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Unveiling Underlying Factors Affecting Consumer Loyalty of Sweetmeat Products: Findings from SEM and fsQCA

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Abstract

This study aims to quantify the determinants that impact consumer satisfaction and consumer loyalty within the sweetmeat food industry. The current study finds that food quality, food safety, pricing, and trust have a substantial impact on consumer satisfaction and loyalty which is supported by the theory of planned behavior, S-O-R, and equity. A convenient sampling method was employed to collect survey data from 279 participants who are engaged in the sweetmeat industry in the northern region of Bangladesh. Subsequently, the raw data was analyzed by adopting symmetric (PLS-SEM) and asymmetric (fsQCA). The study reveals that while food safety doesn't significantly impact consumer satisfaction, high food quality, price, and trust boost satisfaction. Pricing and trust don't significantly impact loyalty. fsQCA supports PLS-SEM results, highlighting nine causal configurations for high consumer loyalty.

Keywords: *Consumer Satisfaction, Consumer Loyalty, Sweetmeat Product, PLS-SEM, fsQCA.*

Introduction

The perceived value among consumers for any product or service is of utmost importance in fostering brand loyalty. Baker and Wakefield (2012) demonstrate that the ultimate objective in a food operation such as a sweetmeat store is to foster client loyalty through the provision of value-based food and service. Food quality (PQ), price (PR), food safety (FS), and trust (TR) increase consumer satisfaction (CS) levels (Jani & Han, 2015). Consumer satisfaction attainment is a prerequisite for consumer loyalty (CL). Above all, casual consumers, managers, and owners should pay much priority to loyal consumers (Espinosa et al., 2018). Enhanced consumer satisfaction leads to consumer loyalty, which in turn helps the sweetmeat store by yielding higher profits, ensuring favorable word of mouth, encouraging repeated purchases from loyal consumers, and lowering the cost of marketing and promotion (Battour, Rahman, and Rana, 2020). Bangladesh is expected to be ranked the 9th largest global market of consumers by 2030.

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The inhabitants of Bangladesh exceed USD 2646, the annual per capita income. Many famous sweetmeat sellers are found in the northern part of Bangladesh. Among them *noborup dodhi* and *mishtanno vandar*, *mouchak*, *beliful mistanno vandar* and *Rajshahi mistanno vander* etc are famous. In Bangladesh, the sweetmeat food industry is very popular as well as profitable. Lately, shop owners are very aware of consumer loyalty since it has a direct impact on their profitability. There has been relatively little research done on consumer loyalty in the sweetmeat product market in the northern part and throughout Bangladesh. The main goal of this investigation was to determine the factors of consumer satisfaction and consumers' satisfaction function as an intermediary between different measurements of satisfaction and consumer loyalty.

The approach of company-to-consumer relationship management must take loyalty into account. Consumer loyalty is a prominent subject of interest among consultants, business managers, and marketing specialists (Uddin, 2019a). Consumer loyalty fosters the motivation of consumers to make repeat purchases of products and services. The acquisition of consumers is a significant driver of competitive advantage for companies. According to Uddin (2019b), the retention of current consumers is a far more productive business strategy than trying to get new ones by enticing old ones to come back. For these reasons, in the more open and competitive market, service providers prioritize keeping their current consumers rather than focusing on attracting new ones. Therefore, it is important to understand how consumers choose a store that is crucial for the sweetmeat food market (El-Adly & Eid, 2016). Consumers often look for "a package of benefits" to meet their demands in multiple areas. Consequently, it is essential to identify the elements that satisfy consumers so that they return to the store for more food. The objective of this research is to enhance the values associated with loyalty in sweetmeat food businesses through several interventions. Initially, it will include an analysis of the obstacles faced by consumers in maintaining loyalty within the sweetmeat food sector. The integrated analysis results of Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) and Factors of Variance Correction Analysis (fsQCA) models will assist managers and researchers in comprehending consumer satisfaction difficulties in a sweetmeat food industry. The paper will set clear guidelines on the definition of consumer satisfaction and its possible influence on consumer loyalty. Developing a vast knowledge on factors that impact loyalty of consumer and satisfaction is essential for predicting the extensive application of consumer behavior evaluation in both practical and research domain. Moreover, it provides a deep understanding about all the factors (such as food quality, price, food safety and trust) which have much impact on consumer loyalty. Lastly, it urges practitioners to keep their focus on the product quality, consumer loyalty towards a the sweetmeat producing industry. The main aim of this study is to identify the factors that affect consumer loyalty in the sweetmeat food sector, particularly in the northern region in Bangladesh. In addition this study also aims to find out the impacts of the factors like food quality, pricing, food safety, and trust on consumer satisfaction in the sweetmeat food industries.

Conceptual Framework and Hypotheses Development

Food Quality

The profitability of a corporation is significantly impacted by quality (Oude Ophuis & Van Trijp, 1995). According to Espejel et al. (2009), quality attributes significantly influence consumers' perceptions of risk, loyalty, and satisfaction at both high and low involvement levels. For highly involved consumers, loyalty is greatly influenced by both intrinsic and external quality attributes. Similarly, Uddin (2019b) demonstrated that consumer satisfaction is positively correlated with food quality, pricing, and food safety, trust, which in turn positively correlates

with consumer loyalty. Konuk (2019) demonstrated that a positive relationship exists between food quality and both price and perceived value. Moreover, there a significant positive correlations among price, perceived value, and consumer satisfaction, prerequisites of consumers' behavioral intentions.

According to (Tsiotsou, 2006), there are two types of distinct quality: subjective quality and objective quality. Zeithaml (1988) argued that perceived quality is "the consumer's judgment about a product's overall excellence or superiority," meanwhile, It is specifically stated that objective quality is the "actual technical superiority or excellence of the products". Cue utilization theory posits, that consumer can determine a product's quality by observing both internal and external clues. According to Ophuis and Trijp (1995), visual, chromatic, morphological, and structural attributes are intrinsic quality indicators for food products, whose modification is not possible without appropriately modifying the physical characteristics of the product. According to Namkung and Jang (2007), food presentation, freshness, healthfulness, and tastiness are all signs of quality.

The theory of S-O-R demonstrates that an external stimulus initiates the generation of the organism's internal evaluative process., which then directs the outcome (Jacoby, 2002). According to this concept, food quality characteristics including flavor, texture, and appearance as a stimulus may affect consumers' subjective assessments.

Price

According to Zeithaml (Zeithaml, 1988), the price is specified by consumers' perspective as "what is given up or sacrificed to obtain product". As previously said, purchasers consider PR as an external identifier to evaluate product quality. Xia et al., (2004) demonstrate that price is seen as a crucial factor for evaluating prices and is defined as "a consumer's assessment and associated emotions of whether the difference (or lack of difference) between a seller's price and the price of a comparative other party is reasonable, acceptable, or justifiable". According to Campbell (Campbell, 2007), price emanates as "a consumer's subjective sense of a price as right, just, or legitimate versus wrong, unjust, or illegitimate". The equity principle can be applied to elucidate consumes' observation of PR. According to Bechwati et al. (2009), "parties involved in social exchanges compare with each other the ratios of their inputs into the exchange to their outcomes from the exchange". The dual entitlement concept is another theoretical pillar of PR. According to this principle, "the seller is entitled to a fair profit and the buyer is entitled to a fair price in an economic transaction" (Haws & Bearden, 2006). According to this theory, perceptions of injustice develop when one consumer's satisfaction is disregarded (Bolton et al., 2003). Furthermore,consumers may eventually consider a price to be unjust if their benchmark price is below the retail price (Xia et al., 2004).

This study's assessment of consumers' perceptions of price concerning sweet prices is grounded in the dual entitlement concept and equity theory. In light of these beliefs, the price of the sweets will be seen as reasonable and acceptable by the consumer if it generates reasonable profits for the business.

Food safety

According to Cui et al., (2019), consumer concerns around food safety have increasingly escalated. Food safety has gradually grown in importance as a consumer trend and purchasing motivator during the last ten years. Henson et al. (2006) argued that a multitude of variables that influence consumers' choice to buy sweetmeat from a vendor may inherently impact their

perception of food safety. Henson and his colleagues' (2006) work has been reinforced by several studies that address food safety as a determinant of consumer happiness (Cha & Borchgrevink, 2019) and as a variable in the selection of sweets vendors (Bai et al., 2019; Choi et al., 2019).

The theory of planned behavior (TPB) posits that individuals' intention to engage in a behavior is influenced by their perceived control over the action, subjective norms, and attitude toward the targeted conduct (Chai et al., 2022). An individual's self-assessment of their conduct, shaped by preference, recognizing ability, and cognition, is known as their attitude. Subjective norms are societal norms and outside influences, whereas perceived behavior control is a person's assessment of their level of difficulty and self-control. The impact of several elements on food consumption, including transgenic technologies, brands, production locations, taste and quality, and ecological environment (Chkanikova & Sroufe, 2021; L. Yu et al., 2021), etc., is extensively studied using TPB. The validity of the Theory of Planned Behavior (TPB) in analyzing how individual traits, environmental consciousness, food pricing, and other factors affect consumers' willingness and behavior to consume organic food has been proven by research in the field of sweetmeat food consumption (Daxini et al., 2019).

Trust

According to Garbarino and Johnson (1999), relational marketing views trust as a necessary component for relationships to succeed. Moorman et al. (1993) argued within their conceptualization of trust "A willingness to rely on an exchange partner in whom one has confidence". Furthermore, they propose that trust can be characterized as a conviction, assurance, or anticipation regarding the trustworthiness of an interchange partner, which arises from the partner's competence, dependability, or deliberate actions. McAllister (1995) argued regarding the constituents of this notion, that the emotive and cognitive aspects are the fundamental basis for interpersonal trust among individuals within an organization. According to Lewis and Weigert (1985), affection-based trust arises from the emotional connections individuals form with each other, while cognition-based trust is established by individuals selecting on whom to put trust and making that choice based on what they consider to be "good reasons". McAllister (1995) also demonstrates that affection-based trust results from the emotional connections that people have with one another.

A procedure closely associated with the marketing of sweetmeat food is the analysis of trust measured by the consumer's attitude towards a brand or product, namely their faith in the brand's capacity to meet its intended objective effectively (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2001). As a result, this emphasis ignores individuals and institutions in favor of an ethereal thing called the brand (Delgado-Ballester & Luis Munuera-Alemán, 2001).

When it comes to food products, trust is strongly related to other fundamental ideas of consumer loyalty and satisfaction, such as perceived pricing and safety, as well as other ideas like nutrition and health. Another potentially significant component in consumers' food product purchasing decisions is trust (Fandos Herrera & Flavián Blanco, 2011). In certain instances, consumers may lose faith in the food production process and express concerns about potential adverse effects on their health. It has been essential to rebuild public reassurance in the quality control of food goods (Fandos Herrera & Flavián Blanco, 2011). However, consumers' perceptions of extrinsic signals such as labeling or advertising as quality indicators will determine how effective they are in building trust. This perception is based on the signals' reputation and trustworthiness.

Consumer Satisfaction

Satisfaction is a core notion included in research models to evaluate consumer behavior. The theory of expectation-disconfirmation demonstrates satisfaction as "the overall psychological state that arises when the emotions related to unmet expectations are combined with the consumer's previous feelings about the consumption experience" (Oliver, 1980). According to this concept, satisfaction is achieved when consumer expectations are fulfilled, and dissatisfaction emerges when they are not (Namkung & Jang, 2007). According to Enrique Bigne et al., (2008), there are two aspects to consumer satisfaction: affective, or emotional, and cognitive, or rational. While the emotional component consists of feelings like enjoyment and pleasure that lead to the confirmation of expectations, the cognitive component consists of a logical and analytical appraisal of the purchased object (Y. Yu & Dean, 2001).

A positive correlation between FQ and CS has been demonstrated by earlier studies in the hospitality field (Huang et al., 2014). Additionally, it was observed that CS is influenced by price-related factors, such as worthy price (Ramanathan et al., 2016). Research on food safety as a determinant of consumer pleasure has consistently corroborated the conclusions of Cha and Borchgrevink, (2019).

According to previous research, several theories like the S-O-R theory, the expectation-disconfirmation theory, the equity theory, and the planned behavior theory propose that consumers who perceive sweetmeat items as high-quality are more likely to experience internal satisfaction. Furthermore, consumers with high PR ratings might be more satisfied with sweets. Furthermore, it is anticipated that consumers' satisfaction will rise with elevated views of food safety about meal selections.

H1. FQ positively affects CS.

H2. PR positively affects CS.

H3. FS positively affects CS.

H4. TR positively affects CS.

Consumer Loyalty

Brand loyalty is a term used to describe the behavior of consumers who prefer a particular brand or vendor over others that are similar, during a specific time. This preference affects the decision-making process (Jacoby & Kyner, 1973). Hence, these authors propose quantifying loyalty from two viewpoints one behavioral and another attitudinal. Adopting a behavioral approach, Dick and Basu (1994) define loyalty as the correlation between the "relative attitude" towards a certain entity a brand, or store, and the "patronage behavior". Behavioral and attitudinal metrics of loyalty offer valuable insights into the characteristics of loyal consumers (Yi & La, 2004). According to Duffy (2003), brand loyalty is an attitude that a consumer feels towards a company. According to Yi and La (2004), devoted consumers frequently exhibit unique preferences, attachments, commitments, low brand switching rates, and a readiness to pay higher prices. One of the most important studies on food product loyalty is that conducted by Sheldon (2002), which examines the elements that have the greatest impact on consumer choice, including food safety, fair pricing, and quality. Additionally important is the fact that consumer pleasure is obtained after all of the product's previously described attributes have been met. Consumer loyalty is cultivated by satisfied consumers. According to Lu and Chi (2018), CS specifically had a favorable effect on consumers' behavioral intentions in the sweet setting. Based on S-O-R and

expectation-disconfirmation theory, and actual data, it is expected that sweet clients who are extremely satisfied will be more likely to be loyal. This resulted in the subsequent hypotheses.

H5. FQ positively influences CL.

H6. PR positively influences CL.

H7. FS positively influences CL.

H8. TR positively influences CL.

H9. CS positively influences CL.

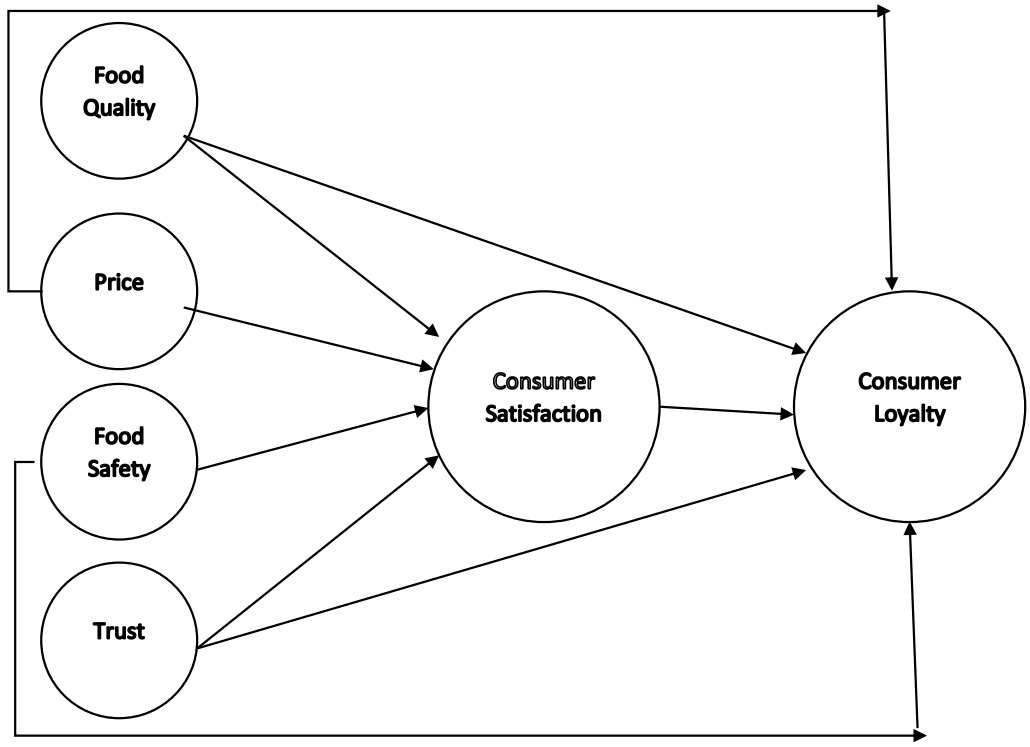

Fig 1: Conceptual Framework

Methodology

Participants, approaches, and sample

The present work evaluated how FQ, PR, FS, TR, and CS influence consumer loyalty among sweetmeat consumers. The current work employed a quantitative methodology to investigate the aforementioned possibilities. Written, structured questionnaires were used to gather data from sweetmeat consumers in Bangladesh's northern region. Participants were thoroughly informed about the research objective in conformity with the primary goals of the research. Before the questionnaires were sent, consumers were checked. In order to do this, those who agreed to take part in the field survey were asked if they had ever been visited to a sweetmeat store. After that,

individuals were asked to complete the survey form while remembering the sweetmeat store they had visited most recently. Statistical data was collected using the convenient sampling approach. The investigation was carried out throughout a three-month timeframe in the year 2024. Three hundred and fifty questionnaires were sent to the participants. After excluding 21 questionnaires with incomplete responses from the 300 surveys that were returned, there were 279 valid surveys available for hypothesis testing.

The sociodemographic profile of the survey respondents is given below. Females accounted for 40% of the 279 replies. Married status was reported by 14% of the respondents. Every single participant was above the age of 18, and the bulk of them (74%) fell within the age bracket of 25 to 45. Out of the respondents who finished their education, 57% possessed a college degree.

Measures

The survey instrument items are derived from previously developed and tested scales. An assessment of consumer loyalty was conducted using a 26-item scale derived from several writers. Food quality (PQ) was assessed using a four-item scale derived from Carranza et al., (2018) and Singh et al., (2021) that incorporates visual appeal, freshness, tastiness, and ingredient characteristics of food. Four categories for public relations are modified from the research undertaken by Carranza et al., (2018) and Singh et al., (2021). FS is evaluated using five items derived from the study of (Liu & Grunert, 2020). TR is assessed using four questionnaires modified by (Carranza et al., 2018). CS is evaluated utilizing five questionnaires designed to measure emotional and relational viewpoints, modified by Singh et al., (2021) consisting of four questionnaires that were modified from Schirmer et al., (2018). A 5-point Likert scale was used to collect data and survey participants were instructed to evaluate the questions, ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Analysis

In order to analyze how all factors affect consumer loyalty, two stages were taken: first, route analysis utilizing the variance-based method to SEM. The second method is fsQCA (fuzzy sets qualitative comparative analysis), which enables the inclusion of causative conditions or models (Calabuig Moreno et al., 2016). PLS-SEM data provide broad trends, but fsQCA shows that several realities must be taken into account to successfully build consumer loyalty. Thus, by facilitating an evaluation of a comprehensive interaction between elements of a complex and non-linear character, fsQCA adheres to complexity theory. Consequently, the configurational method of fuzzy sets and PLS-SEM together constitute the main contribution of this research.

Symmetric Analysis

This PLS-SEM study comprises two components: measurements and assessments of the structural model. A validity and reliability assessment of the measurement model was conducted utilizing convergent and discriminant tests. Convergent validity was evaluated utilizing factors loadings and average variance extracted (AVE), whereas reliability was examined utilizing composite reliability (CR) and Cronbach Alpha (CA). The Cronbach Alpha (CA) and composite reliability (CR) estimations for every variable surpassed the conventional threshold of 0.7., while the AVE estimate for each construct increased over the threshold of 0.5 (Acquah, Agyabeng-Mensah, et al., 2021). The obtained findings demonstrate that the model meets the criteria for both convergent validity and reliability (Table 1). Utilizing the Fornell Larcker criterion (Fornell & Larcker, 1981), a discriminant validity assessment was conducted on the model. According to the previously defined criteria, it may be concluded that the model has met the requirement

of discriminant validity.

Table 3 represents an overview of the structural model results, including the P-value, path coefficient (β), and T-statistics. According to the data presented in Table 3, six out of the nine hypotheses were confirmed. Findings demonstrate that CS positively influences CL where p = 0.009, β = 0.109 and t = 2.607. A noteworthy positive impact of FQ on CL was observed where p = 0.000, β = 1.125 and t = 27.277. A significant positive impact of FQ on CS was observed where p = 0.000, β = 0.337 and t = 5.209. A notable positive impact of food safety on consumer loyalty was observed where p = 0.000, β = -0.45, t = and 10.053. There was a notable positive relationship between PR and CS where p = 0.007, β = 0.153, t = 2.711. Analysis revealed that TR significantly influenced consumer satisfaction positively where p = 0.000, β = 0.357, t = 6.027. Furthermore, three out of the nine hypotheses were not substantiated, since it was shown that food safety didn't have a statistically notable impact on consumer satisfaction where p = 0.834, β = -0.014, t = 0.21. The analysis revealed that price did not have a statistically notable impact on consumer loyalty where p = 0.708, β = 0.01, t = 0.374. In addition, Trust was determined to have no statistically notable impact on consumer loyalty where p = 0.654, β = 0.016, t = 0.448. The empirical findings fully achieved the aims of this study. The findings indicate a notable correlation between CS and CL, inclusive of elements such as food quality, price, food safety, and trust. While the three relationships are inversely related, CS plays a mediator role between determinants of CS and CL of the sweetmeat business.

	CA	**CR**	**AVE**
Consumer Loyalty (CL)	0.801	0.869	0.624
Consumer Satisfaction (CS)	0.722	0.827	0.544
Food Quality (FQ)	0.71	0.817	0.53
Food Safety (FS)	0.731	0.848	0.65
Price (PR)	0.776	0.856	0.598
Trust (TR)	0.705	0.835	0.63

Table 1. Reliability and Validity Results.

	CL	**CS**	**FQ**	**FS**	**PR**	**TR**
CL	0.79					
CS	0.599	0.738				
FQ	0.781	0.648	0.728			
FS	0.463	0.57	0.739	0.806		
PR	0.389	0.507	0.494	0.538	0.773	
TR	0.551	0.662	0.686	0.706	0.545	0.794

Table 2. Fornell-Larcker Criterion

Hypotheses	Structural Path	β	T-stats	P values	Label	Decision
H1	Consumer Satisfaction -> Consumer Loyalty	0.109	2.607	0.009	Significant	Supported
H2	Food Quality -> Consumer Loyalty	1.125	27.277	0.000	Significant	Supported
H3	Food Quality -> Consumer Satisfaction	0.337	5.209	0.000	Significant	Supported
H4	Food Safety -> Consumer Loyalty	-0.45	10.053	0.000	Significant	Supported
H5	Food Safety -> Consumer Satisfaction	-0.014	0.21	0.834	Not significant	Not supported
H6	Price -> Consumer Loyalty	0.01	0.374	0.708	Not significant	Not supported
H7	Price -> Consumer Satisfaction	0.153	2.711	0.007	Significant	Supported
H8	Trust -> Consumer Loyalty	0.019	0.448	0.654	Not significant	Not supported
H9	Trust -> Consumer Satisfaction	0.357	6.027	0.000	Significant	Supported

Table 3. Structural Model Findings.

Note: P≤0.05 at the 95% significant level.

Asymmetric Analysis

fsQCA (fuzzy sets qualitative comparative analysis) is an integration of fuzzy sets and fuzzy logic techniques. It integrates complexity theory with models that exhibit asymmetry. Given that not all interactions between external and internal factors adhere to a linear pattern, it has become crucial to develop a thorough elucidation of the correlation between constructs that goes beyond mere correlations and regression coefficients. This issue is addressed by the use of fuzzy sets, which offer many approaches that can result in the same conclusion (Kaya et al., 2020; Olya & Altinay, 2016). According to Kaya et al., (2020) and Pappas et al.,(2017) to analyze regression, fuzzy sets make it possible to identify an exogenous construct that, in a small subset of situations, results in an outcome. Additionally, because symmetric studies (like regression and SEM) employ a lot of exogenous factors and have significant correlations, they are characterized by

conflating effects of collinearity. For instance, these methods cannot account for muddied notions like age and gender (Acquah, Naude, et al., 2021a; Kaya et al., 2020). Moreover, empirical evidence indicates that an endogenous construct's value is influenced by multiple antecedents rather than just one. In asymmetric techniques, higher values of an external construct are adequate but not essential for predicting higher values in the endogenous construct. This is different from symmetric analyses, in which high values of an external construct are necessary and enough for this end (Acquah, Naude, et al., 2021b). Moreover, it should be noted that not all instances in the data provide evidence of a positive or negative correlation between the endogenous and exogenous constructs. By contrast, symmetric approaches rely on either a positive or negative logic (net effects), which might be deceptive as instances that contradict the apparent net effects are somewhat common. Consequently, it is advisable to evaluate the combination of factors that cause an exogenous construct to predict the endogenous constructs both favorably and negatively (Kaya et al., 2020; Olya & Altinay, 2016). The current research aimed to examine the complex interplay between food quality, pricing, food safety, trust, and consumer satisfaction in predicting consumer loyalty.

Calibration

As the components in this survey were examined utilizing a 5-point Likert scale, before doing the fsQCA analysis, it was imperative to rescale the constructs into fuzzy variables. According to Fiss (2011) and Kaya et al. (2020), the measurements were calibrated to fuzzy sets defined by values between 0 and 1. A value of 1 represents fully in, 0.5 implies a cross-over point, and 0 denotes fully out. In the lack of substantial knowledge, Misangyi and Acharya (2014) have employed percentile as the foundation for calibration, the sole method of calibration is by using theoretical information, which is essential for determining the 3 qualitative breakpoints (fully-in, cross-over and fully-out). Further research that has been published in credible academic journals, Dual (2016) and Khedhaouria and Thurik (2017) also endorses this calibration methodology. Consequently, the breakpoints and outcomes were determined based on the 95th, 50th, and 5th percentile thresholds (Acquah, Naude, et al., 2021a). The breakthrough values for fully-in, cross-over, and fully-out at the 95th, 50th, and 5th percentiles were predetermined as 4.75, 3.50, and 2.00 respectively, in order to calibrate the outcome of consumer loyalty. Concurrently, while adjusting the parameters (food quality, price, food safety, trust, and consumer satisfaction), the thresholds for fully-in, cross-over, and fully-out at the 95th, 50th, and 5th percentiles were defined as 4.25, 3.00, and 2.00 for food quality, 3.75, 2.50, and 1.25 for price, and 3.80, 2.60, and 1.40 for food safety. Furthermore, we allocated values of 4.00, 3.00, and 1.75 for trust, and 4.20, 3.20, and 1.80 for consumer satisfaction, at the 95th, 50th, and 5th percentiles, which correspond to fully-in, cross-over, and fully-out, respectively. Table 4 presents the calibration thresholds obtained together with supplementary descriptive details.

	Descriptive Statistics					**Calibration**		
Variable	N	Min	Max	Mean	Std.	Fully-in (95%)	Cross-over (50%)	Fully-out (5%)
Food Quality	279	1.25	4.75	3.131	0.710	4.250	3.000	2.000
Price	279	1	4.5	2.575	0.767	3.750	2.500	1.250

Food Safety	279	1	4.6	2.624	0.751	3.800	2.600	1.400
Trust	279	1.25	4.5	2.952	0.751	4.000	3.000	1.750
Consumer Satisfaction	279	1.4	4.6	3.184	0.669	4.200	3.200	1.800
Consumer Loyalty	279	1	5	3.519	0.769	4.750	3.500	2.000

Table 4. Data Calibration and Descriptive Statistics

Once the data had been accurately calibrated into fuzzy sets, the subsequent task was to conduct a necessity analysis. In requirement analysis, the condition is evaluated to determine if the ratio of fuzzy set values is fewer than or equal to the equivalent values in the eventual output (Kaya et al., 2020). A requirement is deemed essential assuming its consistency score above 0.75 (Acquah, Naude, et al., 2021b). The outcomes of the requirement analysis (Table 5) indicate that, except price, all the other causal criteria are required to achieve CL. The reason for this is that the consistency scores of these circumstances are above the threshold of 0.75. Hence, the findings indicate that the attainment of CL requires the presence of food quality, food safety, trust, and consumer satisfaction.

Configurational Elements	**CL**		**~CL**	
	Consistency	Coverage	Consistency	Coverage
Food Quality	0.839	0.854	0.463	0.533
~Food Quality	0.541	0.472	0.873	0.860
Price	0.729	0.714	0.548	0.606
~ Price	0.598	0.540	0.741	0.755
Food Safety	0.761	0.723	0.555	0.595
~ Food Safety	0.574	0.533	0.742	0.778
Trust	0.792	0.751	0.523	0.561
~ Trust	0.538	0.500	0.768	0.806
Consumer Satisfaction	0.788	0.785	0.529	0.596
~ Consumer Satisfaction	0.595	0.528	0.809	0.811

Table 5. Necessary Conditions Analysis

Following the analysis of the necessary conditions, the upcoming initiative was to determine the adequate configurations of food quality, pricing, food safety, trust, and consumer happiness required to attain consumer loyalty. To obtain adequate responses this study utilized the truth table methodology, adhering to Fiss (2011)'s guidelines. The frequency threshold was set at 1, and the consistency parameter was set at 0.8. In contrast, the consistency threshold measures whether participation in the outcomes set is equal to or greater than membership in the specific causal configuration set. Conversely, the frequency threshold indicates that a configuration is beneficial in at least one of the described scenarios. Therefore, based on Wu et al. (2014) suggestions, a selection of intermediate solutions was made to assess the stated claims. The

results of the fsQCA yielded configurations that resulted in both high CL and low CL scores. At elevated levels of CL, 9 causative recipes were identified (Table 6) with a coverage of 0.858 and a consistency of 0.777. Through the examination of the adequate criteria, two sets of models were identified for high levels and low levels of consumer loyalty, respectively. The 1st group of models, designed to capture high levels of consumer loyalty, achieved a solution coverage of 0.858, exceed the threshold of 0.75 as proposed by Schneider et al. (2010). Additionally, the solution consistency was found to be 0.777. In the 2nd group of models, designed for modest levels of consumer loyalty, the solution demonstrates a coverage of 0.860 and a consistency of 0.778.

Consistency evaluates the degree to which the particular configurations contribute to the result of those configurations. Therefore, we choose configurations where the consistency value is more than 0.75. The results yielded four models accounting for high levels of consumer loyalty and five models accounting for low levels.

Raw coverage quantifies the amount of variance in the membership that can be accounted for just by each configuration, enabling us to evaluate the degree to which the configurations elucidate the result. As a result, a setup that provides for a significant amount of consumer loyalty is suggested by a high unique coverage.

Models 2, 3, 6, and 7 exemplify strategies for achieving high levels of consumer loyalty. Model 2, with a consistency level of 0.880, posits that 64.7% of the instances indicate that sweetmeat merchants attain significant amounts of consumer loyalty by maintaining high standards of food quality, food safety, and trust. Hence, the convergence of food quality, food safety, and trust is adequate to attain consumer loyalty. Price and consumer satisfaction were irrelevant factors in this statistical model. The aforementioned configuration resulted in the highest level of raw coverage and provided a collection of factors that most accurately reflect consumer loyalty.

Consistent with Model 3, 63.3% of the examples indicate that achieving high levels of consumer loyalty is contingent upon sweetmeat merchants maintaining high standards of food quality, food safety, and consumer happiness. This conclusion was reached considering a solution consistency level of 0.905. Therefore, this arrangement recommends that a combination of food quality, food safety, and consumer satisfaction is enough to cultivate consumer loyalty. The irrelevant indicators in this approach were trust and pricing.

Based on model 6, 56.5% of the examples suggest that there is a robust correlation between significant levels of consumer loyalty and the presence of high levels of food quality, pricing, trust, and consumer pleasure among sweetmeat merchants. Furthermore, this summary exhibited a commendable consistency level of 0.912. It demonstrates that food quality, pricing, trust, and consumer happiness are adequate for attaining consumer loyalty. Regarding this paradigm, food safety was considered irrelevant antecedents.

Model 7 indicates that 52.5% of the instances suggest that elevated levels of consumer loyalty are associated with sweetmeat vendors who exhibit high levels of price, food safety, trust, and consumer satisfaction. Furthermore, this summary exhibited a commendable consistency level of 0.854. The factors of price, food safety, trust, and consumer satisfaction are alone adequate for attaining consumer loyalty. Remarkably, the antecedents of food quality were negligible in our model.

The remaining combinations, which correlate to high levels of consumer loyalty and are represented by models 1, 4, 5, 8, and 9, with raw coverage values of 0.371, 0.332, 0.321, 0.350,

and 0.310 respectively, excluded from the analysis because of the low consistency with the empirical evidence.

Models 10, 11, 12, 13, and 14 have combinations that correspond to low levels of consumer loyalty (Table 6). According to model 10, 58.3% of the examples indicate that sweetmeat merchants with low levels of price, food safety, and trust have not achieved a high level of CL. The present inference exhibits a consistency level of 0.889. Similarly, model 11 demonstrates that 64.6% of the examples indicate that sweetmeat merchants with low levels of food quality, food safety, and consumer pleasure experience a minimal level of client loyalty. The present inference exhibits a consistency level of 0.917. Equally, model 12 suggests that 62.9% of the cases indicate the presence of poor levels of consumer loyalty among sweetmeat suppliers who have low levels of food quality, pricing, and consumer happiness. The present inference exhibits a consistency level of 0.930. Based on model 13, 60.7% of the reported examples indicate that sweetmeat suppliers with low levels of food quality, pricing, and trust experience low levels of consumer loyalty. The present inference exhibits a consistency level of 0.912. Based on model 14, 60.9% of the cases indicate that sweetmeat merchants experienced low levels of client loyalty due to inadequate food quality, price, and food safety. The present inference exhibits a consistency level of 0.889. Models 15, 16, 17, 18, and 19 were excluded due to their little correspondence with the sample examples. Crucially, all nine of the configurations described above (four for successful consumer loyalty and five for unsuccessful consumer loyalty) meet the criteria, used by De Crescenzo et al. (2020).

CL= f(FQ, PR, FS, TR, CS)			
	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	consistency
Model 1: ~PR*~TR*CS	0.371	0.0009	0.825
Model 2: FQ*FS*TR	0.647	0.042	0.880
Model 3: FQ*FS*CS	0.633	0.019	0.905
Model 4: FQ*~PR*~FS*~TR	0.332	0.028	0.915
Model 5: ~FQ*~FS*TR*~CS	0.321	0.013	0.833
Model 6: FQ*PR*TR*CS	0.565	0.025	0.912
Model 7: PR*FS*TR*CS	0.525	0.002	0.854
Model 8: ~FQ*~PR*~FS*CS	0.350	0.000	0.822
Model 9: ~PR*FS*TR*~CS	0.310	0.000	0.813
solution coverage: 0.858 **solution consistency: 0.777**			
~CL= f(FQ, PR, FS, TR, CS)			
	Raw coverage	Unique coverage	consistency
Model 10: ~PR*~FS*~TR	0.583	0.003	0.889
Model 11: ~FQ*~FS*~CS	0.646	0.062	0.917
Model 12: ~FQ*~PR*~CS	0.629	0.014	0.930
Model 13: ~FQ*~PR*~TR	0.607	0.003	0.912
Model 14: ~FQ*~PR*~FS	0.609	0.006	0.889
Model 15: FQ*FS*TR*~CS	0.311	0.013	0.825
Model 16: FQ: *FS*~TR*CS	0.271	0.000	0.853

Model 17: FQ*PR*~FS*TR*CS	0.251	0.003	0.841
Model 18: ~FQ*PR*FS*TR*CS	0.294	0.024	0.952
Model 19: FQ*~PR*FS*CS	0.293	0.003	0.808
Solution coverage: 0.860 **Solution consistency: 0.778**			

Table 6. Sufficient Conditions Analysis

Discussion and Conclusion

Analysis of the data was conducted using both symmetric and asymmetric methodologies. Upon comparing the outcomes of PLS-SEM with the findings from the fsQCA, intriguing discoveries were made. Product-level structural equation modeling (PLS-SEM) indicated that consumer pleasure was highly affected by food quality, price, and trust, but not by food safety. Furthermore, the results of the PLS-SEM research suggested that consumer loyalty was highly influenced by food quality, food safety, and consumer satisfaction. The statistical significance of the effects of pricing and trust on consumer loyalty was not established. Nevertheless, the fsQCA conducted revealed that nine different combinations of these factors resulted in significant amounts of consumer loyalty. These findings were obtained by comparing and contrasting these outcomes.

Nevertheless, the fsQCA results presented contrasting information. Enhanced food quality is associated with increased CL levels in models 2, 3, and 6. However, the results in model seven do not show any correlation between food quality and CL, which contradicts the outcomes of the PLS-SEM analysis. Furthermore, the outcomes of PLS-SEM suggest a substantial and positive correlation between food safety and CL. The recipes proposed in model 6 did not consider food safety, which further contradicts the results of the PLS-SEM analysis. Thirdly, the outcomes of PLS-SEM indicate that the correlation between CS and CL is not only positive but also statistically significant, which contradicts model 2. The results obtained by fsQCA indicate that the correlation between high prices and high levels of consumer loyalty is supported by the configurations shown in models 6 and 7, which contradict the findings of PLS-SEM. Moreover, the significant levels of trust result in elevated levels of CL, as shown in models 2, 6, and 7, which contradict the findings of PLS-SEM tests. Indeed, the aforementioned comparisons demonstrate that the PLS-SEM approach in isolation is inadequate in offering a comprehensive elucidation of the correlation between constructs due to its failure to consider asymmetric scenarios.

The present work investigated the impact of the variables PQ, PR, FS, TR, and CS on CL. The confectionery merchants principally need this information to gain a comprehensive understanding of how all variables impact CL. This paper employs the progressively popular fsQCA method alongside the highly recognized PLS-SEM and conducts a comparative analysis of the outcomes. Although fsQCA facilitated the categorization of these antecedents into multiple plausible causal pathways that can lead to the same outcome, PLS-SEM allowed for the identification of the essential conditions for successful (failed) continuous learning, without necessarily being the only requirements. Significantly, the study offers sweetmeat sellers detailed yet realistic models by proposing distinct settings that are enough for generating successful cold chain (CL) and other pathways that can result in CL failure, together with paths linked to CL failure as a whole.

Implication

The findings have application for managers since they not only indicate the antecedents that should be given priority in order to increase consumer loyalty, but they also offer other avenues for achieving the same goal. As a result, managers are counseled that successful consumer loyalty does not require the simultaneous presence of all antecedents. Moreover, while many combinations of these elements converge to the same outcome in terms of CL, it is not essential to enhance these factors simultaneously. Therefore, managers should prioritize improving the performance of characteristics captured by food quality, price, food safety, trust, and consumer satisfaction when they aim to increase consumer loyalty. Nine distinct combinations are revealed by the results for managers to consider. Since resource limits affect all businesses, managers should place a strong emphasis on determining the optimal causal recipe that guarantees high levels of consumer loyalty.

Furthermore, according to the resource-based view, firms differ in terms of the type and quantity of resources at their disposal. Therefore, researchers should evaluate resource assignments and determine the causal formula that ensures resource optimization to achieve strong consumer loyalty. For example, it may be cost-effective for some businesses to allocate resources toward achieving high standards for food quality, pricing, trust, and consumer satisfaction while maintaining low standards for food safety (model 6). Some businesses may find it considerably more cost-effective to use resources to achieve high levels of food quality, food safety, and trust than to worry about price and consumer satisfaction (model 2). Additionally, the causal recipes assist managers in identifying which antecedents are not conducive to improvement in addition to helping them find the antecedents.

All things considered, the causal recipes this study offers assist managers in accomplishing three primary goals. They can first use it to determine the precursors of high levels of consumer loyalty. Secondly, it makes it possible for managers to pinpoint the causes of low levels of consumer loyalty. Thirdly, it aids managers in determining which antecedents are unnecessary or only slightly necessary to attain high or low levels of the result, which aids in cost- and priority-cutting.

Limitations and Future Research

Although this study represents one of the early efforts to explore the factors contributing to CL, this work has some shortcomings and leaves room for more investigation. First off, the study only looked at a select few variables (food safety, pricing, food quality, and trust). Subsequent investigations could look into additional factors like perceived value, food safety, service quality, and environmental awareness. Second, because data were collected from individual respondents who were consumers of each sweetmeat vendor in Bangladesh's northern region, the study cannot be applied to other industries. Therefore, it would be worthwhile to repeat this study by gathering information from numerous respondents in various industries across various nations. In this mixed-methods investigation, fsQCA and PLS-SEM were used. Possible future research could include combining fsQCA with NCA (necessary condition analysis) or PLS-SEM and NCA methodologies. Thus, these combinations should prioritize the enhancement of PLS-SEM by NCA rather than the iterative improvement of fsQCA, considering the disparities in methodologies. Lastly, the study's context was consumer loyalty. How fsQCA can be used in various domains within the more general topic of consumer loyalty may be the subject of future research.

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