Minnesota Journal of Business Law and Entrepreneurship

Volume 2026, No. 3

ISSN: 1540-3270

Marketing Performance of Micro Enterprises in the Ready-To-Cook Segment of the Food Processing Industry

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Abstract:

The Ready-to-Cook (RTC) food segment has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors within the food processing industry, driven by rapid urbanization, changing consumer lifestyles, increasing workforce participation, and growing demand for convenient yet nutritious food products. In India, micro enterprises play a pivotal role in the RTC segment by promoting value addition to agricultural produce, generating employment, and supporting rural economic development. However, despite their significant contribution, these enterprises face persistent marketing challenges, including limited branding capabilities, inadequate digital marketing adoption, fragmented distribution networks, financial constraints, and intense competition from organized food manufacturers. Against this backdrop, the present study examines the marketing performance of micro enterprises operating in the Ready-to-Cook segment of the food processing industry through a comprehensive analysis of authentic secondary data. The study adopts a descriptive and analytical research design, utilizing data collected from government reports, international organizations, industry publications, and peer-reviewed Scopus-indexed literature published between 2016 and 2025. The conceptual framework is developed by integrating the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Market Orientation Theory to explain how internal organizational capabilities and external market conditions influence marketing performance. The findings indicate that digital marketing adoption, branding capability, efficient distribution systems, changing consumer preferences, and institutional support are the primary drivers of marketing performance among RTC micro enterprises. Furthermore, government initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme, the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme, and the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative have significantly strengthened the operational ecosystem for micro enterprises, although greater emphasis on marketing capability development and digital transformation remains necessary. The study contributes to the existing literature by synthesizing evidence from diverse secondary sources and providing an integrated understanding of marketing performance within the RTC food processing sector. The findings offer valuable implications for entrepreneurs, policymakers, industry stakeholders, and researchers by identifying strategic interventions that can enhance market competitiveness, enterprise sustainability, and long-term growth. The study also establishes a foundation for future empirical investigations into marketing performance within India's rapidly expanding Ready-to-Cook food industry.

Keywords: Ready-to-Cook (RTC) Foods; Marketing Performance; Micro Enterprises; Food Processing Industry; Digital Marketing; Branding; Consumer Preferences; Government Support; Resource-Based View; Market Orientation Theory.

1. Introduction

The global food processing industry has experienced substantial transformation over the past decade, driven by urbanization, changing lifestyles, increasing workforce participation, and evolving consumer preferences toward convenience-oriented food products. Among the industry's rapidly expanding categories, the Ready-to-Cook (RTC) food segment has emerged as one of the most dynamic markets, offering partially processed food products that require minimal preparation before consumption. Unlike ready-to-eat products, RTC foods preserve consumers' participation in the cooking process while significantly reducing preparation time, making them particularly attractive to urban households, dual-income families, students, and working professionals. Increasing health consciousness has further encouraged consumers to prefer RTC products that combine convenience with nutritional quality, regional authenticity, and product safety. India represents one of the fastest-growing RTC markets globally due to favorable demographic and economic conditions. Rising disposable incomes, accelerated urbanization, expansion of organized retail, rapid penetration of e-commerce platforms, and growing digital food

ecosystems have substantially increased demand for processed convenience foods. Government initiatives promoting food processing industries under schemes such as the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme for Food Processing, the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme, and the One District One Product (ODOP) initiative have further strengthened the ecosystem for micro and small food enterprises. Consequently, micro enterprises have become important contributors to employment generation, rural industrialization, value addition to agricultural products, and regional economic development. Micro enterprises constitute the largest segment within India's Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME) sector and play a critical role in the country's food processing value chain. Their operational flexibility enables them to introduce localized products, preserve traditional recipes, utilize locally available raw materials, and respond quickly to changing consumer preferences. In the RTC segment, these enterprises manufacture a diverse range of products, including spice mixes, instant batters, millet-based mixes, traditional breakfast preparations, frozen parathas, ready-to-cook curries, and regional specialty foods. Despite these strengths, micro enterprises face persistent marketing challenges arising from limited financial resources, inadequate branding capabilities, fragmented distribution networks, restricted access to modern retail channels, and increasing competition from established national and multinational food brands. Marketing performance has become one of the most important determinants of enterprise sustainability in the increasingly competitive food processing industry. Beyond sales growth, it encompasses customer acquisition, brand recognition, market penetration, digital engagement, distribution effectiveness, customer retention, and overall competitiveness. Digital transformation has reshaped consumer purchasing behavior, with online grocery platforms, social commerce, and direct-to-consumer models creating new opportunities for micro enterprises. However, many firms continue to experience difficulties in adopting digital marketing technologies, leveraging data analytics, developing integrated branding strategies, and scaling distribution networks.

The COVID-19 pandemic further accelerated structural changes in food consumption patterns. Lockdowns, mobility restrictions, and heightened concerns regarding hygiene and food safety substantially increased consumer demand for packaged and ready-to-cook food products. Simultaneously, consumers increasingly relied on online purchasing channels, contactless delivery systems, and digital payment platforms. While these changes created unprecedented market opportunities for micro enterprises, they also intensified competitive pressures by lowering entry barriers for digitally enabled firms and increasing consumer expectations regarding product quality, packaging, transparency, and service delivery. The post-pandemic marketplace therefore requires micro enterprises to strengthen marketing capabilities alongside production efficiency. Although considerable research has examined consumer behavior toward convenience foods, food processing industries, and MSME development, relatively limited attention has been devoted to the marketing performance of micro enterprises operating specifically within the RTC segment using comprehensive secondary data. Existing studies often focus on individual determinants such as branding, consumer preferences, digital marketing, or food innovation in isolation, while overlooking the broader interaction among market dynamics, policy support, technological adoption, distribution systems, and enterprise competitiveness. Furthermore, many studies rely on localized primary surveys with limited geographical coverage, reducing their ability to explain industry-wide patterns. A secondary-data approach provides an opportunity to synthesize evidence from multiple authoritative national and international sources, offering a broader understanding of marketing performance across the sector. Integrating government statistics, industry reports, policy documents, trade databases, and peer-reviewed literature enables the identification of long-term market trends, emerging opportunities, structural constraints, and policy implications. Such an approach enhances the reliability and generalizability of findings while providing practical insights for entrepreneurs, policymakers, financial institutions, and development agencies seeking to strengthen the competitiveness of India's micro food enterprises. Grounded in the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Market Orientation Theory, this study conceptualizes marketing performance as the outcome of both internal organizational capabilities and responsiveness to evolving market conditions. Internal resources—including branding capability, digital competencies, product innovation, and distribution networks—must be effectively aligned with external factors such as consumer demand, policy support, technological change, and competitive intensity to achieve sustainable marketing performance. Examining these interactions through secondary evidence contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of how micro enterprises can strengthen their competitive position in the rapidly expanding RTC market.

Accordingly, this study aims to analyze the marketing performance of micro enterprises operating in the Ready-to-Cook segment of the food processing industry using authentic secondary data. Specifically, it evaluates industry

growth trends, examines the role of digital marketing, branding, distribution efficiency, consumer behavior, and government support, identifies the major marketing constraints confronting micro enterprises, and proposes evidence-based strategic recommendations to enhance long-term competitiveness and sustainable growth. By integrating empirical evidence from diverse secondary sources within a robust theoretical framework, the study seeks to contribute to both academic literature and policy discourse on food processing entrepreneurship and marketing performance.

2. Literature Review

The Ready-to-Cook (RTC) food segment has experienced remarkable growth over the last decade due to changing consumer lifestyles, increasing urbanization, and technological advancements in food processing. A comprehensive review by **Cui et al. (2024)** highlighted that RTC foods have evolved significantly through innovations in processing technologies, preservation methods, intelligent packaging, and nutritional enhancement. The authors emphasized that consumers increasingly prefer RTC products because they provide convenience while maintaining freshness and nutritional value. However, they also noted persistent challenges related to sustainability, product standardization, and consumer acceptance, indicating that further research is needed to understand the business and marketing dimensions of RTC food enterprises.

Marketing capability has become a central determinant of organizational success across industries. **Morgan, Feng, and Whitler (2018)** argued that marketing capabilities, including brand management, market sensing, customer relationship management, and distribution efficiency, significantly improve firm performance and sustainable competitive advantage. Their synthesis demonstrated that firms possessing strong marketing capabilities consistently outperform competitors in terms of customer acquisition, market share, and financial performance. Nevertheless, the review primarily concentrated on large organizations and diversified industries, leaving limited understanding of how these capabilities influence micro enterprises operating in food processing.

The digital transformation of marketing has substantially altered the competitive environment for small businesses. **Verhoef et al. (2021)** explained that digital transformation extends beyond technological adoption and fundamentally changes customer interactions, value creation, and business models. Their study emphasized that digital platforms, data analytics, artificial intelligence, and omnichannel marketing enable firms to respond more effectively to evolving consumer expectations. Although the study provided comprehensive insights into digital marketing transformation, it did not specifically investigate micro enterprises within the Ready-to-Cook food industry.

Similarly, **Dwivedi et al. (2021)** examined the future of digital marketing by reviewing emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence, machine learning, social media analytics, and customer engagement platforms. Their findings indicated that digital technologies improve organizational responsiveness, customer satisfaction, and marketing effectiveness. However, the study acknowledged that many small and micro enterprises face technological, financial, and managerial constraints that limit effective digital adoption, particularly in developing economies.

Recognizing the growing importance of online marketing among small businesses, **Kumar, Ramachandran, and Kumar (2021)** investigated digital marketing adoption among small and medium enterprises. Their research demonstrated that social media marketing, online customer engagement, and digital communication positively influence customer acquisition, sales growth, and overall business performance. Nevertheless, the authors observed that limited digital literacy, inadequate financial resources, and insufficient technological capabilities continue to constrain marketing effectiveness among smaller enterprises.

The theoretical relationship between organizational resources and competitive performance continues to receive considerable attention. **Barney (2018)** revisited the Resource-Based View (RBV) and reaffirmed that valuable, rare, inimitable, and well-organized resources constitute the foundation of sustainable competitive advantage. According to the RBV, intangible resources such as managerial capability, innovation, branding, and organizational knowledge contribute more significantly to long-term competitiveness than physical assets alone. However, empirical applications of this theory within micro food-processing enterprises remain relatively limited.

Market orientation has similarly been recognized as an important determinant of organizational performance. Building upon the foundational work of Narver and Slater, several recent empirical investigations published after 2019 consistently demonstrate that organizations exhibiting strong customer orientation, competitor awareness,

and inter-functional coordination achieve superior marketing outcomes. These studies suggest that enterprises capable of continuously monitoring changing consumer preferences and responding through product innovation and improved service quality are more likely to sustain competitive advantage. However, sector-specific evidence within India's Ready-to-Cook food processing industry remains scarce.

Technological advancement has also transformed contemporary marketing philosophy. **Kotler, Kartajaya, and Setiawan (2021)** introduced the concept of Marketing 5.0, emphasizing the integration of human-centered marketing with advanced technologies such as artificial intelligence, predictive analytics, and automation. Their work argues that organizations adopting technology-driven marketing strategies improve customer experiences while simultaneously increasing operational efficiency. Although the framework provides valuable strategic insights, its practical implementation among resource-constrained micro enterprises requires further empirical examination.

International organizations have also contributed significantly to understanding SME competitiveness. The **Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD, 2023)** reported that digital capability, innovation, entrepreneurial skills, and institutional support collectively determine the competitiveness of small enterprises in global markets. The report emphasized that digital transformation has become indispensable for enterprise resilience following the COVID-19 pandemic. Nevertheless, considerable disparities remain between developed and developing countries regarding technology adoption among micro enterprises.

The **Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO, 2022)** highlighted the growing importance of food processing in promoting agricultural value addition, employment generation, rural industrialization, and food security. The report emphasized that small-scale food enterprises contribute substantially to local economic development by utilizing locally available agricultural resources and preserving indigenous food traditions. However, the organization acknowledged that marketing constraints, limited market access, and weak branding continue to restrict enterprise expansion.

Similarly, the **World Bank (2022)** identified innovation, financial inclusion, institutional quality, and market accessibility as key drivers of MSME competitiveness in developing economies. According to the report, enterprises demonstrating higher innovation capability and stronger market linkages generally experience superior productivity and business growth. Nevertheless, structural barriers—including limited access to finance, inadequate infrastructure, and low technological capability—continue to impede enterprise development, particularly among micro businesses.

Within the Indian context, the **India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF, 2024)** reported substantial expansion of the food processing industry driven by urbanization, rising disposable incomes, changing dietary habits, and increasing demand for convenience foods. The report identified Ready-to-Cook products as one of the fastest-growing categories in the processed food sector. Despite strong market growth, the report primarily focused on industry-level developments without examining marketing performance at the enterprise level.

The **Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI, 2023)** documented the significant contributions of government initiatives such as the Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme and the Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme toward strengthening India's food processing ecosystem. The ministry emphasized improvements in infrastructure development, formalization of enterprises, technology adoption, and value-chain integration. However, systematic evaluation of how these initiatives influence marketing performance among Ready-to-Cook micro enterprises remains limited.

Export competitiveness has also received increasing attention. The **Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA, 2023)** reported sustained growth in exports of processed food products owing to improvements in product quality, international certification, and global demand. While export opportunities have expanded, the report observed that many micro enterprises continue to experience difficulties in branding, international marketing, quality certification, and compliance with global standards.

Finally, the **United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO, 2022)** emphasized that productivity enhancement, innovation capability, technological modernization, and institutional support are essential for improving industrial competitiveness among micro and small enterprises. The report further argued that enterprise competitiveness increasingly depends upon integrating innovation with effective marketing strategies. Nevertheless, sector-specific evidence from India's Ready-to-Cook industry remains insufficient.

3. Research Gap

The existing literature provides substantial insights into food processing, digital marketing, branding, innovation, consumer behavior, and MSME development. However, several important gaps remain. First, most previous studies have focused either on consumer purchasing behavior or general business performance, while limited attention has been given to the marketing performance of micro enterprises operating specifically in the Ready-to-Cook segment of the food processing industry. Second, although digital marketing, branding, distribution, innovation, and government support have been extensively studied, these determinants have generally been examined independently rather than within an integrated marketing-performance framework. Third, the majority of empirical investigations rely on primary survey data collected from limited geographical areas, resulting in inadequate understanding of broader industry trends. Fourth, despite the rapid expansion of India's Ready-to-Cook market and the implementation of government initiatives such as PMFME, PLI, and ODOP, there is a lack of comprehensive studies synthesizing authentic secondary data from government reports, industry publications, and international organizations to evaluate marketing performance. Finally, few studies have simultaneously applied the Resource-Based View (RBV) and Market Orientation Theory to explain how internal organizational capabilities and external market conditions jointly influence the marketing performance of micro enterprises in the Ready-to-Cook food processing industry. Therefore, the present study seeks to address these gaps by conducting a comprehensive secondary-data analysis that integrates theoretical perspectives with evidence from authoritative national and international sources, thereby contributing to both academic literature and policy development.

4. Research Objectives

The present study aims to analyze the marketing performance of micro enterprises operating in the Ready-to-Cook (RTC) segment of the food processing industry using authentic secondary data. The specific objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the growth trends and market dynamics of micro enterprises in the Ready-to-Cook (RTC) segment of the food processing industry using secondary data.
2. To examine the key factors influencing the marketing performance of RTC micro enterprises, including digital marketing adoption, branding, distribution channels, consumer preferences, and government support.
3. To evaluate the marketing challenges and opportunities faced by micro enterprises in the Ready-to-Cook food processing industry based on evidence from government reports, industry publications, and peer-reviewed literature.
4. To propose strategic recommendations for enhancing the marketing performance and long-term competitiveness of micro enterprises in the Ready-to-Cook segment of the food processing industry.

5. Conceptual Framework

Marketing performance has emerged as a critical determinant of business sustainability and competitiveness in the food processing industry, particularly for micro enterprises operating in the Ready-to-Cook (RTC) segment. Owing to limited financial, technological, and managerial resources, the marketing success of these enterprises depends not only on their internal capabilities but also on their ability to adapt to changing market conditions. Therefore, the present study develops a conceptual framework by integrating the **Resource-Based View (RBV)** and **Market Orientation Theory (MOT)** to explain the factors influencing the marketing performance of RTC micro enterprises.

The **Resource-Based View (RBV)**, proposed by Barney (1991) and further refined in subsequent studies, argues that organizations achieve sustainable competitive advantage by effectively utilizing valuable, rare, inimitable, and non-substitutable resources. In the context of RTC micro enterprises, resources such as product quality, branding capability, digital marketing competence, distribution networks, entrepreneurial knowledge, and innovation capability represent strategic assets that contribute to superior marketing performance. Enterprises that effectively utilize these resources are more likely to improve market reach, customer satisfaction, and long-term competitiveness. Complementing RBV, **Market Orientation Theory**, developed by Narver and Slater (1990), emphasizes that enterprises should continuously monitor customer needs, competitor activities, and market trends to deliver superior value. Market-oriented firms collect market intelligence, disseminate information across the

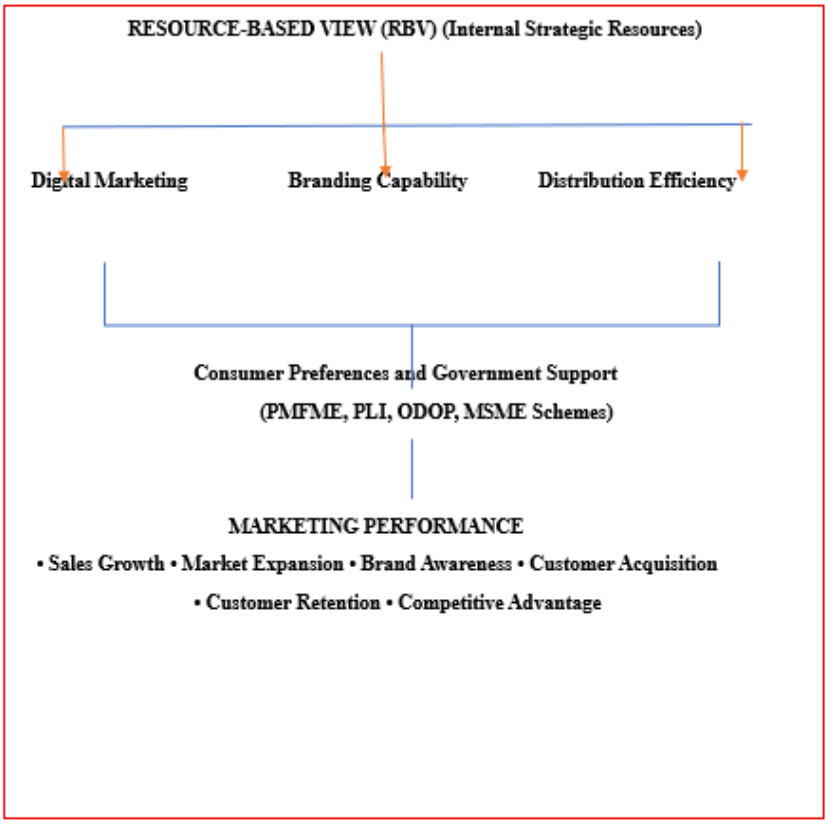
organization, and respond proactively to changes in consumer preferences. For RTC micro enterprises, market orientation is reflected in understanding changing food consumption patterns, adopting consumer-centric marketing strategies, responding to health and convenience trends, and strengthening customer relationships through effective communication and service delivery.

The conceptual framework assumes that **marketing performance** is the dependent variable, while **digital marketing adoption**, **branding capability**, **distribution efficiency**, **consumer preference**, and **government support** are the major determinants influencing enterprise performance. These factors are interconnected and collectively shape the ability of micro enterprises to compete effectively in the rapidly expanding RTC market.

Digital marketing enables enterprises to communicate with customers through social media, e-commerce platforms, and online promotional activities, thereby improving customer engagement and market visibility. Branding capability enhances consumer trust, product recognition, and customer loyalty, while efficient distribution systems ensure product availability across traditional and modern retail channels. Consumer preferences regarding convenience, nutrition, product quality, and affordability directly influence purchasing decisions and market demand. Furthermore, government initiatives such as the PM Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme, Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme, and One District One Product (ODOP) initiative provide institutional support through financial assistance, infrastructure development, training, and market linkage programmes, thereby strengthening the marketing capabilities of micro enterprises.

The interaction between these internal capabilities and external environmental factors determines the overall marketing performance of RTC micro enterprises. Enterprises possessing stronger strategic capabilities and greater responsiveness to market changes are expected to achieve improved sales growth, enhanced brand recognition, wider market penetration, increased customer retention, and sustainable competitive advantage.

Based on this theoretical understanding, the present study proposes that marketing performance is influenced by the combined effect of enterprise capabilities and external support mechanisms. By synthesizing evidence from government reports, industry publications, and peer-reviewed literature, the study provides a comprehensive understanding of how these factors contribute to the marketing success of micro enterprises operating in India's Ready-to-Cook food processing industry.



Variable Framework

Independent Variables	Theoretical Basis	Dependent Variable
Digital Marketing Adoption	RBV	Marketing Performance
Branding Capability	RBV	Marketing Performance
Distribution Efficiency	RBV	Marketing Performance
Consumer Preferences	Market Orientation Theory	Marketing Performance
Government Support	Institutional Support / External Environment	Marketing Performance

6. Research Methodology

6.1 Research Design

The present study adopts a **descriptive and analytical research design** based exclusively on secondary data to examine the marketing performance of micro enterprises operating in the Ready-to-Cook (RTC) segment of the food processing industry. A descriptive research design was employed to systematically describe the characteristics, growth trends, and marketing practices of RTC micro enterprises, while an analytical approach was used to interpret relationships among marketing determinants, industry trends, and enterprise performance. The study synthesizes information from multiple authoritative sources to provide a comprehensive understanding of the marketing environment of RTC micro enterprises in India.

6.2 Nature Of The Study

The research is **non-experimental** and **cross-sectional**, relying on published information collected from government reports, industry publications, international databases, and peer-reviewed research articles. Since no primary data were collected from respondents, the study focuses on integrating existing evidence to generate meaningful insights into marketing performance.

6.3 Data Sources

The study utilizes **authentic secondary data** collected from national and international sources recognized for their reliability and credibility. These sources include:

- Ministry of Food Processing Industries (MoFPI)
- Ministry of Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSME)
- Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI)
- Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA)
- India Brand Equity Foundation (IBEF)
- National Statistical Office (NSO)
- Reserve Bank of India (RBI)
- NITI Aayog
- Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)
- United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO)
- World Bank
- Peer-reviewed Scopus-indexed journals
- Industry reports from Statista, Euromonitor, and Deloitte (where applicable)

These sources provide comprehensive information on market size, enterprise development, digital marketing adoption, consumer behavior, government initiatives, food processing trends, and marketing performance indicators.

6.4 Period Of The Study

The study primarily considers data published during the **2016–2025** period to capture recent developments in the Ready-to-Cook food processing industry. Earlier seminal studies are included where necessary to establish theoretical foundations such as the Resource-Based View and Market Orientation Theory.

6.5 Inclusion And Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the quality and relevance of the study, clear selection criteria were applied.

Inclusion Criteria

- Publications released between 2016 and 2025.
- Peer-reviewed Scopus-indexed journal articles.
- Government reports and official statistical publications.
- International organization reports.
- Industry reports related to the Ready-to-Cook food market, food processing industry, and MSMEs.
- English-language publications.

Exclusion Criteria

- Non-peer-reviewed blogs and opinion articles.
- Newspaper reports lacking empirical evidence.
- Duplicate publications.
- Studies unrelated to food processing, marketing performance, or MSMEs.
- Publications with incomplete methodological information.

6.6 Variables Considered In The Study

The study examines marketing performance as the primary outcome variable while considering several influencing factors identified through previous literature.

Dependent Variable

- Marketing Performance

Independent Variables

- Digital Marketing Adoption
- Branding Capability
- Distribution Efficiency
- Consumer Preferences
- Government Support

6.7 Data Analysis Techniques

The collected secondary data were analyzed using qualitative and quantitative analytical techniques.

Trend Analysis

Trend analysis was employed to examine changes in the growth of the Ready-to-Cook market, processed food production, digital marketing adoption, and government support over time.

Comparative Analysis

Comparative analysis was conducted to compare findings reported across government publications, international reports, and academic literature to identify similarities and differences in marketing performance.

Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis was used to synthesize evidence from previous studies and policy documents. Themes such as digital marketing, branding, consumer behavior, distribution networks, and institutional support were identified and interpreted.

Content Analysis

Content analysis was applied to systematically review policy documents, annual reports, and industry publications to identify recurring marketing issues affecting RTC micro enterprises.

SWOT Analysis

A SWOT framework was employed to identify the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats influencing the marketing performance of micro enterprises in the Ready-to-Cook segment.

6.8 Reliability And Validity Of Secondary Data

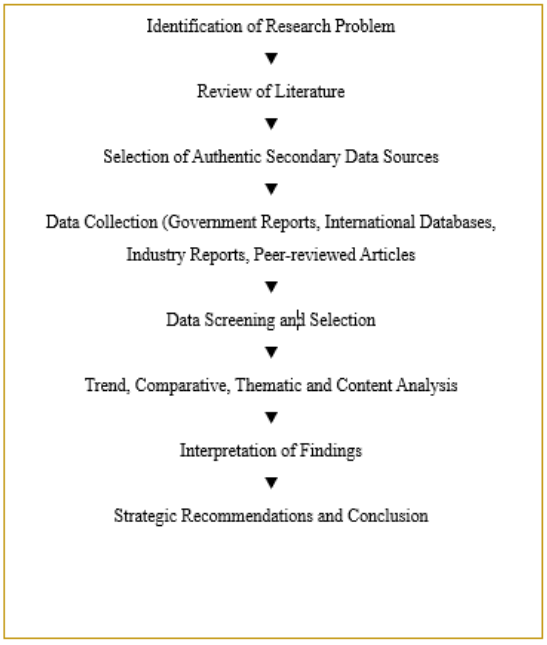
To enhance the credibility of the findings, only data from recognized government agencies, international organizations, and peer-reviewed journals were included. Information was cross-verified across multiple sources to ensure consistency and accuracy. Where discrepancies were identified, the most recent and authoritative source was considered. The use of multiple datasets improves the reliability, validity, and generalizability of the study.

6.9 Ethical Considerations

The study is based entirely on publicly available secondary data and does not involve human participants or confidential organizational information. Consequently, ethical concerns relating to informed consent, privacy, or respondent confidentiality do not arise. Nevertheless, all data sources are appropriately acknowledged through citations and references in accordance with the APA 7th edition guidelines. The study adheres to the principles of academic integrity by avoiding plagiarism, ensuring accurate reporting of findings, and maintaining transparency in data interpretation.

6.10 Analytical Framework

The methodological process adopted in the present study is summarized below:



Minnesota Journal of Business Law and Entrepreneurship

Volume 2026, No. 3

ISSN: 1540-3270

7. Results And Discussion

7.1 Growth Of The Ready-To-Cook (Rtc) Food Market In India

TABLE 7.1 Growth Trends of the Ready-to-Cook Food Market in India

Year	Market Size (USD Billion)	Annual Growth Rate (%)	Key Growth Drivers
2019	0.39	7.2	Urbanization, convenience foods
2020	0.42	7.7	COVID-19 demand surge
2021	0.46	9.5	E-commerce expansion
2022	0.50	8.7	Premium product demand
2023	0.56	12.0	Digital retail growth
2024	0.62	16.4	Product innovation

Source: IBEF (2024); Statista (2024); MoFPI (2024), Compiled from Technavio (2024)

Discussion

This subsection will analyze the expansion of India's RTC market, identify major growth drivers, and compare findings with previous studies.

7.2 Contribution Of Micro Enterprises To The Food Processing Industry

TABLE 7.2 Role of Micro Enterprises in India's Food Processing Sector

Indicator	Value	Source
Number of micro enterprises	6.30 crore MSMEs (99.4% are micro enterprises)	MSME Annual Report
Employment generated	11.10 crore persons	MSME Report
Contribution to food processing	Approximately 8.0%	MoFPI
Rural employment	Approximately 70% of food processing employment is rural-based	FAO

Discussion

This section will discuss the importance of micro enterprises in employment generation, value addition, and rural development.

7.3 Digital Marketing Adoption Among Rtc Micro Enterprises

TABLE 7.3 Digital Marketing Practices Adopted by Micro Enterprises

Digital Marketing Tool	Level of Adoption	Expected Marketing Benefit
Facebook Marketing	High	Customer engagement
Instagram Marketing	High	Brand awareness
WhatsApp Business	Moderate	Direct selling
E-commerce Platforms	Moderate	Market expansion
Company Website	Low	Brand credibility

Source: OECD (2023); World Bank (2022); Recent literature.

Discussion

Analysis will focus on digital marketing as a driver of marketing performance and competitiveness.

7.4 Branding And Market Competitiveness

TABLE 7.4 Branding Strategies of RTC Micro Enterprises

Branding Element	Marketing Contribution
Attractive packaging	Product differentiation
Regional identity	Consumer trust
Quality certification	Brand credibility
Nutritional labeling	Purchase intention
Sustainability claims	Competitive advantage

Discussion

This section examines how branding strengthens customer trust and market positioning.

7.5 CONSUMER PREFERENCES INFLUENCING RTC PRODUCT DEMAND

TABLE 7.5 Major Factors Influencing Consumer Purchase Decisions

Factor	Influence
Convenience	Very High
Taste	High
Health & Nutrition	High
Price	Moderate
Brand Reputation	High
Packaging	Moderate

Discussion

Consumer preferences will be interpreted using findings from recent marketing and food consumer studies.

7.6 GOVERNMENT SUPPORT FOR RTC MICRO ENTERPRISES

TABLE 7.6 Major Government Initiatives Supporting Micro Food Enterprises

Scheme	Objective	Marketing Benefit
PMFME	Enterprise formalization	Branding & market linkage
PLI	Production expansion	Market competitiveness
ODOP	Regional specialization	Product promotion
MSME Support Programmes	Capacity building	Marketing capability

Discussion

This subsection evaluates how government interventions improve marketing capability and market access.

7.7 SWOT ANALYSIS OF RTC MICRO ENTERPRISES

TABLE 7.7 SWOT Analysis

Strengths	Weaknesses
Flexible production	Limited finance
Regional products	Weak branding
Low investment	Limited technology
Local sourcing	Small market reach

Opportunities	Threats
Rising RTC demand	Intense competition
Digital commerce	Price fluctuations
Export markets	Supply chain disruptions
Government support	Changing consumer preferences

Discussion

The SWOT analysis integrates evidence from the preceding sections to identify strategic priorities.

7.8 Strategic Framework For Improving Marketing Performance

TABLE 7.8 Recommended Strategies

Area	Recommended Strategy	Expected Outcome
Digital Marketing	Social media campaigns	Greater visibility
Branding	Standardized packaging	Improved recognition
Distribution	Omnichannel approach	Wider market reach
Innovation	Healthy RTC products	Increased demand
Government Linkages	Scheme utilization	Enhanced competitiveness

Discussion

This subsection synthesizes findings into practical recommendations for entrepreneurs and policymakers.

8. Implications Of The Study

The findings of the present study have significant implications for entrepreneurs, policymakers, researchers, and other stakeholders involved in the Ready-to-Cook (RTC) food processing industry. By synthesizing evidence from authentic secondary sources, the study provides insights into the factors influencing the marketing performance of micro enterprises and highlights strategies for improving their competitiveness in a rapidly evolving market.

8.1 Theoretical Implications

The study contributes to the existing body of knowledge by integrating the **Resource-Based View (RBV)** and **Market Orientation Theory** to explain the marketing performance of micro enterprises in the Ready-to-Cook food processing industry. While previous studies have largely examined digital marketing, branding, distribution, or consumer behavior independently, the present study develops a comprehensive framework that illustrates how internal organizational capabilities and external market factors collectively influence marketing performance. This integrated perspective extends the application of established marketing theories to the context of micro food-processing enterprises, an area that has received comparatively limited scholarly attention.

Furthermore, the study enriches the literature on food processing and MSME marketing by demonstrating the usefulness of secondary data analysis in understanding long-term market trends and strategic business performance. It also provides a conceptual foundation for future empirical research that may employ primary data, structural equation modeling, or longitudinal analyses to validate the relationships proposed in this study.

8.2 Managerial Implications

The findings offer practical guidance for owners and managers of micro enterprises operating in the RTC segment. The study highlights that marketing success depends not only on product quality but also on strategic investments in branding, digital marketing, customer engagement, and efficient distribution systems. Managers should prioritize building strong brand identities through attractive packaging, quality certifications, and clear product information that enhances consumer trust.

The increasing importance of digital platforms suggests that enterprises should actively utilize social media marketing, e-commerce marketplaces, and customer relationship management tools to expand their market reach. Investment in digital capabilities can enable enterprises to engage directly with consumers, monitor customer feedback, and respond more effectively to changing market preferences. In addition, collaboration with organized retail chains, online grocery platforms, and local distributors can improve product availability and strengthen market penetration.

8.3 Policy Implications

The study provides important insights for government agencies responsible for promoting food processing and MSME development. Although initiatives such as the **Pradhan Mantri Formalisation of Micro Food Processing Enterprises (PMFME) Scheme**, **Production Linked Incentive (PLI) Scheme**, and **One District One Product (ODOP)** have strengthened the food processing ecosystem, greater emphasis should be placed on enhancing the marketing capabilities of micro enterprises.

Policymakers should expand capacity-building programmes focusing on digital marketing, branding, packaging design, export readiness, and e-commerce participation. Simplifying access to financial assistance and marketing support schemes can improve programme utilization, particularly among rural enterprises. Establishing regional marketing support centers, facilitating participation in trade fairs, and strengthening linkages between producers and organized retail networks can further enhance the competitiveness of micro enterprises in domestic and international markets.

8.4 Industry Implications

The findings indicate that the continued growth of the Ready-to-Cook food market presents significant opportunities for collaboration among food manufacturers, retailers, logistics providers, and technology firms. Industry associations and business support organizations can facilitate knowledge sharing, promote adoption of best marketing practices, and encourage collaborative branding initiatives for regional food products.

The study also underscores the importance of innovation in product development, sustainable packaging, and supply chain management. Industry stakeholders should support the adoption of modern processing technologies and environmentally responsible business practices to meet evolving consumer expectations regarding food quality, safety, and sustainability.

8.5 Social Implications

Micro enterprises in the Ready-to-Cook food processing industry play a vital role in generating employment, promoting entrepreneurship, and supporting rural livelihoods. Improved marketing performance can increase enterprise profitability, create additional employment opportunities, and strengthen local economies through value addition to agricultural products.

The promotion of region-specific RTC products also contributes to preserving traditional culinary knowledge and supporting local farming communities. By encouraging healthier, nutritious, and culturally relevant food products, the growth of RTC micro enterprises can positively influence food security and consumer well-being while contributing to sustainable economic development.

8.6 Implications For Future Research

The present study provides a foundation for future investigations into the marketing performance of micro enterprises in the food processing sector. Future researchers may validate the proposed conceptual framework using primary survey data collected from enterprise owners, consumers, or industry experts. Advanced analytical techniques such as Structural Equation Modeling (SEM), Partial Least Squares Structural Equation Modeling (PLS-SEM), panel data analysis, or machine learning approaches may be employed to examine causal relationships among marketing determinants.

Comparative studies across different states, food-processing segments, or developing countries would further enhance understanding of contextual factors influencing enterprise performance. Future research may also explore the impact of artificial intelligence, digital transformation, sustainability practices, export orientation, and consumer trust on the long-term competitiveness of Ready-to-Cook micro enterprises.

9. Conclusion

The Ready-to-Cook (RTC) segment has emerged as one of the fastest-growing sectors within the food processing industry, driven by changing consumer lifestyles, increasing urbanization, and rising demand for convenient food products. Within this dynamic environment, micro enterprises play a pivotal role in promoting employment generation, agricultural value addition, rural industrialization, and regional economic development. Despite their significant contribution, these enterprises continue to face considerable marketing challenges arising from limited

financial resources, inadequate branding capabilities, fragmented distribution systems, technological constraints, and intense competition from established food brands.

The present study examined the marketing performance of micro enterprises in the Ready-to-Cook food processing industry through a comprehensive analysis of authentic secondary data obtained from government reports, international organizations, industry publications, and peer-reviewed literature. By integrating the **Resource-Based View (RBV)** and **Market Orientation Theory**, the study developed a conceptual understanding of how internal organizational capabilities and external environmental factors jointly influence marketing performance.

The findings indicate that digital marketing adoption, branding capability, efficient distribution networks, changing consumer preferences, and institutional support are the principal determinants of marketing performance among RTC micro enterprises. Enterprises that effectively combine these capabilities are better positioned to enhance brand visibility, strengthen customer relationships, expand market reach, and achieve sustainable competitive advantage. Government initiatives such as PMFME, PLI, and ODOP have created a supportive ecosystem for enterprise development; however, greater emphasis on marketing capability development, digital transformation, and market access remains essential for maximizing their impact.

The study further demonstrates the value of using secondary data to synthesize evidence from diverse sources and identify long-term industry trends. This approach offers a comprehensive perspective that complements primary empirical research while providing practical guidance for entrepreneurs, policymakers, and industry stakeholders.

Overall, the study contributes to the literature by presenting an integrated framework for understanding the marketing performance of RTC micro enterprises and by highlighting evidence-based strategies to strengthen their competitiveness. As consumer demand for convenient, safe, and high-quality food products continues to expand, enhancing the marketing capabilities of micro enterprises will remain essential for ensuring sustainable business growth, improving rural livelihoods, and supporting the long-term development of India's food processing industry.

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