Baby Care Products					
		N	Mean	SD	F-value	Sig. value	S/NS
Age	Under 25	47	3.3026	1.04712	3.547	.015	S
	26-30	133	3.7109	.78388			
	31-35	54	3.7366	.96341			
	36-40	18	3.3086	.86197			
Education	High School	25	3.1600	1.09012	5.360	.001	S
	Graduate	113	3.4907	.89405			
	Postgraduate	84	3.8452	.79228			
	Professional Degree	30	3.7889	.81459			
Occupation	Homemaker	92	3.6461	.89995	1.007	.390	NS
	Working Professional	102	3.6808	.88994			
	Business	27	3.4527	.87648			
	Other	31	3.4194	.92327			
Monthly Household Income	Below 25000	84	3.4392	.93168	2.802	.041	S
	25001-50000	108	3.6193	.79432			

	50001-100000	41	3.7507	1.00117			
	Above 100000	19	4.0292	.92507			
Number of Children	1	147	3.6145	.91812	1.777	.171	NS
	2	98	3.5635	.83671			
	3+	7	4.2222	1.14396			
Age of Youngest Child	0-6 months	43	3.5530	.94794	.588	.624	NS
	6-12 months	63	3.5115	.83924			
	1-2 years	83	3.6479	.83217			
	2-5 years	63	3.7037	1.00040			

(Source: Computed)

The analysis reveals that age, educational qualification, and monthly household income all have a significant influence on the buying behaviour steps for baby care products ($p < 0.05$). Specifically, the highest mean influence scores were observed among postgraduates, those with income above ₹1,00,000, and consumers aged 31-35 years, suggesting these groups are most influenced by the buying process. Conversely, occupational status, the number of children, and the age of the youngest child were found to have no significant difference in their influence on buying behaviour steps ($p > 0.05$), leading to the acceptance of the null hypothesis for these demographic variables.

DESCRIPTIVE STATISTICS

Table 4.2.1

Influence of various sources in the decision to purchase baby care products (BCP)

Statement	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	S.D
Advertisements (TV, print, digital)	252	1	3	2.08	.762
Friends	252	1	3	2.26	.538
Doctors / Pediatricians	252	1	3	2.53	.688
Self-search (e.g., internet, blogs)	252	1	3	2.24	.657
Family members	252	1	3	2.33	.679
Company representatives / brand promoters	252	1	3	1.90	.701
Sales promotions at point of sale	252	1	3	1.89	.789

Professional medical advice is the primary factor influencing maternal consumers' purchase decisions for child care products, with doctors/pediatricians recording the highest mean influence score (2.53). This is closely followed by trusted personal networks like family members (2.33) and friends (2.26). In contrast, direct marketing activities such as advertisements across various media (2.08) and company representatives/sales promotions at the point of sale (1.90 and 1.89) were rated as the least influential factors. The data clearly shows that professional and relational trust outweighs promotional efforts in this sector.

MEAN RANKING

Table 4.3.1

Important factors while purchasing baby care products

Particulars	N	Mean	Rank
Safety	252	2.29	1
Quality	252	2.58	2
Innovation	252	3.02	3
Brand Reputation	252	3.37	4
Packaging Design	252	3.73	5

From the table 4.3.1 - It has been evident from the mean ranking that the higher important factor considered by mothers while purchasing baby care products is "Safety" (mean 2.29) followed by, "Quality" (mean 2.58), "Innovation" (mean 3.02), "Brand Reputation" (mean 3.37), "Packaging Design" (mean 3.73). **Thus, it has been determined that the most important factor considered by mothers while purchasing baby care products is Quality.**

REFERENCE

1)The study was conducted by ***Debra Grace and Aron O' Cass (2001)*** with the title *"Attributions of Service Switching: A Study of Consumers' and Providers' Perceptions of Child-Care Service Delivery."* It was published in the journal ***Journal of Services Marketing***, ***Volume 15, Issue 6***, in ***October 2001***, and the journal's ***ISSN is 0887-6045***.

2) The study was authored by ***Hugh Waters, Laurel Hatt, and David Peters (2003)*** with the title *"Working with the private sector for child health."* It appeared in the journal ***Bulletin of the World Health Organization***, ***Volume 81, Issue 8***, in ***August 2003***, and the journal's ***ISSN is 0042-9686***.

SUGGESTION

To address these objectives, future research should not only evaluate the effectiveness of retail channels but also delve into the specific maternal needs driving the choice between online, in-store, and hybrid models, particularly concerning trust and convenience. Regarding promotions, the study should quantify the Return on Investment (ROI) of different methods, especially influencer marketing versus traditional advertising, by linking them directly to changes in both brand awareness and sales conversions. A crucial suggestion is to investigate the integration of 'Place' and 'Promotion', examining how location-based digital promotions impact purchasing within different retail environments.

CONCULSION

The study affirms that safety and quality are the fundamental drivers of maternal choice in childcare, though affordability and discounts are crucial for finalizing purchases. Mothers increasingly favor convenient online and hybrid retail channels for information, but in-store experiences remain vital for establishing the trust and quality assurance they demand. Brands must leverage targeted promotions like influencer marketing to build awareness among younger mothers. Ultimately, sustainable growth requires providers to focus on offering transparent, value-for-money products and ensuring a seamless integration of digital and physical retail touchpoints.

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