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A STUDY ON DEALER AND RETAILER INFLUENCE ON CONSUMER BUYING DECISIONS FOR JK SUPER STRONG CEMENT

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Abstract - *The Indian cement industry is highly competitive, with minimal product differentiation and strong dependence on distribution channels. Dealers and retailers play a pivotal role in influencing consumer buying decisions, particularly in semi-urban and rural markets where product knowledge among consumers is limited. This study examines the extent of dealer and retailer influence on consumer purchasing behavior with special reference to JK Super Strong Cement in the Pandharpur region of Maharashtra. A descriptive research design was adopted using primary data collected through structured questionnaires from 40 respondents, including contractors, house owners, architects/engineers, and dealers. The findings reveal that dealer recommendations have a significantly stronger impact on purchase decisions compared to advertising and price factors. Trust, product knowledge, incentives, and long-term relationships emerge as key drivers of dealer influence. The study concludes that strengthening dealer engagement strategies can provide a sustainable competitive advantage for cement manufacturers in regional markets.*

Key Words: **Dealer influence, consumer buying behavior, cement industry, distribution channel, JK Cement, semi-urban markets**

1.INTRODUCTION

The cement industry forms the backbone of infrastructure development and economic growth in India. As the second-largest producer of cement globally, India's cement demand is driven by housing, commercial construction, and government-led infrastructure initiatives such as Pradhan Mantri Awas Yojana and the Smart Cities Mission [1]. Despite steady growth, the industry faces intense competition due to price sensitivity, high logistics costs, and limited product differentiation.

In such an environment, marketing intermediaries especially dealers and retailers emerge as crucial influencers in shaping consumer preferences. Cement is a high- involvement and technical product, and consumers often rely on dealer expertise to guide purchase decisions [2], [6]. This dependence is particularly strong in semi-urban regions like Pandharpur, where trust-based relationships dominate purchasing behavior. JK Cement Ltd., a leading cement manufacturer in India, follows a dealer-centric distribution strategy, making it an ideal case for examining intermediary influence. This research investigates how dealer and retailer recommendations affect consumer buying decisions for JK Super Strong Cement and evaluates their influence relative to other marketing factors.

1.1 Company Profile

JK Cement Ltd. is one of India's leading cement manufacturing companies and a flagship enterprise of the JK Organization. Established in 1975, the company has built a strong presence in both grey and white cement segments and operates in domestic as well as international markets [8].

1.2 Background and Inception

JK Cement commenced its operations in May 1975 with its first grey cement manufacturing plant at Nimbahera, Rajasthan. Over the years, the company expanded its capacity through green field and brownfield projects and established overseas operations in the UAE and Africa.

1.3 Ownership Pattern

JK Cement Ltd. is a public limited company listed on the Bombay Stock Exchange (BSE) and the National Stock Exchange (NSE). The Singhania family holds a significant share of the company's equity, while the remaining shares are held by institutional investors, foreign investors, and retail shareholders.

1.4 Nature of the Business

The company is engaged in the manufacture of grey cement, white cement, wall putty, and allied building materials. JK Super Strong Cement is one of its flagship products, known for strength, durability, and reliability.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several studies have highlighted the growing importance of dealer networks in industrial and consumer goods marketing. Mishra and Bhandari [3] found that in the cement industry, dealer incentives and credit facilities significantly impact brand recommendation behavior. Patel [4] emphasized that dealer credibility and product knowledge strongly influence consumer trust in technical goods.

Singh and Kumar [5] observed that retailers often act as "decision facilitators" rather than mere sellers, especially in rural markets. Kotler and Keller [6] argue that channel members play a strategic role in bridging the gap between manufacturers and end consumers by providing information, assurance, and service support. Industry reports indicate that nearly 70–80% of cement purchase decisions in India are influenced by dealer recommendations, making channel management a critical success factor [7]. However, limited empirical studies focus on regional markets like Pandharpur, creating a research gap that this study seeks to address.

2.1 NEED OF STUDY

With increasing competition from brands such as UltraTech, Ambuja, Adani Cement, and Shree Cement, it has become essential for cement manufacturers to understand the effectiveness of dealer-driven marketing strategies[2]. The study helps identify the factors that influence dealer recommendations and consumer preferences, particularly in semi-urban markets.

3.OBJECTIVES

1. To assess the level of influence dealers/retailers have on consumers' choice of JK Super Strong Cement over other brands.

2. To identify the key factors (e.g., trust, product knowledge, incentives) through which dealers/retailers impact consumer purchasing decisions.

3. To analyze consumer awareness and perception of JK Super Strong Cement independent of dealer/retailer influence.

4. To study the comparative impact of dealer/retailer influence versus other marketing channels on buying decisions.

4.RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study adopts a descriptive research design to analyze dealer and retailer influence on consumer buying behavior.

4.1 Research Design

A descriptive research design was adopted to analyze existing market conditions without manipulating variables. Both primary and secondary data were collected using questionnaires and secondary sources. Convenience sampling was used to select respondents.

The research process begins with identifying the research problem related to dealer and retailer influence on consumer buying decisions for JK Super Strong Cement. This is followed by a review of relevant literature and formulation of research objectives and hypotheses. A descriptive research design is adopted, and data is collected through primary and secondary sources. Convenience sampling is used to select respondents. The collected data is analyzed using percentage analysis, graphical tools, and comparative analysis, leading to interpretation, findings, conclusions, and actionable suggestions.

4.2 Data Collection

Primary data were collected through structured questionnaires administered to 40 respondents, including contractors, house owners, architects/engineers, and dealers. Secondary data were sourced from company reports, academic journals, industry publications, and official websites [1], [7], [8].

4.2 Sample Size

- Dealers/Retailers: 5
- Consumers: 35

4.4 Sampling Technique

Convenience sampling was used due to time and accessibility constraints.

4.5 Analytical Tools

- Percentage analysis
- Graphical representation
- Comparative analysis

4.6 Hypotheses

H_0: Dealer/retailer influence has no significant impact on purchase decisions for JK Super Strong Cement. H_1: Dealer/retailer influence has a significant impact on purchase decisions for JK Super Strong Cement.

5. DATA ANALYSIS & INTERPRETION

This section presents the analysis of primary data collected from 40 respondents in the Pandharpur region. The respondents include contractors, house owners, architects/engineers, and dealers/retailers. Percentage analysis has been used, and interpretations are drawn in line with the objectives of the study.

5.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Table 5.1: Gender-wise Distribution of Respondents

Gender	No. of Respondents	Percentage
Male	36	90%
Female	4	10%
Total	40	100%

The table indicates that 90% of respondents are male, while only 10% are female. This reflects the reality of the construction sector in semi-urban and rural regions like Pandharpur, where cement purchase and construction decisions are predominantly taken by male members. Hence, male respondents form the primary decision-making group for cement purchases.

Table 5.2: Age-wise Distribution of Respondents

Age Group	Respondents	Percentage
Below 25	3	7.5%
25–35	21	52.5%
36–45	13	32.5%
Above 45	3	7.5%
Total	40	100%

The data shows that 85% of respondents belong to the 25– 45 age group, indicating that cement purchasing decisions are largely made by economically active and experienced individuals. These respondents are typically involved in house construction, renovation, or contracting work, making them highly relevant for the study.

Table 5.3: Occupation-wise Distribution

Occupation	Respondents	Percentage
Contractor/Builder	15	37.5%
House Owner	11	27.5%
Architect/Engineer	9	22.5%
Dealer/Retailer	5	12.5%
Total	40	100%

Contractors and builders constitute the largest group (37.5%), followed by house owners (27.5%). This confirms that professional buyers and influencers dominate cement consumption, while dealers form an important advisory group in the purchase process.

5.2 Awareness and Perception of JK Super Strong Cement

Table 5.4: Familiarity with JK Super Strong Cement

Level of Familiarity	Respondents	Percentage
Very Familiar	29	72.5%
Somewhat Familiar	8	20%
Heard of it	3	7.5%
Not Familiar	0	0%

More than 90% of respondents are either very familiar or somewhat familiar with JK Super Strong Cement. This highlights strong market presence and visibility of the brand in the Pandharpur region, largely driven by dealer-level promotion.

Table 5.5: Source of Awareness

Source	Respondents	Percentage
Dealer/Retailer	25	62.5%
Advertisement	8	20%
Social Media	1	2.5%
Friends/Relatives	6	15%

The dominant source of awareness is dealer/retailer recommendation (66.7%), far exceeding advertisements and social media. This confirms that interpersonal communication at retail outlets plays a more critical role than mass media in cement marketing.

5.3 Dealer/Retailer Influence on Buying Decisions

Table 5.6: Perceived Quality of JK Super Strong Cement

Rating	Respondents	Percentage
Excellent	24	60%
Good	13	32.5%
Average	3	7.5%
Poor	0	0%

An overwhelming 90.5% of respondents rated the cement as good or excellent, indicating strong satisfaction with quality, durability, and strength. This positive perception supports repeat purchases and strengthens dealer confidence while recommending the product.

Table 5.7: Trust Factors for Dealer Recommendation

Trust Factor	Respondents	Percentage
Long-term relationship	10	25%
Incentives/Discounts	8	20%
Product knowledge	14	35%
Past experience	8	20.0%

Trust is primarily built through long-term relationships and credibility, rather than incentives alone. This indicates that consumers view dealers as advisors, and their technical knowledge and honesty significantly influence buying decisions.

Table 5.8: Level of Dealer Influence

Influence Level	Respondents	Percentage
Very High	16	40%
Moderate	16	40%
Low	7	17.5%
No Influence	1	2.5%

Over 76% of respondents reported moderate to very high dealer influence, confirming that dealers play a decisive role at the point of purchase, especially for technical products like cement.

Table 5.9: Brand Switching Due to Dealer Influence

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	22	55%
No	18	45%

More than half of the respondents switched brands due to dealer persuasion, which strongly supports the alternative hypothesis (H_1) that dealer influence significantly impacts buying decisions.

Table 5.10: Willingness to Pay More if Dealer Recommends

Response	Respondents	Percentage
Yes	31	77.5%
No	9	22.5%

A large majority of respondents are willing to pay a slightly higher price when the product is dealer-recommended, indicating that trust outweighs price sensitivity in cement purchases.

The analysis clearly demonstrates that dealer/retailer influence is the most dominant factor affecting consumer buying decisions for JK Super Strong Cement in the Pandharpur region. While product quality and brand reputation remain important, dealer trust and guidance act as the final trigger in the purchase decision.

6.FINDINGS

- Dealer recommendations are the most influential factor in cement purchasing decisions.
- Product quality and brand trust are primary reasons for dealer advocacy.
- Independent consumer awareness of JK Super Strong Cement remains limited.
- Advertising has relatively low influence compared to interpersonal communication.

7.CONCLUSION

The study confirms that dealer and retailer influence plays a decisive role in consumer buying decisions for JK Super Strong Cement in the Pandharpur region. While the product enjoys strong acceptance once introduced, its market success largely depends on dealer advocacy.

Strengthening dealer relationships, improving supply reliability, and enhancing consumer awareness through localized promotions can significantly improve market penetration. For cement manufacturers operating in semi- urban markets, dealer-centric strategies remain indispensable for sustained growth.

8.MANEGERICAL IMPLICATION

- Strengthen dealer training and technical education programs
- Introduce performance-based incentive schemes
- Improve logistics and stock availability
- Enhance localized branding and mason engagement initiatives

- Integrate digital marketing with dealer-led promotions.

9.LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The study is limited to 40 respondents from the Pandharpur region, which may restrict the generalization of the findings. Convenience sampling was adopted due to time and accessibility constraints. The study focuses only on JK Super Strong Cement and does not include comparative analysis with competing brands. Future research may consider a larger sample size, multiple regions, and comparative brand studies for broader applicability.

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