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# Branding and Promotional Incentives on Purchase Behavior for Sanitary Napkins among Young Adult Female Consumers in Bangladesh

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## Abstract

This investigation encompasses the influences of branding and promotional incentives on the purchase intention of sanitary napkins among young adult female consumers in Dhaka City. The analysis utilized mixed methodology, combining a comprehensive review of published information with structured quantitative studies, qualitative FGDs, and interviews. A non-probability purposive sampling technique was used to analyze 517 responses. The outcomes were rigorously analyzed using SPSS Version 20 application software. Though many conglomerates in Bangladesh have invested in the female sanitary napkins segment, this has yet to expand. The findings prescribe explicit barriers related to availability and affordability, the suspicious look of shopkeepers, and infrequent awareness-building campaigns by brands that hinder consumer purchase choices. This study proves that unattended reproductive health issues (e.g., menstruation) hamper the achievement of SDGs. Appropriate strategy execution among manufacturers, trade intermediaries, and the national administration minimizes the influence of social taboos, and attractive product offerings will stimulate proper hygiene practices and brand loyalty. This investigation exclusively embraces adolescent female customers in Dhaka. Consequently, forthcoming research will emphasize female workers in different age groups in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) sector within the Dhaka city peripherals. Such workers are economically underprivileged segments, and barely any such investigation was conducted on their purchase intention regarding female hygiene practices. Thus, future investigators may exploit the random sampling technique to attain a substantial outcome and influence garment workers' purchase behavior.

**Keywords:** Brand Preferences, Promotional Incentives, Sanitary Napkins, Social Taboos, Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), Sustainable Female Hygiene Practices

## 1. Introduction

In a study, Ahmad et al. (2015) suggested that social taboos are crucial elements of social customs and are protected by cultural and established sanctions, which facilitate people to get used to these and learn to live. Lichtenstein et

al. (2007) opined that those established differences (norms and expectations of society guided by these taboos), in effect, might explain why some people yield their protected values while others do not. Taboos are exclusions or constraints in a society that shape what is unacceptable or inappropriate. Such social taboos can influence people's thought processes and behaviors. Many cultures discourage open discussion on topics such as sex, puberty, death, menstruation, and other issues.

Regardless of being a crucial part of women's and girls' reproductive health and rights - menstruation in Bangladesh, as well, remains drastically under-addressed and hence surrounded by disgrace and suppression (Warrington et al., 2021). Female hygiene is one of the buzzwords for reproductive health issues in women across the globe, including Bangladesh. Thus, it needs to address the result of attracting the younger generation to exult the services of the company sector from their earlier life. Horng et al. (2001) specified the age range for young adults between the ages of 3 to 19 years. In this paper, researchers investigate these 'young adult' female consumers as these segments are induced mainly by social stigma and taboos. A notable shift towards eco-friendly and reusable female hygiene products in Bangladesh indicates a growing concern for sustainable female hygiene practices.

Available information suggests that, in the year 2024, the revenue in the female hygiene market in Bangladesh amounts to US\$ 0.61 billion, and it is expected that the market will encounter an annual growth rate of 5.84% (Statista Market Insights, 2024). Through community-based endeavors, it will aspire to engage women and girls and include menstrual health education sessions where the TV commercials by the brand marketers play noteworthy roles in breaking down the shackles of menstrual taboos and in shaping the awareness, attitude, and hygiene practice of girls and their parents on menses. Due to the knowledge gap and lack of access to reliable sources of information, adolescents in academic institutions generate unusual views of their puberty toward the menstrual cycle. They may hold misconceptions about sustainable hygiene practices and their management earlier in Bangladesh. However, this situation is changing as, at present, Sanitary Napkins-related TV Commercials by prominent brands are contributing to normalizing menstruation. An advertisement by 'Senora' Sanitary Napkin showcased a mother educating her daughter on self-confidence by using a sanitary napkin to perform well during exams and attain the desired success with fewer complications (Square Toiletries Limited, 2023). Another advertisement for the 'Freedom' Sanitary Napkin in Bangladesh, highlighted in its slogan as 'Mukto Bihongo' [Free Bird], conveys the intended message that Sanitary Napkin enriches girls' confidence to practice proper hygiene and liberty to explore new dimensions of life (ACI Limited, 2015).

Some television commercials also showed supportive roles of the male family members, such as the brother, father, or husband, in purchasing Sanitary Napkins from the marketplace. Young adults have come to know from TV advertisements that all activities, such as playing sports, going to academic institutions, going outside in any place at any time, and other interactive areas, become more feasible to accomplish even if they are menstruating (Poly et al., 2020) (Warrington et al., 2021).

To influence the young adult female consumers' buying choice for sanitary napkins as part of the promotion, female hygiene brands in Bangladesh have started taking the initiative to ensure that menstruation does not hinder their lives, celebrations, visions, or empowerment. For example, 'Freedom' is one of Bangladesh's most trustworthy and recognized female hygiene brands from ACI Limited. ACI Limited pioneered sanitary napkin vending machines and menstrual hygiene awareness. As a part of this initiative, in 2019, the first sanitary napkin vending machine in Bangladesh was installed (free of cost) at the University of Dhaka's Campus. This impactful notion has ensured the convenience of purchasing affordable sanitary napkins for female students at any time from the installed vending machines for just Tk 10 (a single sanitary napkin) instead of buying a large packet by paying more from their pocket and bringing relief to the consumers. Hence, they do not need to murmur, stress over, or feel uncomfortable asking favors or awkwardly talking to shopkeepers about such an essential hygiene item. Likewise, ACI Center was the first corporate office in Bangladesh to install an automated sanitary napkin vending machine to ensure its female employees' appropriate menstrual hygiene practices. This was followed by initializing the expansion of vending machines in other academic institutions. The brand marketer is determined to continue such an approach to make sanitary napkins accessible to women nationwide (ACI Limited, 2019) (The Daily Star, 2022).

Based on the above discussion, researchers witnessed that though many conglomerates in Bangladesh have been investing in the female sanitary napkins segment, this segment has yet to expand its product offerings and market expansion to include more young adult female consumers in the buying practices. Hence, considering these circumstances, the researchers expect that the investigation and analysis conducted will shed significant light on the existing performance of sanitary napkin manufacturers and the prospects to be explored regarding the appropriates of female hygiene practices in Bangladesh.

## 2. Objectives of the Study

The primary intention of this study is to investigate the influences of branding and promotional incentives on the purchase intention of Sanitary Napkins among young adult female consumers in Dhaka City. Moreover, specific objectives were studied to achieve the research outcome, which is as follows:

- To assess the purchase behavior and measure the product availability, affordability, accessibility, and difficulties consumers encounter during purchase actions.
- To explore consumer awareness, product acceptability, brand preferences, and loyalty status while purchasing.
- To identify the impact of promotional incentives and customer relationship management on consumers' purchase intentions.

## 3. Literature Review

A study by Muhit I. B. and S. T. Chowdhury (2013) signifies that the success of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) depends on emphasizing the reproductive health issues of women (SDG – Sustainable Development Goal 3) as it confirms gender equality and women empowerment (Muhit & Chowdhury, 2013) (Santina et al., 2013). Inadequately addressed 'menstruation' issues may hamper the achievement of SDG-5 (Sustainable Development Goal) on gender equality (Salim & Begum, 2016). During puberty or adolescence (between the ages of ten and nineteen) stage, girls experience 'Menstruation' - sometimes known as 'Menses' or described as a 'Menstrual Period.' Due to changes in hormones, they face both physical and emotional changes. Menstruation continues until girls reach menopause (when menstruation ends), mostly between their late forties and mid-fifties (House et al., 2012). However, menstruation continued to be wrapped in mystery, taboo, and awkwardness (e.g., avoiding entering the holy place, not joining religious or social meetings, not touching plants, cleaning the bed on the fourth day of menstruation, and other issues) for females across the globe including Bangladesh (Power, 1995) (Mukherjee et al., 2020).

### 3.1 Buying Behavior

Consumers' buying behavior is a decision process and an approach of the people involved in buying and using products. Product purchase decisions start based on problems (need or want) and recognition that fits their requirements (Lamba, 2023). Therefore, for marketing products (goods and services), understanding the consumer's mindset and thought process is crucial. Customers prefer to buy the best quality products at a reasonable price. Hence, efforts from the company segment must be connected to these views of consumer behavior to offer identifiable product features (Lavuri & Sreeramulu, 2019).

### 3.2 Purchase Behavior of Consumer towards Female Hygiene Products

Consumer decisions have been approached through the ages. The older segment is influenced by their developed experiences (e.g., relying on diversified options in making decisions). In contrast, the younger segment relies mainly on the brand image (e.g., price, reputation, and others). Gender also distinguishes spending behavior. Women are more emotional and easily attracted by advertisement appeal than their male counterparts (Matheos et al., 2017). Menstruation is an integral and usual part of women in a productive age. Therefore, menstrual hygiene is essential to hygiene, cleanliness, and reproductive health services; every woman and girl has a right to practice female hygiene appropriately (House et al., 2012).

To ensure optimal safety during this period, quality napkins are required. Product quality is one of the contributing factors to the level of pleasure in consumer purchase decisions and post-purchase response. Female sanitary napkins are a must-have convenience item for every woman at a productive age, as they always need it every month due to their monthly period. Product requirements/desires are more diverse in women than men. Hence, companies must consider consumer behavior changes so that consumers have enough substitute alternatives (sanitary napkins) recommended by marketers (Matheos et al., 2017).

### *3.3 Factors Affecting Consumers' Preference for Sanitary Napkins in Bangladesh*

Mensah et al. (2016) opined that consumer's buying behavior for sanitary napkins is usually influenced by several factors such as price, quality standards, features, advertisements, family and friends' recommendations, and packaging. Thus, consumers purchase Sanitary Napkins based on their lifestyle (e.g., quality vs. price-sensitive purchase). Usually, users of sanitary napkins gather adequate product information before purchasing (to evade difficulties they may face afterward), and most of them signify importance to affordability, comfort, volume, and duration of blood absorption (Tu et al., 2021). In a study, Krithika and Aileen (2019) suggested that economic conditions (e.g., income, attitude towards spending and saving) affect product preference. Whereas quality is a priority for value-sensitive customers, people with less purchasing power prefer to utilize an economically convenient brand (Mensah et al., 2016). Another investigation found that using sanitary products relates to economic conditions (Salim & Begum, 2016). These users usually prefer to buy long sanitary napkins with wings and an excellent soak-up facility (Krithika & Alex, 2019). As disposable napkins are somewhat expensive, the product usage ratio will increase when it becomes more affordable (Parker et al., 2014). Previous research showed that value-sensitive users desire sanitary napkins with superior performance, indicating that they tend to spend more money on an improved choice of products (Kara, 2021).

Along with economic factors, personal factors influence choice level. Women mostly prefer thin sanitary napkins, while the preference for thick sanitary napkins is insignificant. The inclination for sanitary napkins without wings is admirable. Reference groups (e.g., family members, peers, neighbors, and other primary references) influence attitude and self-concept that may affect product and brand choices and constitute the most influential personal factor. Generally, a girl is familiar with and used to the brand her mother recommended. Such interaction indicates that the girl trusts her mother's suggestions and preferences to use a particular brand or due to a certain comfort level developed over time with the brand. Some consumers may change their brand preferences to certain brands for better features and product attributes over time.

Brand identity association also plays a considerable role in product preferences. Hence, advertising is an instrumental tool for influencing buying behavior by showcasing brand identity to target prospects. Guided by the appealing brand messages, customers' responses will determine brand loyalty, which is essential to boost the profitability and profit growth of the company. Customers who have a positive attachment to the offered products based on comfortability and limited side effects will be more loyal and more likely to recommend new prospects (Krithika & Alex, 2019).

### *3.4 Promotional awareness and efforts for Sanitary Napkins in Bangladesh*

As per the opinion of Santina et al. (2013) and Rahman et al. (2018), conventional media is comparatively more straightforward to reach with clear messages in urban areas of Bangladesh. However, bounded by social restrictions in rural areas, awareness regarding female product usage, brand, and health services can be arranged by non-conventional media rather than conventional media, such as road shows and running video shows. In addition, the demonstration by the service providers and brand fairs only for the females, folk theatre, folk songs, school visits by the medical/health representatives, toll-free health services, and 'Uthan Baithak' (Courtyard Meeting, where a group discussion is held occasionally with goods and services demonstration among the community members in rural areas) be practiced regularly.

Sanitary napkins have become available on the shelves of shops and supermarkets, and the recent practice of wrapping the products in newspapers to conceal the contents is also less prominent. Thus, packaging is essential

to presenting sanitary wear. Though the marketing and displaying of these products have become acceptable - the styles, images, packaging, and labeling used by brands still allow attitudes towards menstruation, such as disgrace, privacy, and discretion, to be suppressed and reinforced in the minds of the target audiences. This, in turn, has knock-on effects on views concerning females' sexuality and role in society (Power, 1995). Hence, the manufacturers must study the consumer behavior shifts and accordingly redesign and portray packaging to evade the signs of society's taboos about menstruation.

According to Uddin, Tushar, and Sakib (2020), sanitary napkin producers can collaborate with garment producers to develop relatively affordable sanitary napkins from recycled cotton (e.g., a considerable amount of unavoidable waste occurs at different stages of production when making garment items). Turning the waste into value-added products may ensure the health and safety of female users in Bangladesh.

#### **4. Methodology**

To investigate the research objectives, the researcher will apply the mixed method approach, which involves quantitative and qualitative research approaches, to collect relevant data from the targeted research respondents. Relating the qualitative and quantitative data improves an evaluation by ensuring that the strengths of one type of data balance the limitations of another.

Secondary data sources played an essential role in supporting the empirical study. Information relevant to the investigation was generated from books, journal articles, newspaper articles, different authorized website sources, annual reports, and other published sources to develop the conceptual framework of this study.

Structured questions (with multiple options and, in some cases, multiple choices) cover the quantitative study, whereas focus group discussions and interviews embrace the qualitative research. To explore the investigation's consequences, the researchers utilized a planned questionnaire to accumulate required information from respondents about their thoughts and experiences with the topic mentioned. More than 550 responses were received, and around 517 responses were utilized to gather more reliable and accurate data. The non-probability purposive sampling method was employed for the needful purpose of the investigation. This approach utilizes perceptions in the analysis by acquiring information from active participants about revealing it to researchers (Kumar, 2005). Due to the sensitive hygiene issue, the researchers conducted this sampling approach attributable to feasibility, less costly, less time-consuming, and restraints owing to physical interactions with potential female users.

The researchers circulated the developed questionnaire to female consumers with adequate knowledge of the investigated topic. To construct the questionnaire, "Google Forms," was used. Over 600 respondents received the Google Form survey link, and 550 respondents (92 percent) contributed to the investigation. However, because of the inaccuracy of responses, 517 replies (94 percent of the accepted responses) were employed for analysis. As per the report by Krejcie & Morgan (1970), the accepted sample size of 517 responses was commenced based on sample size determination. The findings further stated that if the population size is above 100,000, the sample size should be at least 384 to attain significant consequences for the investigation.

SPSS Version 20 was used in the investigation. Necessary descriptive statistics (percentages and graphs) were applied for the research. Descriptive statistics are simple to understand, re-arrange, and successively order, and they employ the data to derive descriptive information (Zikmund et al., 2010). Hence, the Frequency Distribution Table was used to examine the properties of the variable. Relevant findings and recommendations have also been prepared for this study by analyzing these charts.

#### **5. Analysis and Discussion**

##### *5.1. Consumers' Demography*

According to the survey findings (Table 5.1), the study comprised 517 respondents who are existing users of sanitary napkins in Dhaka City and portrayed that a significant number of respondents (about 97 percent) were aged 18 to 38 years. Students and service holders (76 percent) by profession hold a sizable percentage. Most respondents' marital status was identified as single (51 percent) and married (46 percent), with similar representation for each status group.

Table 5.1: Demographic Profile of Respondents (in Percentage)

Variables	Category	Percentage (%)
Age	18-24 years	39.80
	25-31 years	39.30
	32-38 years	16.80
	39-45 years	3.90
	46+	0.20
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Professional engagement	Student	41.00
	Business/self-employed	07.50
	Service holder	35.20
	Housewife	15.10
	Others	01.20
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Marital Status	Single	51.10
	Married	46.00
	Divorced/Separated	02.70
	Widowed	00.00
	Others	00.20
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Source: Primary survey, December 2023.

The consumer demographic signifies that most respondents are young, active, and regularly engaged in outdoor activities. Therefore, sanitary napkins and hygiene products are essential to ensure proper health, safety, and comfort; thus, these groups are counted as the potential target market for toiletries and consumer care products marketers offering sanitary napkins and other health products in Bangladesh.

## 5.2. Key Purchase Behavior

### 5.2.1 Affordability of Respondents

As per the survey results, most respondents (55 percent) needed to spend nearly BDT 300/- (Three Hundred Taka) to purchase and use sanitary napkins in a particular month. Since lower-middle class and price-sensitive consumers find it difficult to pay this amount as expenditure for sanitary napkins, affordability is still a significant concern for the existing and potential target markets while purchasing their required items and quantities of sanitary napkins routinely.

Table 5.2: Behavioral and Psychographic Statistics of Respondents (in percentage)

Variables	Category	Percentage (%)
Average monthly expenditure for Sanitary Napkins	Less than TK 150	31.30
	TK 151-TK 300	54.90
	TK 301-TK 450	10.10
	TK 451 and above	03.50
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Sanitary Napkins Purchased by	Self	50.30
	Husband	19.90

	Mother/sister	17.00
	Father/brother	12.00
	Others	0.80
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Availability/Accessibility of sanitary napkins as per customer choice	Local Pharmacy	54.10
	Pharmacy Chain Outlets (such as Lazz Pharma, Prescription Aid, and others)	15.50
	Superstores (such as Shwapno, Agora, Meena Bazar, and others)	26.50
	Online Stores (such as Chaldal, Daraz, Shwapno Online, Meena Click, and others)	3.60
	Others	0.40
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Encounter/confront difficulties during the menstruation cycle	Need to buy a bigger pack in the absence of small pack sizes	41.10
	Lack of instant availability, user need to keep/carry 'Sanitary Napkins'	40.40
	Lack of clean and hygienic washrooms	12.40
	'Sanitary Napkins' are rarely available in the nearby general stores	1.90
	Need to depend on others as the customer herself is not purchasing it	3.10
	Others	1.10
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Research findings (Table 5.2) indicated that the respondents need to buy a bigger pack of sanitary napkins, which is expensive for the consumers to purchase as most of the brands currently available in Bangladesh do not serve small pack sizes in the market or fail to minimize the overall cost of production (due to higher import tax levied on imported inputs from the international market). Usually, the manufacturers offer pack sizes containing 6 to 16 pads in a packet. Due to social taboos and perceived social discomfort, most female buyers prefer to purchase this product themselves (50 percent). So, if they find bigger-sized packs at a reasonable price, they could be comfortable shopping with less purchase frequency.

### 5.2.2 Availability and Accessibility of Sanitary Napkins

According to respondents' preferences, local (nearby) pharmacies are the top-most favored option for consumers who purchase sanitary napkins regularly (comprising more than 50 percent). Due to some implied social taboos and feelings of unidentified hesitation, retailers deliver the purchased items in covered or wrapped packages. Such action ensures buyers' comfort in carrying the products without hesitation and social embarrassment.

As sanitary napkins are rarely available in nearby grocery stores during emergency requirements, around 40 percent of the users reserve these products along with their hand-carry accessories (Table 5.2). The researchers have also identified the respondents' preferences in placing orders for Sanitary Napkins online as the least attractive purchase option. This usually happens to avoid vendors' usual delivery lead time and to skip unauthorized receiving of the parcel delivery.

### 5.2.3 Difficulties faced during the purchase of Sanitary Napkins.

Traditionally, it is evident that discussions about the menstruation cycle are one of the most confidential issues among reference groups. Girls from the initial stage of puberty are encouraged or even forced to believe by their peripheral and social reference groups, i.e., friends, family members, peers, and other primary reference groups, that menstruation is something to be kept secret and not to be discussed on public platforms. However, research



findings highlighted that 73 percent of respondents purchased sanitary napkins directly from the retail outlets without experiencing much embarrassment. This may happen due to appropriate health awareness, the modern mindset of new generations, and the modern lifestyles of the contemporary generation. However, purchasing sanitary napkins can be uncomfortable, especially for the remaining 27 percent, who are still anxious that other customers or a community will spot their purchases and give them a suspicious look.

Though many respondents answered that it is not inconvenient while buying, a significant percentage mentioned the salespersons' unfriendly behaviors as one of the primary reasons for such social embarrassment. The researchers observed that the salesperson's curious look (53 percent) and unnecessary questions make it uncomfortable for the female users during their purchase action from the outlets. As every active girl and woman purchases Sanitary Napkins regularly, the manufacturers and the outlets should take proper initiatives to reduce the current inconveniences and to develop a cordial attitude during shopping interactions (Table 5.3).

Table 5.3: Inconvenience Faced by Respondents (in percentage)

Variables	Category	Percentage (%)	Variables	Category	Percentage (%)
Inconvenience faced by respondents during Purchase time of Sanitary Napkins	Yes	26.50 (137) <sup>a</sup>	Types of Inconvenience faced by respondents	Retailer's/another salesperson's curious look	53.10 (78) <sup>a</sup>
				Questions asked by the salesperson can make respondents feel uncomfortable.	11.60 (17) <sup>a</sup>
				Another customer's curious look or uncomfortable attitude	34.00 (50) <sup>a</sup>
				Others	1.30 (2) <sup>a</sup>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00 (517)<sup>a</sup></b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00</b>
No	73.50 (380) <sup>a</sup>				

Note: a. Figure in the parentheses indicates the number

#### 5.2.4 Presence of Sanitary Napkins in the nearby Work/Study Location

In the case of female users' institutional and corporate engagement hours, the urgent requirement for sanitary napkins is an obvious obligation. However, inadequate availability and access to sanitary napkins can sometimes become embarrassing and a significant health concern. Though more than 50 percent of respondents opined on the readiness of napkins in their workplaces or study areas, only 39 percent preferred to buy or take sanitary napkins from corporate and in-house sources such as the Sanitary Napkin Vending Machines.

The respondents have highlighted significant observations about the operational usage of these vending machines, such as the dispenser system being sometimes unfunctional, not refilled as required, vending machines not always readily available in nearby places from their workstations, classes and common rooms, and inadequate service operations (Table 5.4).

Table 5.4: Availability of Napkins near the Respondents' Work/Study Location (in percentage)

Variables	Category	Percentage (%)	Variables	Category	Percentage in "Total" (%)	Percentage in "Yes" (%)
'Sanitary Napkins' readily available at respondents'	Yes	53.40 (276) <sup>a</sup>	'Sanitary Napkins' purchased from work/study	Yes	38.90 (201 out of 517) <sup>a</sup>	72.83 (201 out of 276) <sup>a</sup>
	No	30.20 (156) <sup>a</sup>				
	Not known	8.50 (44) <sup>a</sup>		No		

existing work/study location	Not Applicable (in case the respondents are not working/studying)	7.93 (41) <sup>a</sup>	location for use by respondents		14.50 (75 out of 517) <sup>a</sup>	27.17 (75 out of 276) <sup>a</sup>
	<b>Total</b>	<b>100.00 (517)<sup>a</sup></b>		<b>Total</b>	<b>53.40 (276 out of 517)<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>100.00</b>

Note: a. Figure in the parentheses indicates the number

### 5.3. Branding

#### 5.3.1 Brand Preference by Respondents

It was identified that both ‘Senora’ from Square Toiletries Limited (28 percent) and ‘Freedom’ from ACI Consumer Limited (28 percent) are the most reliable and prominent female hygiene brands in Bangladesh marketplaces. These locally manufactured brands provide the safest hygienic solution for females during the menstruation period, with the highest absorbance power at a reasonable price per their expected range, as researchers mentioned before.

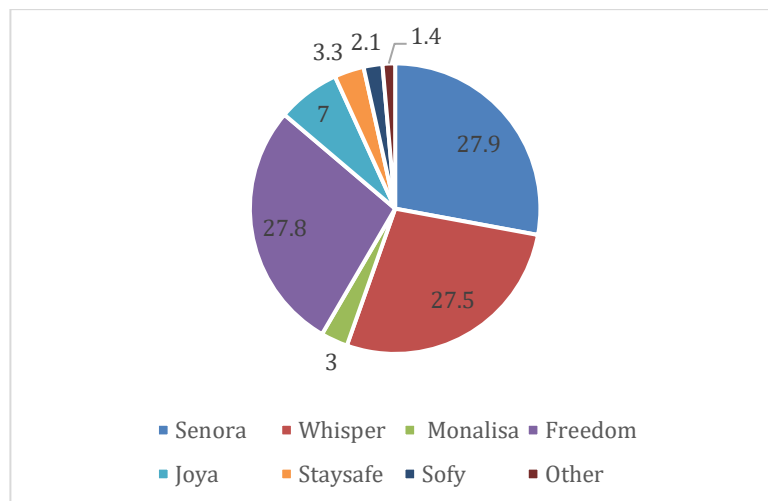


Figure 5.5 (A): Brand Preference by Respondents (in percentage)

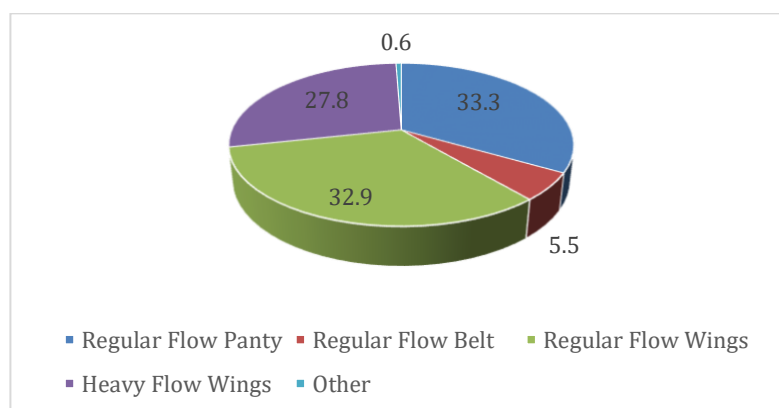


Figure 5.5 (B): Preferred types of Napkins (in percentage)

Through attractive and multi-dimensional promotional campaigns in both electronic and print media, the companies constantly try to assist their prospective target audiences in understanding the attributes and benefits of this product's utilization process. Comparing the total actual and potential users of sanitary napkins, the manufacturers still do not have enough publicity and customer engagement. Along with these two local brands,

'Whisper,' a renowned foreign feminine hygiene brand, has a significant sales volume in Bangladesh. Due to cross-border trade flexibility and cultural exchanges, female consumers of Bangladesh nowadays enjoy the opportunity to have this brand for their needful purpose. This brand also has a worthwhile appeal to female consumers in Bangladesh (28 percent) (figures 5.5 A and B respectively).

Table 5.5: Brand Preference by Respondents (in percentage)

Variables	Category	Percentage (%)
Preferred Size for sanitary napkins	Packet of 20 pads	39.60
	Packet of 15-16 pads	29.10
	Packet of 10-12 pads	21.80
	Packet of 6-8 pads	8.60
	Packet of 3 pads	0.20
	Others	0.80
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Branding and Promotional offerings of 'Sanitary Napkins' manufacturers influence buying decision	Yes	66.50
	No	33.50
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>
Identifiable features for the preferred brand influence purchasing decision	Color, size of the packet, unique pattern of writing the brand's name, and overall aesthetic design of the packet	31.70
	The manufacturer's goodwill and reputation in the market	29.30
	The celebrity/model endorsing the product	2.40
	Message content and presentation during the promotion of the product	12.20
	The visibility and availability of the brand's product line/type variations	23.50
	Others	00.90
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.0</b>

### 5.3.2 Identifiable features for the preferred brand

The aesthetic package design of Sanitary Napkins and the use of attractive colors together attain the top priority as per the responses generated by the investigation (32 percent). The reputation and positive image of the manufacturer are the second most preferred option (30 percent). It indicates how significant brand equity is for the overall purchase choice of consumers in this aspect. As expected, the investigation reflects that around 24 percent of consumers opined for the availability of sanitary napkins offered in the market. Hence, the company must pay attention to extending the product lines and SKUs to attract potential consumers, impacting overall sales volume in return. Celebrity endorsement is one of the critical tools that promotion companies use. However, for the promotion of sanitary napkins, the inclusion of celebrities has an insignificant impact on the purchase decision of consumers (only 2 percent) (Table 5.5).

### 5.3.3 Brand Loyalty Status of Respondents

As sanitary napkins are significant health and hygiene products, frequent changes in brand choices and product categories may lead to probable health risks and practical threats for the users. The outcome of the investigation also reflected the same philosophy. More than fifty (53 percent) of users remain 'hardcore loyal' to their preferred brands for product usage. Around 39 percent of the loyal groups prefer to continue with their desired brand for 3-6 years. Therefore, researchers summarized the importance of effective promotional campaigns and customer relationship management for a positive recall and repeat response toward sanitary napkin products (Table 5.6).

Table 5.6: Brand Loyalty of Respondents (in percentage)

Variables	Category	Percentage (%)	Variables	Category	Percentage (%)
<b>Loyalty Status of Customer</b>	Hardcore Loyal (Buying one (1) brand all the time.)	52.80	<b>Frequency of Using Existing Brand</b>	Less than 3 years	21.90
	Split Loyal (Buying any of the preferred 2-3 brands, which one is readily available.)	39.70		3 - 6 years	35.80
	Shifting Loyal (Buying any brand that is available at the outlet)	3.30		6 - 9 years	15.70
	Switchers (Buying any brand that is the cheapest and offers promotional benefits)	3.30		More than 9 years	26.70
	Others	0.60			
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>		<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>

#### 5.4 Promotional Incentives and Consumers' Purchase Decision

##### 5.4.1 Existing Product Attributes preferred by female users during the purchase of Sanitary Napkins

The reference groups (around 49 percent) are the community influences that provide substantial recommendations or guidelines that inspire initial users to choose sanitary napkins. Due to social stigma, users preferred to seek the opinions and ideologies of their closest ones rather than asking for information from commercial sources (retail outlets, company representatives, and others). However, the contribution of both the print and broadcast media (21 percent) is also praiseworthy. Around 80 percent of users would want to examine the instructions on the product's label to avoid any uncertainties and prospective health problems (Table 5.7).

Though the demand for large-sized packets of Sanitary Napkins (containing 15-20 pads per packet) is relatively high in the local market (around 69 percent), a considerable group of female consumers cannot afford this packet size due to high prices and low purchasing power (as discussed in Table 5.2 above).

The researchers witnessed promotional incentives (e.g., buy one and get one free, bundle-pack offers; on-campus vending machine offerings, motivational health slogans on product's label; online delivery process; convenient pack size at a reasonable price; complete protection of dryness for long hours, free extra napkins in the packet, and others) noticeably play a significant role in shaping consumers thought process (around 67 percent) (Table 5.5) and (around 72 percent) (Table 5.7) respectively.

Table 5.7: Sources of Communication and Existing Promotional incentives preferred by Respondents (in percentage)

Variables	Category	Percentage (%)
Sources encourage customers to purchase Sanitary Napkins	Reference Group	48.90
	Print and Outdoor Media	8.50
	Broadcast Media	12.80
	Online and Digital Advertisements	11.40
	Company Representatives/ Salespersons at the outlets	1.40
	Doctors/Health-care Representatives	14.50
	Other	2.40
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Label information on packaging influences customers	Always	29.40
	Sometimes	49.70
	Not Applicable	20.90

	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Existing promotional Incentives by the brands to attract customers	Free extra pads in the packet	28.20
	Reduced price	22.50
	Bundle product initiatives (such as buy two and get one packet free, volume discounts, and others)	21.60
	Free gifts/ Free health insurance.	10.60
	Sponsorship in events and shows in Educational, Social, Corporate programs and others	7.90
	Celebrating special days (such as Women's Day and World Menstruation Day) and encouraging social engagements	8.60
	Others	0.50
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>

#### 5.4.2 Future Product benefits through Promotional offerings preferred by female users

The research results identified that 57 percent of users prefer convenient packet sizes (35 percent) with flexible retail prices and discount offers (22 percent) since the current market product ranges are higher than the consumers' expectations. Line extension of products that includes increasing product variations of sanitary napkins was identified as the second most preferred factor (19 percent). Moreover, the result analysis indicated that point-of-sales promotions and online purchase facilities are the least preferred (6 percent) factors and have an insignificant impact on users' overall purchase choice of sanitary napkins.

The investigation suggests that many users (67 percent) expect easy disposal bags inside each packet of sanitary napkins. Furthermore, 30 percent of the users are looking for biodegradable and eco-friendly sanitary napkins (10 percent), which can be easily disposed of after usage, and products with high absorbent capacity (20 percent) (Table 5.8).

Table 5.8: Future Promotional incentives preferred by the respondents (in percentage)

Variables	Category	Percentage (%)
New brands must prioritize preferred factors in this category	Enhancing product quality and offering convenient packet sizes	35.30
	Increasing product variations (such as the introduction of new products for teenagers, travel packs, etc., for the regular and premium segments)	18.70
	Price incentives (such as Low-price, discount offers, and others)	22.00
	Customer Care Services	4.10
	Point-of-sales promotions and online purchase facilities	6.40
	Offering free sample products	13.30
	Others	0.20
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Significant product benefits that the "Sanitary Napkins" manufacturers should be more concerned	Easy disposal bags	67.00
	More compact in size with a high absorbent capacity	19.80
	Customer Relationship Management (CRM) Support	2.50
	bio-degradable and eco-friendly 'Sanitary Napkins'	10.10
	Others	00.70
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>

#### 5.4.3 Campaign initiated by Sanitary Napkin Brand's Producer to expedite knowledge of Target Market

As a part of a natural biological process, sudden irregular periods and menstrual cycles for which female users may face unexpected menstruation that makes them feel uncomfortable and hesitated in public areas. Hence, a significant number of users (86 percent) of sanitary napkins opined for the availability of these products in public places (e.g., educational institutions, workplaces, public transportation hubs, shopping, and entertainment zones).

However, researchers witnessed that vending machines for sanitary napkins have already been installed in some specific working areas like female standard rooms, office premises, female washrooms, factories, and transportation hubs) which are insufficient in numbers. A notable number of respondents (71 percent) know about these establishments, indicating a positive merchandising initiative by the brand marketers to position their products' visibility and Accessibility as a part of their consumer awareness building and customer relationships (table 5.9).

Table 5.9: Awareness Campaign by Sanitary brands and hence Knowledge of Respondents (in percentage)

Variables	Category	Percentage (%)
Napkins should be made available for purchase in public areas	Yes	86.00
	No	4.00
	May be	10.00
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Awareness level of respondents regarding the presence of 'Sanitary Napkins Vending Machines' in establishments.	Yes	71.00
	No	29.00
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>
Knowledge about alternative products that can be used instead of 'Sanitary Napkins'.	Unaware	40.00
	Aware	16.70
	Interested in using the product offerings in the future	10.00
	Not Interested at all in using such product offerings	32.00
	Have already used the products	1.30
	<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100.00</b>

Jain et al. (2022) opined that menstruation balances proliferation, decidualization, inflammation, hypoxia, apoptosis, hemostasis, vasoconstriction, and repair and regeneration. An inconsistency in these systems can lead to the irregular endometrial phenotype of Abnormal Uterine Bleeding (AUB). Though menstruation is a physiological process, studies showed that around one-third of women globally are affected by AUB at some point in their reproductive ages. Hence, poor menstrual health is closely linked with AUB and forms an adverse effect on a person's physical, mental, social, emotional, and financial well-being and is often under-reported and under-recognized. Focus group discussions and interview outcomes comply with the information mentioned above and suggest that few female users suffer from heavy menstrual bleeding that lasts for a long time due to unavoidable reasons (e.g., hormone imbalance, the problem with the ovaries, uterine fibroids, genetic bleeding disorder, and others). It becomes challenging for adolescent females to perform everyday activities due to intense menstrual bleeding, blood flow, and cramping.

To address this issue, female health and hygiene product marketing companies have alternative options (e.g., tampons, menstrual cups and discs, absorbent underwear, reusable cloth pads, and products., which are limitedly available) instead of using sanitary napkins to address the related needs of the menstrual cycle. However, the investigation showed that companies must put adequate efforts into marketing and awareness-building among target audiences about using alternative products. The current utilization of such alternatives among respondents is insignificant (1 percent), whereas around 40 percent do not have sufficient knowledge and ideas about such products. Moreover, remarkably, a substantial number of respondents (32 percent) are not interested in using alternative products for personal hygiene. (Table 5.9)

## 6. Insights and Suggestions

Examining the outcomes of the analysis, the investigators have decided on some feasible recommendations to assist the successful branding and promotional operations impacting the consumers' behavior regarding the purchase of female health and hygiene products in Bangladesh, which are mentioned below:

The retail price of sanitary napkins should be revised to minimize the customers' costs and make them convenient for the mass community. For this, the manufacturers may take some initiatives, such as re-engineering production processes, managing low-cost raw materials sourcing from local and reasonable foreign sources, attaining economies of scale, and re-designing the supply chain, sales, and distribution operations to minimize the overall cost of production and marketing efforts. The government may offer some special incentives by reducing the existing taxes on the purchase of raw materials and production logistics and by exempting the value-added tax (VAT) on consumers' purchase of sanitary napkins. These will eventually encourage the manufacturers, marketers, supply chain partners, primary traders, and consumers.

The manufacturers and marketers of sanitary napkins should allocate sufficient funds and management support to their own Research and Development (R&D) department to ensure smooth new product development, new product varieties, the introduction of convenient sizes, innovative packaging, customer-centric marketing activities, and others, for instance, the production of Sanitary Napkins from natural sources. According to a report by The Daily Star (2021), researchers in Bangladesh developed a machine to produce jute cellulose-based sanitary pads. Initially, they manually developed and steered the jute cellulose-based (a biodegradable material) disposable sanitary napkin, which can be considered an excellent alternative for females in Bangladesh to sustain menstrual health and hygiene. Other examples can be cited in an electronic source (Saathi, 2024), which mentions the availability of bamboo and banana fiber-based sanitary napkins. Such product development initiatives, which are biodegradable and eco-friendly, can be patronized as full-fledged production and commercialization of such products to confirm a wide range of consumer benefits. In 2023, 'Senora' Sanitary Napkin launched Bangladesh's first-ever biodegradable sanitary napkin brand, 'Senora Bio.' This innovative product offering was developed on the suggestions of a renowned Bangladeshi Scientist, and with technical assistance from Netherlands-based company TNO. This napkin was made from a biodegradable cotton top sheet and a leakproof back sheet made from potato starch, which blends with the environment within six months after disposal (Square Toiletries Limited, 2023). Hence, researchers thus predict that when other manufacturers introduce such initiatives, the market will eventually be more competitive, and the price of such biodegradable sanitary napkins will be more reasonable and affordable to the public. Such product development initiatives will not only positively impact the health of female consumers but also influence the local community and the environment.

To enhance the availability and accessibility of sanitary napkins, companies should re-arrange their distribution systems, product positioning, and merchandising to introduce convenient buying experiences for the ultimate consumers. For instance, manufacturers may confirm their distribution efficiencies by channel mobilization, increase product visibility by placing products in front of consumers' shopping areas to confirm impulse buying, and set up company-sponsored corners and dedicated shelves inside the super shops with expert sales representatives by providing initial support services and solve any queries of the consumers. Moreover, the strategic involvement of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) representatives in reaching and delivering sanitary napkins to the mass people in urban and rural areas can be an effective way out.

Based on a comprehensive need assessment survey result, the manufacturers and marketers of sanitary napkins should install more vending machines in different public places (station hubs, shopping malls, and others), factories and assembly centers, corporate office premises, and academic institutions such as schools, colleges, and universities, to ensure emergency solutions and initiate awareness building campaigns. A company-sponsored, well-equipped, and dedicated team from each host point should monitor the machine performance, stock replenishments, and service maintenance works to ensure prompt and convenient service delivery to the consumers. Moreover, introducing payment through Mobile Financial Services (MFS) and arranging idea-sharing engagement sessions between the company experts and the beneficiary groups of the vending machines installed in different organizations should be organized for knowledge-sharing and customer relationship purposes.

Compared to previous times, brand initiatives and promotional campaigns for sanitary napkins have progressed to considerable modifications in recent times. In breaking the social taboos and commercial hesitations, companies are now initiating attractive and creative advertisements (both for online and offline media platforms) with more realistic concepts, such as the implementation of rational, emotional, moral, and social appeals in their promotional messages to draw the attention of the mass community and the target audiences. That is how companies are now

turning the advertisement scopes into successful publicity programs, which are considered a substantial branding success for the overall industry stakeholders. In addition to these, more comprehensive and contemporary branding programs and lucrative promotional initiatives, such as effective engagements of new generation users (event sponsorships, CRM and community marketing campaigns, issue-based online competitions, and others), and initializing profitable trade benefits will enhance the brand loyalty of the final consumers' and the channel members.

Participation of male counterparts in shaping policy regarding reproductive health issues is equally crucial. Even if the males do not experience menstruation, they have a significant role in confirming and safeguarding a reassuring environment for the women and girls in their families and workplaces. To comply with such projection, investigators witnessed in a study by Khan et al. (2022) suggested that academic and social institutions must initiate education and knowledge sharing on reproductive and sexual health among girls from the primary level. The health experts can initiate visuals and demonstration-based content on female hygiene practices. The concerned authorities, such as academic institutions and the workplace, must ensure the appropriateness of clean and hygienic toilet facilities for females. It must present clear instructions on using and disposing of sanitary napkins in toilet facilities. Moreover, the males must also be involved in conversations related to female hygiene practices, sanitary napkin applications, and usage functions.

Beyond all the commercials mentioned above and consumer engagement initiatives, social breakthroughs, idea marketing campaigns, and social points of agreement will generate a convenient, comfortable, and hesitation-free shopping and selling experience for users and retailers. Considering sanitary napkins as healthcare and a necessary consumer product, the local grocery stores, shopping websites, and delivery platforms should merchandise and market these products intensively. A blend of combined and constructive efforts from all the stakeholders, such as consumers, companies, policymakers, families, and other social institutions, may open positive and fear-free shopping and selling environments for all the stakeholders.

## **7. Conclusion and Future Discussions**

Inadequacy or lack of social actions has intruded our thought process to wrongly brand menstruation with several taboos in the society of Bangladesh. However, it is a natural biological process for adolescent females. The Millennium Development Goals cannot be achieved if these efforts do not include reproductive health issues. Hence, an inadequately addressed 'menstruation' issue may hamper the achievement of SDG-5 in the long run. Survey findings suggest that company initiatives such as advertisements and related promotional incentives can contribute a lot to breaking the menstrual stigma, changing the attitude of adolescent to ensure that menstruation does not hinder their lives, celebrations, visions, or empowerment, and providing menstrual hygiene practices prescriptions. Though many conglomerates in Bangladesh have been investing in the female sanitary napkins segment, this segment has yet to expand to include most young adult female consumers. Hence, more dynamic collaboration between company sectors and national administration can play a significant role in including productive campaigns and moving forward with comprehensive approaches to influence female hygiene practices and purchase behavior for sanitary napkins. Significant actions will positively impact society, such as minimizing social taboos, and many attractive facilities will influence adolescents' purchase choices regarding sanitary napkins.

This investigation covers only adolescent female users within the periphery of Dhaka City. Despite having literacy and moderate awareness, these groups opted for brand initiatives to serve them affordable sanitary pads. However, in this respect, a significant underprivileged female group is yet to be patronized by sanitary napkin producers/brands. As per the Statistical Yearbook Bangladesh 2023, 2018-19, there were 4621 garment factories in Bangladesh, generating employment opportunities for 4 million workers (Bangladesh Bureau of Statistics (BBS), 2024). Around 80 percent of the 4 million workers (that is, 3.2 million workers) employed are women. As most are from economically neglected segments of society, factory owners can use them for less comparison to their male counterparts (Matsuura & Teng, 2020) (Acevedo & Robertson, 2012). A report by the Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association (BGMEA) cited that, though the apparel industry is Bangladesh's principal export earner with a cumulative value of over \$27.9 billion of exports in the 2019-20



financial year, the contribution of the female labor force is in declining trend due to low wages, long and hard-working hours, inaccessibility of health facilities in the workplace (Matsuura & Teng, 2020) (Acevedo & Robertson, 2012) (BGMEA, 2020). Researchers thus opined that to make this female labor more productive in their work sphere and to accelerate the GDP of Bangladesh, investigation about more significant promotional campaigns by the aggregate collaboration of female sanitary napkin producers and national administration. NGOs must raise health-related awareness among them while serving them these sanitary pads at a reasonable rate. Hence, investigators expect future researchers to emphasize and cover female workers in different age groups in the Ready-Made Garment (RMG) factories located in Dhaka city and on the surrounding peripherals of the city. Consequently, it will uncover further arenas that might aid in improving coordinated strategy guidelines of organized interferences focusing on the requests of such disadvantaged segments in the nation concerning female hygiene products. Nonetheless, the outcomes and investigation have met the investigation's objectives; the consideration would require exposing more samples to establish any related value to the targeted viewers. Thus, further studies on such issues and using an extensive group of defendants allow additional room for applying more required data. For this, future research will use the on-field random sampling method to attain a substantial outcome in the said area and influence the buying behavior of young adult female consumers for sanitary napkins in Bangladesh.

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