

# SUSTAINABLE 7PS FOR SUPERMARKETS IN BANGLADESH

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## ABSTRACT

Green marketing mix or sustainable 7Ps is the cutting edge issue. To keep up with the changing needs of consumers and changing climate as well as business environment, companies need to adopt green marketing practices. Thus this study finds out whether supermarkets of Bangladesh are adopting green marketing mix. The study found that 90% of consumers are aware about green products (or organic; product that do not harm the environment) and want to purchase these products from a trusted source like supermarkets. Survey results show that 65% consumers expect the green products should also be at competitive prices. Product placement such as shelf display, point of sale advertising, employee training, green product promotion and packaging, improvement of physical environment and selling processes are demanded by the respondents of this study. Supermarkets in Bangladesh hardly try to achieve competitive advantage through Green Marketing Mix. Though they can meet consumer expectations and be more profitable through. So, it is time for supermarkets to act green as well.

**Keywords:** Green Marketing Mix; Supermarkets; Environmental Marketing; Green Products, Sustainable Strategy; Green Strategy; Ecological Marketing.

## INTRODUCTION

Marketing mix is a set of tactical marketing tools (product, price, place and promotions) which are blends to generate desired response from the customer (Yan & Rashad, 2014). Green marketing mix is a particular form of development of product, price, promotion and place that do not harm the environment (Young et al., 2010). Companies that apply “green” marketing philosophy are expected to take into consideration ecological aspects of each element of marketing mix before they develop and place products in the market (Masum et al., 2012).

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Hence, for service marketing the Ps include: Product, Price, Promotion, Place, People, Physical Environment, and Process (Booms and Bitner, 1981).

Green Marketing is one of the latest and most popular trends in the market which has assisted for the environment-friendly in individual and planet (Rajeshkumar, 2012). Because of the increase in climate change and global warming, the general people's concern for environmental problems has constantly increased over the past years.

The effects of climate change, along with pollution and the depletion of non-renewable natural resources, have given rise to environmental awareness (Douglas, 2006). Consumer behavior is turning towards environmental friendly or green products. To meet the demand of today's customers, number of super shops and their product offerings are increasing day by day.

The word "Super shop" literally means super market which is a large shop selling food, drink, household goods etc. People choose what they want from the shelves and pay at the counter. Basically, a super market is a one floor large area consisting of the daily goods that are bought by households. Customers' concern about environment, product variety, product quality, fixed price and hassle-free purchasing make the super shop very popular among the middle and upper class urban consumers who live in the urban area (Masum et al., 2012).

Nowadays customers are more conscious about the use of harmful chemicals in the production, preservation and sales of agricultural products (Akter, 2012). To overcome the hazards in selling store brand agricultural products, green marketing can be a solution. Green marketing is the process of satisfying the needs and wants of customers in a way which can bring benefit or profit for both the providers and the society by reducing detrimental impact on the natural environment. The term "green marketing" describes an organization's efforts at designing, promoting, pricing and distributing products that will not harm the environment (Amin et al., 2013). The word "environmentally preferable" considers – the products and services which would be matched with the environment friendly and from manufacturing to selling of the products must have to be protected from deception and unprincipled things (Saha & Darnton, 2005).

Likewise, there is a growing interest among the consumers all over the world regarding protection of environment. Consumer behavior is turning towards environmental friendly or green product. Previous researches showed that most consumers have expressed a great interest in the protection of the environment and they are strongly concerned about the environment and its degradation. (Juwaheer et al., 2010). Besides, green perceived value would positively affect green trust and green purchase intentions. As a result, an immense opportunity has been created to add value through offering green products.

Although green marketing has been an important research topic for more than three decades, hardly any research has been conducted that focuses specifically on practices of marketing mix of green marketing in Supermarkets. A study (Bhatia and Jain, 2013) provides a brief review of environmental issues and identifies the green values of the consumers, their level of awareness about environmental issues, green products and practices.

Several studies examine the determinants that influence consumers' intention to buy environmentally friendly products (Kalafatis et. al, 1999), purchase intention of organic food (Huque and Rana, 2016), the relation between green brand and green marketing (Simao and Lisboa, 2017), Orientation scale of green marketing (Papadas et al., 2017), the influences of green marketing on consumer purchase behavior (Govender and Govender, 2016), firms internal practices for environmental sustainability and role of green marketing (D'Souza et. al, 2015), Green marketing mix strategies as well as consumer buying behavior for automobile sectors (Irfan et al., 2014; Valecha et al., 2018) and the characteristics of research on green marketing (Kumar, 2016, and Chamorro et. al, 2009).

There are also some studies focuses on the green marketing aspect on different countries, such as for China (Zhu and Sarkis, 2015), India (Kumara, 2017; Dubey and Gupta, 2016), Malaysia (Osman et al., 2016), Pakistan (Ali et al., 2011), Greece (Papadopoulos et. al, 2010) and Bangladesh (Mohajan, 2012).

None of these studies investigated Supermarket strategy for sustainable marketing mix and its relation with customers expectation/satisfaction, or in-depth of service marketing mix for strategic marketing. However, this study firstly attempts to encompass all seven aspects (7p's) of service marketing (Booms and Bitner, 1981); 7p's to find out whether supermarkets are adopting green marketing strategy for their customers.

This article identifies the type of promotion and its effectiveness, supermarkets' employee (people), process and physical environment and analyze whether they are suitable for green marketing from the eyes of the consumers. And finally, this study finds out the environmental strategies for 7Ps and provides strategic implications to improve the effectiveness of green marketing in supermarkets.

Next section describes the literature review. The other sections are Materials and Method, Results and Discussions, Conclusion, Limitation and Future Research.

## **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Green Marketing is sustainable marketing. Green includes many aspects; from ecological to political, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to Fair Trade and conservation to sustainability. According to the American Marketing Association, green marketing is the marketing of products that are presumed to be environmentally safe. Thus, green marketing incorporates a broad range of activities, including product modification, changes to the production process, packaging changes, as well as modifying advertising. Green or Environmental Marketing is the marketing process that consists of all activities designed to generate and facilitate any exchanges intended to satisfy human needs or wants, such that the satisfaction of these needs and wants occurs, with minimal detrimental impact on the natural environment (Polonsky, 1994).

Terms like Phosphate Free, Recyclable, Refillable, Ozone Friendly, Environment-friendly, eco-friendly and sustainable are some of the things consumers most often associate with green marketing. With the reference of American Marketing Association Workshop on Ecological Marketing and later published proceeding on green marketing, it was defined as the study of the study of positive and negative aspects of marketing activities on pollution, energy depletion, and non-energy resource depletion (Henion and Kennear, 1976). Several sources point out that a more complete definition of green marketing is based on the process of planning, implementing and managing the development, pricing, promotion and distribution of products in a way that meets the criteria of meeting customer needs, achieving organizational goals of the business and linking these processes to the eco-system (Dangelico and Vocalelli, 2017).

Finally, the main goal of green marketing is to present consumers with the importance of protecting the environment in the context of product consumption, placing an emphasis on building long-term relationships based on both sides of communication, not only with customers but also with other stakeholders and creating the natural need to be environmentally responsible (Moravcikova et al., 2017).

A supermarket is another form of grocery store which is a self-service store offering a wide variety of food and household merchandise, organized into departments. It is larger in size and has a wider selection than a traditional grocery store, but is smaller and more limited in the range of merchandise than a hypermarket or big-box store (Masum et al., 2012). Supermarkets were first introduced by retailers during World War II as they were transformed from small shops or grocery stores where the merchandise was pulled from the warehouse and storerooms by clerks while customers sat in reception areas and listened to the radio.

Retailers feared that the public would balk at self service required by the innovation. But retailers emphasized that pulling your own merchandise in a shopping cart or trolley would result in goods having lower prices. To the retailers delight, supermarkets were popular with the public (MMZimmerman, 1946). The supermarket typically comprises meat, fresh produce, and dairy and baked goods departments, along with shelf space reserved for canned and packaged goods as well as for various nonfood items such as household cleaners, pharmacy products and pet supplies. During the 1960-90 periods three changes occurred in supermarkets. First, product lines expanded into the product lines of other retailers such as pharmacies, clothing stores, automobile part stores, repair stores and fast food.

The expansion of supermarket lines led to the demise of other retailers such department stores and specialty stores. Second, the supermarket expanded in numbers of stores as national chains grew. This enabled more goods to be distributed to more stores in the chains economically. Supermarkets typically are supplied by the distribution centers of their parent companies, usually in the larger cities in the provinces and usually offer products at low prices by reducing their economic margins.

Certain products (typically staple foods such as bread, milk and sugar) are occasionally sold as loss leaders, that is, with negative profit margins. To maintain a profit, supermarkets attempt to make up for the lower margins by a higher overall volume of sales, and with the sale of higher-margin items. Third, the supermarket has expanded in size into big box stores (Gunther, Burke & Yang, 2006). Today, as a result of these changes, Customers usually shop for all of their consumable commodities to meet their needs, by placing their selected merchandise into shopping carts (trolleys) or baskets (self-service) and pay for the merchandise at the check-out.

## **LOGISTICAL ISSUES OF SUPERMARKETS**

Today there are logistical issues affecting the expansion of supermarkets. Merchandise can easily be selected online. But how can the supermarket company efficiently deliver it? Some firms have experimented with a food locker at people homes which is subject to burglary. Other firms have given discounts to customers who wait at home during a two hour delivery window for the delivery truck to come. Other firms have asked for customers' home keys to be given to trustworthy deliveryman wearing body cams to ensure the employees steal nothing. None of these schemes have been successful and freed the requirement that the customer must come to the supermarket, pull his own merchandise, and deliver the merchandise himself to his home. Online merchandisers such as Amazon are teaming up with delivery companies to expand into supermarket products.

In 2017 Amazon purchased the WholeFoods chain to compete with supermarket chains for the online retail food sales and delivery business (Stevens, Gasparro & Haddon, 2017). But whatever Amazon is planning, there is still the problem of delivering perishable food merchandise in a predictable efficient manner when customer purchase online. Now with Green Marketing, the next generation of retail merchandise expectations is starting. The customers want organic, eco-friendly, environmental friendly merchandise. In the same way revolutions occurred in retail marketing in the past when market shops were replaced with supermarkets, supermarkets expanded in merchandise lines and in national chains, and then ultimately transformed into big box stores. Now there is the new revolution where customers want new product lines composed of organic, eco-friendly, environmental friendly merchandise. Once the logistical problem having massive online purchases of food merchandise delivered in a predictable efficient manner, the green market revolution can expand.

## **FARMER MARKETS**

An example of the popularity of green marketing is the increase of popularity of farmer markets. The concept of farmer markets was introduced during the Depression in 1929. There was a breakdown in the supply chain of farm products in the USA. Farmers with excess produce were encouraged by residents of cities to come and sell directly to consumers. At the same time, Fisherman Wharfs came into popularity in the USA in coastal cities.

Only fishermen can sell their excess fish directly to the public in Fisherman Wharfs. Fisherman Wharfs became popular as consumers got freshly caught fish not canned or frozen. Farmer markets have been a success ever since also. Most of the produce sold in farmer markets is organic and natural. Besides having cheaper prices and the fresher produce, farmer markets have resulted in marketing dialogue between customers and farmers (Garner, 2017). For instance, organic farming where no pesticides are used has increased due to customer demands made of farmers by customers in this dialogue.

## **NATURAL FOOD AND ORGANIC FOOD LABELING**

There is a problem in the Green revolution with the labeling of organic and natural food products. There is no uniformity in the definition of organic food products and the definition of natural food products. Some scientists define natural food usually as food not altered by genetic manipulation of DNA. Companies like Monsanto state that nothing is wrong with GMOs. The Monk Mendel introduced food genetic manipulation over five hundred years ago. There is no uniformity in government labeling of what natural food that is manipulated genetically (Mientka, 2013). Another group of government label laws define natural foods as having no chemical preservatives and artificial ingredients. The FDA and USDA have introduced uniformity in what is defined as food grown naturally (Weaver, 2014).-

There is general uniformity in defining organic food by the government as food that is environmental friendly with no fertilizers, pesticides (Cohrssen & Miller, 2016). There is still a lack of uniformity between USA state and federal laws and between USA and international laws (Lathrop, 1991). Over time more uniformity will occur over the definition of natural food and organic food on a state, national, and international basis. Once uniformity occurs, governments, industry, and consumers will have predictable definitions of natural and organic food.

## **CHALLENGES OF GREEN MARKETING**

Green marketing faces a lot of challenges because of lack of standards and public knowledge to what constitutes "Green". Lack of consensus by consumers, marketers, activists, regulators, and influential people has slowed the growth of green products, because companies are often reluctant to promote their green attributes, and consumers are often skeptical about claims (Agyeman, 2014). At the same time, consumers are mistrustful of company claims of green as they have become increasingly sophisticated and knowledgeable through information from the web (Fui Yeng & Yazdanifard, 2015).

The common pitfall of companies' tunnel vision are focused on "managing products" (that is, product features, functions, and efficient production) instead of "meeting customers' needs" (that is, adapting to consumer expectations and anticipation of future desires). Research indicates that many green products have failed because of green marketing myopia—marketers' myopic focus on their products' "greenness" over the broader expectations of consumers or other market players such as regulators or activists (Nagaraju & Thejaswini, 2014). Green marketing myopia can also occur when green products fail to provide credible, substantive environmental benefits (Boztepe, 2012)

Stephen Wenc, the president of UL Environment, laid out four basic challenges to effective green marketing (NADAF & NADAF, 2014) as:

- a) Lack of credibility or trust by consumers and end-users
- b) Confusion regarding green or sustainable product claims
- c) Reputational risk from "misleading claims", and
- d) Liability risk from "green washing" under FTC Green Guides

## **ADVANTAGES OF GREEN MARKETING**

Going green is no longer a trend but a lifestyle; businesses that have already picked up on this change and are currently pursuing a green business model or green marketing strategy are reaping such benefits as:

- > Creating new audiences with product changes, new product development and strategic marketing which will facilitate to raise revenue.
- > Green brands associate consumers with environmental conservation and sustainable business practices and appeal to consumers and thus can add a unique selling point to a product and can boost company's image (Eze & Ndubisi, 2013).
- > Ensuring the environmental friendliness increases the customer satisfaction which enhances the reputation and competitive market value as well as brand equity (Prothero & Fitchett, 2000).
- > 'Greenness', the only concept that can keep the planet Earth which we call our home safe and sound (Masum et al., 2012)

Finally, green marketing is not just about marketing products that are specifically created for the green market, like solar panels or wind turbines. Green marketing is about leveraging the green benefits of any product to appeal to the conscientious consumer.

### **Materials and Methods**

In our research, we attempt to find out the answers to the following questions:

1. Whether supermarkets are trying to adopt green marketing strategies or not?
2. What type of green products are the supermarkets selling most?
3. What type of pricing strategy Supermarkets have adopted to sell green products?
4. What kind of promotions are Supermarkets broadcasting to sell green products and how effective are those promotions?

5. Whether the Supermarkets are providing proper and sufficient information regarding green products through their employees?
6. What sort of physical display environment and point of sale advertising are they providing to display and sell green products?
7. What are the processes through which supermarkets are marketing green products?
8. Whether supermarkets are successful in their green marketing strategies?

## **HYPOTHESES**

Our primary objective is to find out whether Supermarkets have enough involvement in Green Marketing practices which we will analyze in light of the 7Ps of the Green Marketing Mix

### **Product**

*H1: Consumers have proper knowledge about what green products are.*

### **Price**

*H1: Consumers consider green products to be premium or high priced.*

### **Place**

*H1: Consumers expect green products to be mostly available in Supermarkets.*

### **Promotion**

*H1: Consumers are not aware of green brands in Bangladesh.*

### **People**

*H1: Supermarket employees have adequate knowledge to encourage customers to purchase green products*

### **Physical Environment**

*H1: Supermarkets have proper arrangements to market & sell green products.*

### **Process & Policies**

*H1: Supermarkets have specific policies and process to market & sell green products to consumers.*

## **DATA COLLECTION AND METHODOLOGY**

The sample supermarkets are based in Dhaka city. There are currently 121 supermarkets in Bangladesh among Shawapno, Meena Bazaar and Agora are major players. Agora and Meena Bazar are viewed as market leaders in terms of quality and services (Amin, 2015; details in endnote).

This research is mainly descriptive in nature. Supermarket observation and survey are used for data collection. Primary data is collected through questionnaire survey during March-April 2017. Questions are all close-ended. Sample size was 120 persons. 60 persons are from online and 60 persons from supermarket shoppers. There are mainly two parts of the questionnaire – first part to understand the demography of the consumers. And second part is to get their feedback about green marketing in supermarkets so that correlation can be obtained between those two.

For online survey, questions are distributed through Google Forms and released to social media and personal emails. To supermarket shoppers, questionnaires are distributed hand to hand to shoppers at the end of their shopping in front of supermarkets of Agora, Shwapno, Unimart, Meena Bazar and Lavender. Data has been analyzed through proper quantitative and qualitative techniques. All the responses are recorded in Excel and analyzed through use of Pivot Table and Pivot charts.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The result and analyses are discussed separately for all seven aspect of marketing mix as follow:

### **Analysis in Terms of Product**

Mostly four types of green products are sold in the supermarkets. Those four categories broadly include Food & Groceries, Vegetables & Fruits, Electronic & Home Appliances and Healthcare products. Majority of these belong to Food & Groceries like Meats, Grains, Fisheries, Eggs, Milk & Dairy products, etc. Then a large portion belongs to fresh vegetables & fruits too. Electronic appliances and healthcare products retain a very small portion of total share.

In terms of Supermarket, Meenabazar claims to sell organic vegetables which are free of toxic and harmful pesticides and organic meat which they claim to systematically source through quality control process. Agora claims to sell fresh vegetables which they directly collected from the cultivation field of Savar, Kishorganj, Narshingdi and ensure Quality assurance in every stage. Prince Bazar sells healthy eggs in green packaging and promotes to return the used packages and Care-family claims to sell 100% formalin free fisheries. However, Swapno does not seem to be very interested in marketing or claiming to sell green products.

To understand consumers' perception of green products, the study finds out that 90% of consumers are aware of what green products are. This helps us to determine that our first hypothesis **H1: Consumers have a proper knowledge about what green products are is accepted.** The findings have also reveals that 42% of consumers shop fresh fruits and vegetables from Supermarkets; 20% of consumers shop organic foods; 15% of consumers purchase Electronic appliances from supermarkets. This gives us the idea that consumers have positive tendency towards buying organic and fresh food from supermarkets.

### **Analysis in Terms of Price**

It is found from that two-thirds of the respondents (65%) believe that green products are moderately priced. i.e. they are priced similar as substitution products. This implies that our hypothesis **H1: Consumers consider green products to be premium priced is rejected.** Consumers from supermarkets of Dhaka do not perceive green products to be expensive though consumers expect green products should be premium or high priced. This study also shows that most consumers are not willing to buy green products spending an extra penny.

58% of consumers are price sensitive about green products as well and are not willing to pay an extra dime. 38% have explicitly expressed that they will only buy green products if they are reasonably priced or cheap. This implies that **Consumers demand to green products is price sensitive;** as price changes, demand will change accordingly. There is an inverse relationship to price and demand. If the price is high, the consumer will buy substitutes.

### **Analysis in terms of Place**

While many consumers would expect to find green products in a combination of multiple channels, more than 40% consumers think Supermarkets are the good place for green products, and as marketers, all sorts of marketing activities should be focused on this channel. Apart from Supermarkets, another 2 channels that have good potential are Neighborhood Grocers and Online, although all of them were from the higher income group. Thus, the hypothesis **H1: Consumers expect green products to be mostly available in Supermarkets is correct.**

## Analysis In Terms Of Promotion

Findings show that most of the respondents have heard about green marketing or products online (68.3%), word of mouth (20%), television (6.7%). The striking part was only 3.3% have claimed to see green products inside the store. This clearly shows that there is a lot of work that can be done in-store to promote green products through effective shelf placement displays and point of sale marketing. Findings also suggest that consumers could not properly recall any green brands or products advertisement. So, **most consumers are not aware of any green brands in Bangladesh**. But vast engagement of consumers with online proves this media to be an effective platform for promoting green brands and products. However, importance of in-store promotions cannot be neglected as results show that 71.7% respondents feel in-store promotions are extremely important to drive sales.

## Analysis in Terms of People

Majority (43%) of the employees are unable to give any information about green products when consumers inquired. It seems supermarkets are reluctant about the training and educating their employees about green products. Survey result also shows that in 80% of consumers think that employees of the supermarket do not provide any kind of encouragement to purchase environment friendly or organic products over regular products. Hence, it is to reject **H1: Supermarket employees have adequate knowledge to encourage customers to purchase green products.**

## Analysis in Terms of Physical Environment

Results indicate that 73% consumers think that most of the supermarkets do not have specific shelf/space for displaying green products. Whereas, 95% of consumers responded that they would prefer it if there were separate displays or shelf space for green products. It would be easier for them then to be aware of the presence of the green products which in turn might increase the sale of green products. So, in terms of Physical environment, the hypothesis **H1: Supermarkets have proper arrangements to market & sell green products are rejected.**

## **Analysis in Terms of Process**

58% of consumers responded that they get Cotton bags from supermarkets to carry merchandise; 22% paper bags; 10% jute bags and other 10% is the Polythene bags. This shows that supermarkets try to be environmentally friendly though the restriction in use of polythene bags. Use of polythene is restricted by the government and stores have complied. There is hardly any visibility of green promotional materials inside supermarkets. 50% of consumers do not notice any in-house promotional activities and 45% of consumers do not see any promotional activities which effectively makes 95%. It means 95% of consumers do not find any noticeable green promotion in stores.

Taking together, all hypotheses results conclude that Supermarkets in Bangladesh need to increase their involvement in Green Marketing mix. Consumers are more or less aware about green products which they have mostly come to know from online. But in terms of purchasing green products, customers are not left with many options as supermarkets hardly display or sell green brand, environment friendly products. Supermarkets are hardly undertaking any policies to encourage consumers towards buying more green products. There are neither any in-store promotions nor are the employees informative enough nor are green products displayed on separate shelves. So, **overall condition of Supermarkets in terms of Green marketing mix has still much to improve. Green marketing strategies need to be properly adopted by the supermarkets of Bangladesh.**

The supermarket should have sufficient sustainable strategic features to make consumers aware about purchasing green products; more green promotions; more green policies.

The findings indicate that supermarkets in Bangladesh hardly endeavour to achieve competitive advantage over their competitors in terms green marketing strategies. Green marketing strategy is one of the crucial strategies that cannot be left out by competitive organizations. Social responsibility has become the drive of any successful organization in the global market. It can be concluded that, product strategy, pricing strategy, promotion strategy and distribution strategy of any company should emphasize on green marketing practices in order to sustain in the market. For companies to gain competitive edge in the global market, green marketing strategies should be institutionalized in both small and large supermarkets.

## **CONCLUSION**

Customers are aware about green products and organic foods as well as prefer it to be at competitive priced, not premium priced. Otherwise the demand of eco-friendly products will decrease. Shoppers expect sustainable products to be mostly available in supermarkets with proper physical arrangement of shelf display and point of sale advertising and should be promoted accordingly using brand name wherever possible. Supermarkets' employees should have adequate knowledge so that they can encourage the customer to purchase green products. The supermarkets have changed to restrict polythene use and provide cotton and jute bags to customers to carry the merchandise home. In the same way, supermarkets can adopt the overall processes to be sustainable 7Ps oriented.

Green marketing can also increase the satisfaction level of the consumers of super shops by ensuring health safety and environmental protection. It will help to increase awareness about green products and sustainable consumption in Bangladesh. Government can facilitate promoting green products by reducing the tax on green products. Supermarkets show the luxury of shopping for mid or upper-mid level customer. If they encourage people in sustainable consumption, customers and also the informal grocery will follow. Therefore, rising trend of supermarket shopping in Bangladesh can pioneer and supermarkets can patronize adopting sustainable marketing mix to their service marketing.

## **LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH**

Supermarkets situated in Dhaka city are covered only. Some female shoppers are not found interested or of lack of knowledge about green products. 7Ps as generic marketing mix of UK and EU market are explored (Rafiq and Ahmed, 1995). Likewise, sustainable 7Ps can also be explored for different service companies in commercial and service sectors. The researchers must find the ways to save our products, people and planet.

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### **Endnote:**

a. Overview of the Supermarket Industry in Bangladesh: According to the Business Supermarkets Owners' Association (BSOA), currently there are 121 supermarkets in the country. However, the industry is largely dominated by three major players – Shwapno (59 Outlets), Agora (13 Outlets) and Meena Bazar (18 Outlets). Once a key competitor, Nandan, now holds just two stores.

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