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Customer and Competitor Awareness Index for Fish Marketing Agents

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ABSTRACT

The present study examined customer and competitor awareness among fish marketing agents of selected freshwater fish markets in the Nadia district, West Bengal. The study area was chosen for its fish production and diverse fishery resources. The competitor awareness index and customer awareness index were constructed from respondents' scores on a 0–2 scale and expressed as percentages of the maximum obtainable score. The results of the study showed that, among wholesalers, better and reasonable prices, good marketing capabilities, loyalty, and selling fish on credit ranked highly in the competitor awareness criteria. In contrast, the availability of good-quality fish and better and reasonable prices dominated the customer awareness criteria. Moreover, among the retailers, good marketing capabilities, availability of high-quality fish, and reasonable prices were prominent in the competitor awareness criteria. In contrast, better and reasonable prices, marketing capabilities, and satisfied behaviour/attitude were most important in the customer awareness criteria. The findings indicate that both economic and relational attributes shape market positioning in freshwater fish marketing systems.

1. INTRODUCTION

Marketing demand for freshwater fish depends not only on production and supply but also on how market actors understand customer requirements and competitor behaviour. Customer orientation and competitor orientation constitute important dimensions of market orientation because effective market actors continuously acquire, interpret and respond to information about customers and competing sellers. Recent research indicates that fish-purchasing decisions are multidimensional and are shaped by product characteristics, price, socio-economic factors and wider personal and situational considerations (Saidi et al., 2023). Price sensitivity itself varies considerably across consumer segments, highlighting the importance of understanding heterogeneous customer groups (Armbrecht et al., 2023). Recent research on agricultural marketing behaviour also demonstrates the importance of information access, planning and decision-making in strengthening marketing performance (Amar et al., 2025).

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This research addresses the issue through two practical indices, competitor awareness and customer awareness, applied to fish wholesalers and retailers in selected markets of Nadia district, West Bengal. The study is useful because it renders intellectual market-orientation ideas into directly observable criteria such as price, product quality, communication, loyalty, credit sales, and the ability to satisfy customer preferences.

Kohli and Jaworski (1990) define market orientation as the organisation-wide generation of market intelligence, its dissemination across departments, and responsiveness to it. Narver and Slater (1990) conceptualise market orientation as an organisational culture built around customer orientation, competitor orientation, and inter-functional coordination, and show that it is positively associated with profitability. Jaworski and Kohli (1993) further demonstrated that market orientation has identifiable antecedents and consequences, making it a useful framework for empirical work on market behaviour.

Fish marketing presents additional challenges because fish is highly perishable and quality-sensitive. Freshness is a fundamental component of fish quality and directly influences the evaluation and marketability of fish products (Madhubhashini et al., 2024). Consumer preference for finfish reflects multiple intrinsic and extrinsic product attributes (Saidi et al., 2023), while recent large-scale evidence across 12 seafood markets, including India, shows that food safety and taste remain among the most highly valued seafood attributes (Schrobback et al., 2025). Evidence from West Bengal is particularly relevant: Molla et al. (2025) identified lack of locally available fresh fish, irregular supply and price fluctuation among important constraints confronting fish consumers. These observations strengthen the rationale for examining how fish marketing agents perceive quality, price, customer requirements and competitor capabilities.

Against this background, the present study was conducted and presents a localised empirical picture of how fish wholesalers and retailers rank market-awareness criteria in the Nadia district. Its contribution is descriptive and applied rather than causal: it identifies which awareness dimensions matter most to market participants within the selected study area.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Selection of the Study Area and Rationale

West Bengal comprises 23 districts, of which Nadia district was considered the study locale. The rationale for selection was its notable contribution to freshwater fish production and diversified fishery resources. The markets in the district primarily deal in freshwater fish, so the study focuses on the freshwater fish marketing system. Three blocks, namely Chakdah, Krishnanagar-I and Krishnanagar-II, were selected for the study based on fish production, and the respondents were wholesalers and retailers. From each block, 2 wholesale and 2 retail markets were selected for the study, making a total of 6 wholesale and 6 retail markets. However, in the last block, only 1 wholesale and 1 retail market were found, so a total of 5 wholesale and 5 retail markets were included in the study. A total of 38 wholesalers and 62 retailers were interviewed for the study, making a sample size of 100.

2.2 Competitor and Customer Awareness Index

It was developed based on the formula given by Kanaga (1988). The index was constructed to measure the competitor and customer awareness index of the wholesalers and retailers. The responses of the respondents were recorded on a scale of 0-2, with 0 indicating not important, 1 indicating important, and 2 indicating very important. A three-point Likert-type approach has also been employed in recent fish-market consumer research in West Bengal for assessing consumers' perceptions of market-related attributes (Molla et al., 2025).

$$\text{Competitor awareness index} = \left\{\frac{\text{Total score obtained}}{\text{Maximum score obtainable}} \text{X } 100\right\}$$

$$\text{Customer awareness index} = \left\{\frac{\text{Total score obtained}}{\text{Maximum score obtainable}} \text{X } 100\right.$$

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Competitor Awareness Index for Wholesalers

One of the major challenges faced by the farmers who market their products is determining the target market (Skora, 2006). It is important to know who your potential customer is, and at the same time, it is important to know the competition around. This is important for developing a foolproof marketing plan and strategy. Hence, the competitor awareness index was developed to understand the perception and competency of the wholesalers about their market competitors. Table 1 reveals that a better and reasonable price was the most important parameter with an index score of 97.43%, followed by good

marketing capabilities (96.15%), loyalty (94.87%), selling fish on credit (93.58%), and availability of good quality products (92.30%). The prominence of price and marketing capability in the present study is consistent with contemporary consumer research showing substantial heterogeneity in price sensitivity among fish-consumer segments (Armbrecht et al., 2023). Marketing-related attributes are also important in seafood purchasing, with branding, product information, packaging and pricing strategies influencing consumer behaviour and purchase intentions (Gosh, 2024). The least important parameter was found to be better processing capabilities, with a score of 10.25%, since processing is not done in wholesale markets. Moreover, Bhutia et al. (2020) observed similar results where the majority of respondents perceived the quality, variety, and reasonable price of fish as the primary criteria for selecting fish markets.

3.2 Customer Awareness Index for Wholesalers

The customer awareness index for wholesalers was also calculated in similar lines. Table 02 shows that the availability of good quality fish in their shops was the most important parameter for customers to come to their shops, with an index value of 98.71%, followed by better and reasonable price (96.15%), satisfied with their behaviour (94.87%), loyalty (71.79%), and good marketing capabilities (55.12%). The predominance of product quality is consistent with recent literature identifying freshness as a fundamental component of fish quality (Madhubhashini et al., 2024). A systematic review of finfish preferences similarly identified freshness, price and other intrinsic and extrinsic attributes as important cues influencing consumer choice (Saidi et al., 2023). Evidence from West Bengal further indicates that the lack of locally available fresh fish, irregular supply and price fluctuation remain important constraints experienced by fish consumers (Molla et al., 2025). These findings support the present result that maintaining a reliable supply of fresh, high-quality fish at acceptable prices can provide an important competitive advantage to wholesalers (Salim et al., 2023). These findings closely support the present result, demonstrating that the ability to consistently supply fresh, high-quality fish can be an important competitive advantage for fish traders.

Table 1. Competitor awareness index for wholesalers

S.N.	Competitor Awareness Parameters	Not So Important (0)		Important (1)		Very Important (2)		Index	Rank
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1.	Due to his good marketing (advertising and promoting) capabilities	0	0	3	7.69	36	92.31	96.15	**2**
2.	Better and more reasonable price	0	0	2	5.13	37	94.87	97.43	**1**
3.	Good communication skills	3	7.69	33	84.62	3	7.69	50	9
4.	Loyalty	0	0	4	10.26	35	89.74	94.87	**3**
5.	Availability of good quality products(fish)	1	2.56	4	10.26	33	84.62	89.74	7
6.	Fulfils the preference of the customer and meets their demands	0	0	6	15.38	33	84.62	92.30	**5**
7.	Satisfied with his behaviour/attitude	0	0	38	97.44	1	2.56	51.28	8
8.	Sells a variety of products preferred by the customers	0	0	7	17.95	32	82.05	91.02	6
9.	Better processing capabilities	34	87.18	2	5.13	3	7.69	10.25	10
10.	Sells fish on credit	0	0	5	12.82	34	87.18	93.58	**4**

Table 2. Customer awareness index for wholesalers

S.N.	Customer Awareness Parameters	Not So Important		Important		Very Important		Index	Rank
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1.	Due to his good marketing (advertising and promoting) capabilities	0	0	35	89.74	4	10.26	55.12	**5**
2.	Better and more reasonable price	1	2.56	1	2.56	37	94.87	96.15	**2**
3.	Loyalty	1	2.56	10	25.64	28	71.79	71.79	**4**
4.	Availability of good quality products(fish)	0	0	1	2.56	38	97.44	98.71	**1**
5.	Fulfils the preference of the customer and meets their demands	0	0	37	94.87	2	5.13	52.56	6
6.	Satisfied with his behaviour/attitude	0	0	4	10.26	35	89.74	94.87	**3**
7.	Sells a variety of products preferred by the customers	0	0	38	97.44	1	2.56	51.28	7

3.3 Competitor Awareness Index for Retailers

The competitor awareness index for retailers was also calculated accordingly. Table 3 shows that good marketing capabilities are the major reason for the success of their competitor, with an index score of 92.45%, followed by availability of good quality fish (92.44%), reasonable price (90.56%), loyalty (80.18%), and selling a variety of products preferred by the customer (72.64%). These findings suggest that competitive positioning in fish retail markets extends beyond price alone and also depends on how effectively sellers differentiate and communicate their offerings. Recent evidence indicates that seafood branding, product information and other marketing attributes influence purchasing behaviour (Gosh, 2024). Consumers may also use information relating to product origin and traceability as differentiation cues when purchasing fish products (Rodríguez-Salvador & Calvo Dopico, 2023). Similarly, Mugaonkar et al. (2011) reported quality and freshness of the fish as the major criteria among customers for selecting fish markets.

3.4 Customer Awareness Index for Retailers

The customer awareness index in Table 4 indicates that better and reasonable price was the most important criterion for customers purchasing their products, with an index score of 97.16%, followed by good marketing capabilities (92.45%), satisfaction with behaviour and attitude (85.84%), better processing capabilities (83.01%), and fulfilment of customer preferences (80.18%). For retailers, better processing capabilities were found because retail markets involve a substantial amount of processing work. The study conducted by Menozzi et al. (2020) also revealed that customers prefer better-processed fish to unprocessed fish, which clearly indicates the need to place greater emphasis on the processing capabilities of marketing agents. The relatively high importance assigned to processing capability suggests that retail customers also value convenience, presentation and product-handling services. Recent consumer research has demonstrated that product form, freshness, branding and packaging-related attributes can significantly influence seafood purchasing behaviour (Gosh, 2024). Thus, processing and retail presentation may function as additional means by which fish retailers differentiate their products and respond to customer expectations.

From a broader fisheries-development perspective, improving customer and competitor awareness should therefore be complemented by stronger capacity building, market information systems and institutional linkages. Fisheries extension systems based on stakeholder convergence can facilitate technology dissemination, skill development and improved market access, while digital extension mechanisms can strengthen the ability of fisheries actors to respond to emerging market requirements (Nanda et al., 2025). Such interventions could help wholesalers and retailers translate market awareness into more effective and sustainable marketing practices.

Table 3. Competitor awareness index for retailers

S.N.	Competitor Awareness Parameters	Not So Important (0)		Important (1)		Very Important (2)		Index	Rank
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1.	Due to his good marketing (advertising and promoting) capabilities	0	0	8	15.09	45	84.91	92.46	**1**
2.	Better and more reasonable price	0	0	10	18.86	43	81.13	90.56	**3**
3.	Good communication skills	21	39.62	32	60.38	0	0	30.18	10
4.	Loyalty	0	0	21	39.62	32	60.38	80.18	**4**
5.	Availability of good quality products(fish)	0	0	28	52.83	35	66.04	92.44	**2**
6.	Fulfils the preference of the customer and meets their demands	0	0	45	84.91	8	15.09	57.54	9
7.	Satisfied with his behaviour/attitude	0	0	32	60.38	21	39.62	69.81	8
8.	Sells a variety of products preferred by the customers	0	0	29	54.72	24	45.28	72.64	**5**
9.	Better processing capabilities	0	0	21	39.62	32	60.38	70.75	6
10.	Old business	0	0	32	60.38	21	39.62	69.81	7

Table 4. Customer awareness index for retailers

S.N.	Customer awareness parameters	Not So Important (0)		Important (1)		Very Important (2)		Index	Rank
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%		
1.	Due to his good marketing (advertising and promoting) capabilities	0	0	8	15.09	45	84.91	92.45	2
2.	Better and more reasonable price	0	0	3	5.67	50	94.33	97.16	1
3.	Good communication skills	0	0	45	84.19	8	15.09	57.54	9
4.	Loyalty	0	0	29	54.72	24	45.28	72.64	7
5.	Availability of good quality products(fish)	0	0	24	45.28	29	54.72	77.35	6
6.	Fulfils the preference of the customer and meets their demands	0	0	21	39.62	32	60.38	80.18	5
7.	Satisfied with his behaviour/attitude	5	9.43	5	9.43	43	81.14	85.84	3
8.	Sells a variety of products preferred by the customers	2	3.77	29	54.71	22	41.51	68.86	8
9.	Better processing capabilities	4	7.54	10	18.86	39	73.58	83.01	4

4. CONCLUSIONS

The results of the study indicate that successful fish marketing enterprises are not dependent on a single factor; rather, their competitive advantage is determined by their ability to combine effective marketing practices with quality assurance, competitive pricing, customer relationship management, and product diversification. Effective marketing capability enables traders to understand consumer preferences, establish reliable procurement and market linkages, negotiate with suppliers and buyers, maintain regular customers, and respond to changes in demand and prices. This suggests that interventions aimed at improving the competitiveness of fish marketers should go beyond physical infrastructure and supply enhancement and should also focus on marketing skill development, market intelligence, customer relationship management, quality maintenance, competitive pricing, and product diversification. Customer and competitor awareness among fish marketing agents is sine qua non for advancing the fish marketing sector to the next level of advanced marketing, embracing customer and competitor management.

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