



Factors Driving Sales and Retail Pricing Practices of ITC Connect: A Field-Based Case Study of Retail Execution in Osmanabad, Maharashtra

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Abstract

This paper reports a field-based case study of retail sales and pricing practices for ITC Connect, a slim-cigarette brand in ITC Limited's FMCG – Cigarettes portfolio, in Osmanabad territory, Maharashtra. Drawing on primary field data collected during a sales-and-distribution internship — stock audits and visibility ratings at the top 10 outlets on each of 7 distributor-salesman (DS) routes (N = 70 outlets, 16 localities), conducted between 22 June and 1 July 2026, together with semi-structured retailer feedback recorded in a parallel visit tracker — the study examines how product availability, shelf visibility, and competitor presence jointly shape Connect's market performance. Descriptive analysis shows an average of 4.87 Connect units per outlet (341 units total) against 7.81 units of the leading competing brand, referred to here as Stellar Shift (547 units total, singles and duos combined), with the competitor holding a stock advantage in 55 of 70 outlets (78.6%). Field price observations placed Connect's actual retail selling price at approximately ₹25–30 against approximately ₹20 for the competitor. Pearson correlation analysis, however, found no significant inverse relationship between Connect and competitor stock levels at the outlet level ($r \approx -0.02$ to -0.10 , $p > 0.40$ in every case), indicating that the two brands' shelf presence is not a simple zero-sum trade-off, and that factors beyond price alone — including shelf visibility and distributor servicing — plausibly contribute to the observed stock gap. Thematic analysis of retailer feedback collected across all 70

outlets found that 25 outlets (35.7%) reported no complaints with availability or display, 19 (27.1%) reported active consumer awareness and repeat demand for Connect, while a further 4 outlets (5.7%) explicitly reported that price-premium smokers preferred the competing brand. The study integrates these findings with literature on FMCG pricing strategy, sales-promotion design, and India's Kirana-dominated retail structure to derive practical implications for availability, visibility, and retailer engagement. The paper closes with a discussion of its limitations — principally its single-territory scope and its reliance on point-in-time stock counts rather than continuous sales-register data — and outlines directions for future research.

Keywords: FMCG pricing; retail execution; consumer price sensitivity; India retail; ITC Connect; cigarette distribution; Kirana stores; competitive strategy

1. Introduction

This paper presents a field-based case study of ITC Limited's slim-cigarette brand Connect in Osmanabad territory, Maharashtra, India. The underlying field research was conducted during a sales-and-distribution internship with ITC's territory sales team (Territory ID 32813, Osmanabad) and is used here as the empirical basis for an academic investigation of retail product movement and pricing practice in traditional trade. Connect competes against a leading in-market slim-cigarette brand — referred to throughout this paper, for reasons of competitive confidentiality, as Stellar

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Shift — within the largely unorganised kirana- and paan-shop retail structure that continues to account for the great majority of tobacco-product sales in India.

Despite ITC's extensive multi-channel distribution network, field observation suggested that Connect's on-shelf availability and stock position were comparatively weak relative to Stellar Shift within the study territory. A structured audit of the top 10 performing outlets on each of the territory's 7 distributor-salesman (DS) routes — 70 outlets across 16 localities — conducted between 22 June and 1 July 2026, recorded 341 units of Connect in stock against 547 units of Stellar Shift (singles and duos combined). This finding prompted a closer field inquiry into pricing dynamics: Connect was typically sold at an actual retail price of approximately ₹25–30, while Stellar Shift sold at approximately ₹20. This price gap, combined with retailer feedback collected at every one of the 70 outlets, suggested that shelf visibility, distributor servicing, and consumer brand preference — not price in isolation — might jointly explain Connects comparative stock position.

Building on these field observations, this study analyses the role of retail pricing, product visibility, and retailer-level dynamics in shaping Connects market performance. Four objectives guide the analysis: (1) to examine Connects sales and stock position across the sampled outlets; (2) to identify the factors influencing product movement, including visibility and competitor presence; (3) to examine the influence of pricing — both Maximum Retail Price (MRP) and actual selling price — on sales; and (4) to derive evidence-based recommendations for improving Connects retail performance. The analysis integrates the field data with literature on FMCG pricing strategy, sales-promotion practice, and consumer price sensitivity in the Indian market.

2. Literature Review

2.1 FMCG Pricing Strategy and Consumer Price Sensitivity

In highly competitive FMCG markets, pricing strategy is a central determinant of consumer choice. Gupta, Basu, Goel, Makkar, and Verma (2025) argue that Indian consumers are markedly price-sensitive, so that pricing and promotional design must align closely with perceived value if they are to influence purchase behaviour. In India's largely unorganised retail structure, the printed Maximum Retail Price (MRP) functions as a regulatory ceiling, but the actual price realised at the point of sale frequently varies by outlet and region, with material consequences for purchase decisions. Dawra, Katyal, and Gupta (2016) characterise a distinct “deal-prone” segment of Indian consumers who actively seek bargains and view themselves as price-savvy shoppers; such consumers are more likely to respond to promotional mechanisms — price-offs, bonus packs, coupons — than to price reductions alone. Vyas (2005), in a content analysis of promotional schemes across eight FMCG categories, finds that bonus packs, free gifts, and price-offs are the most deployed promotional tools, and that non-food categories exhibit greater variation in incentive intensity than food categories. Together, this literature implies that any analysis of Connects pricing must account not only for MRP but also for retailer-level discounting practice and promotional activity.

2.2 Retail Structure, Distribution, and Trade Margins

India's retail landscape remains dominated by an estimated 12–13 million small kirana stores, which collectively account for the substantial majority of FMCG sales (Kaple, 2026). In this structure, on-shelf product availability is shaped as much by distributor relationships and retailer margins as by centralised company pricing decisions. Industry analysis of general-trade distribution notes that the field salesperson — the distributor salesman who visits assigned outlets on a fixed cycle, books orders, and pushes promotional schemes — remains the primary demand signal in this channel, with stocking decisions historically driven as much by relationship and incentive as by measured consumer demand (Kirana Club, 2026). Ongoing digital transformation of Kirana ordering is beginning to shift this dynamic toward more demand-responsive, retailer-initiated ordering (Kaple, 2026), which is likely to give individual outlets more direct influence over which brands they stock. For the present study, these findings suggest that Connects shelf presence in the sampled



territory is plausibly shaped by the distributor network structure (the seven routes covered in this study) and by the incentives offered to retailers along those routes, independent of headline pricing.

2.3 MRP Compliance and Consumer Price Perception

The regulatory MRP in India is intended to protect consumers by capping the price at which a product may legally be sold. In practice, however, a persistent gap often exists between the printed MRP and the price a retailer actually charges, with some outlets selling below MRP to accelerate stock turnover, which in turn shapes consumer perceptions of value and fairness. ITC's own investor communications describe an ongoing emphasis on "judicious pricing actions" and net revenue management to balance margin protection against volume growth amid cost pressure (ITC Limited, 2026a, 2026b), reflecting a broader tension between protecting brand and retailer margin and maintaining competitive shelf pricing. The present study's field price observations — Connect at approximately ₹25–30 against Stellar Shift at approximately ₹20 — sit directly within this tension. Complementary research on conditional promotions in Indian retail (Nigam, Dewane, Behl, & Pereira, 2022) shows that the structure of a promotional offer, not merely its headline discount, materially affects whether Indian consumers respond by purchasing more or trading up; while the present study does not include a formal promotional experiment, this literature usefully frames how the observed price gap might influence consumer trial or brand switching at the shelf.

2.4 Synthesis

Taken together, the literature reviewed here indicates that (a) Indian FMCG consumers, particularly in price-sensitive rural and semi-urban segments, respond strongly to promotional structure and not merely to price level; (b) Kirana retailers are pivotal, semi-autonomous decision nodes whose stocking choices are shaped by margin, distributor relationship, and promotional support at least as much as by headline pricing; and (c) large manufacturers such as ITC actively manage the tension between MRP-based margin protection and competitive shelf pricing through revenue-management practice. This study extends that literature with a direct, outlet-level field case: how Connects stock position, actual selling price, and shelf visibility interact with a specific, named competitor in a defined rural-Maharashtra territory.

3. Research Objectives

1. To examine ITC Connects sales and stock position across the sampled retail outlets in the study territory.
2. To identify the factors influencing Connect's product movement, including shelf visibility, outlet characteristics, and competitor presence.
3. To examine the influence of retail pricing — both Maximum Retail Price and actual selling price — on Connect's sales.
4. To derive evidence-based recommendations for improving Connects retail sales performance in the study territory.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Study Area and Duration

The study was conducted in ITC's Osmanabad sales territory (Territory ID 32813, Wholesale Distributor code PU3926), Maharashtra, where the sales office covers seven distributor-salesman (DS) routes: SHINDE, ROSHAN, MHAZAR, DINESH CHAVAN, ARVIND, SHOIB, and ISMAIL SHAIKH. The detailed outlet audit reported in this paper was conducted between 22 June and 1 July 2026, within a broader internship placement running from mid-May to mid-July 2026. Across the seven routes, a total of 171 outlets were mapped by the distributor-salesman teams, of which the top 10 performing outlets on each route (70 outlets in total, spanning 16 mapped localities) were selected for the detailed stock, visibility, and retailer-feedback audit reported here.



4.2 Research Design

The study follows a descriptive, field-based research design combining structured primary data collection with a review of related secondary literature and company disclosures. This design suits a study whose objective is field-level descriptive and correlational insight into an observed retail phenomenon, rather than statistical generalisation to the national market.

4.3 Sampling

Across the seven DS routes in the territory, 171 outlets were mapped by the sales team in total. From this base, the top 10 performing outlets on each route — selected by the DS teams on the basis of historical sales volume — were chosen for detailed audit, yielding a purposive sample of 70 outlets spanning 16 localities. Outlet types were predominantly paan shops and small general stores, consistent with the retail structure typical of this product category. The detailed stock, visibility, and pricing analysis in this paper is confined to this 70-outlet purposive sample, for which complete, outlet-level audit data are available.

4.4 Data Collection Instruments

- **Outlet stock audits.** ITC Connect stock (units on hand) was recorded at each of the 70 sampled outlets, together with the stock of Stellar Shift (recorded separately for single-stick and duo-pack formats). Each outlet was additionally rated for product visibility (High / Medium / Low) based on shelf positioning and prominence and assigned a priority flag by the DS team.
- **Price observations.** The actual retail selling price — not simply the printed MRP — was recorded in field notes for both brands across the sampled outlets.
- **Structured retailer feedback.** At each of the 70 outlets, a field visit tracker recorded the visit date, current stock status, visibility, and a coded retailer-feedback remark summarising the retailer's comments on consumer demand, competitor preference, or stocking requests, drawn from a fixed set of field-coded categories to ensure consistency of recording across the seven DS routes.
- **A parallel outlet-mapping record.** DS-level totals (outlets mapped per route, primary locality served) were maintained separately to document the sampling frame from which the top-10 purposive sample was drawn.

4.5 Variables

- **Stock variables:** ITC Connect units on hand per outlet; Stellar Shift units on hand per outlet (singles and duos, reported separately and combined).
- **Pricing variables:** Outlet-level actual selling price for Connect and Stellar Shift; printed MRP, where relevant.
- **Outlet attributes:** Visibility rating (High / Medium / Low); DS route; locality.
- **Retailer feedback:** Coded field remarks, thematically grouped into categories covering consumer awareness/demand, competitor preference, stock-supply requests, and general availability.

4.6 Data Analysis

Stock-audit data from the 70-outlet sample were tabulated to compute route-level totals and per-outlet averages for both brands. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, range) were calculated for Connect stock, and Pearson correlation coefficients were computed between Connect stock and Stellar Shift stock (singles, duos, and combined) to test whether higher competitor stock coincided systematically with lower Connect stock at the outlet level. Given the sample size and the study's descriptive orientation, no formal significance testing beyond the reported correlation coefficients and associated p-values was undertaken. Qualitative retailer feedback was reviewed thematically to support and contextualise the quantitative patterns. All analysis was performed in Microsoft Excel and cross-checked manually for arithmetic consistency.



5. Results

5.1 Outlet and Stock Characteristics

Across the 70 sampled outlets, total Connect stock was 341 units, an average of 4.87 units per outlet (SD = 1.86; range 2–8). Combined Stellar Shift stock (369 singles + 178 duos) was 547 units, averaging 7.81 units per outlet (SD = 2.30) (Table 1, Figure 1). On average, sampled outlets therefore carried approximately 60% more units of the competing brand than of Connect. Every sampled outlet stocked Connect to some degree at the time of audit (0 stock-outs recorded), but Stellar Shift stock exceeded Connect stock in 55 of the 70 outlets sampled — 78.6% of the sample.

Route (DS)	Outlets (n)	Total Connect Units	Avg. Connect/Outlet	Total Stellar Shift Units	Avg. Stellar Shift/Outlet
SHINDE	10	52	5.2	78	7.8
ROSHAN	10	51	5.1	69	6.9
MHAZAR	10	58	5.8	83	8.3
DINESH CHAVAN	10	45	4.5	77	7.7
ARVIND	10	43	4.3	73	7.3
SHOIB	10	47	4.7	85	8.5
ISMAIL SHAIKH	10	45	4.5	82	8.2
Total / Average	70	341	4.87	547	7.81

Table 1. Outlet-level ITC Connect and Stellar Shift stock by distributor route (N = 70 outlets).

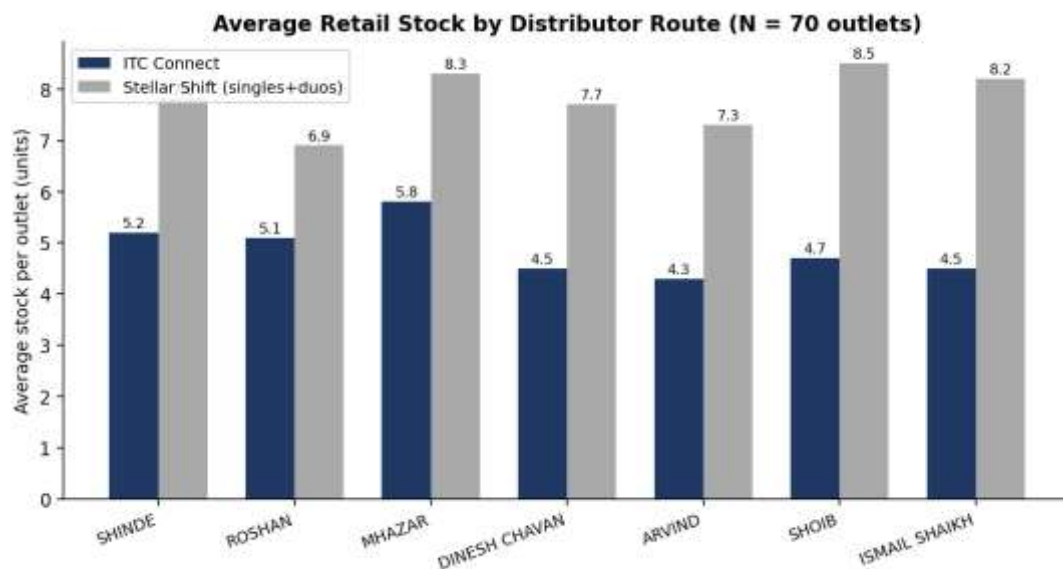


Figure 1. Average retail stock per outlet by distributor route, ITC Connect vs. Stellar Shift (N = 70 outlets).

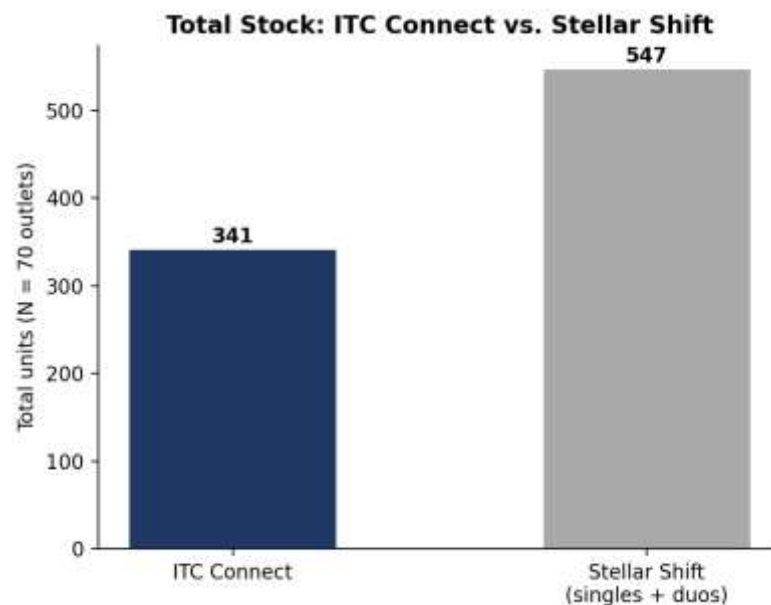


Figure 2. Total stock across all 70 sampled outlets, ITC Connect vs. Stellar Shift (singles + duos combined).

Across routes, MHAZAR recorded the highest average Connect stock (5.8 units), while ARVIND recorded the lowest (4.3 units); Stellar Shift stock was highest on SHOIB (8.5 units/outlet) and lowest on ROSHAN (6.9 units/outlet). Notably, the route with the strongest Connect performance (MHAZAR) also carried above-average Stellar Shift stock, reinforcing the pattern examined formally in Section 5.3 that the two brands' stock levels do not move as a simple trade-off across routes.

Outlet visibility was rated High for 50.0% of outlets ($n = 35$), Medium for 32.9% ($n = 23$), and Low for 17.1% ($n = 12$) (Figure 3). High-visibility outlets carried more Connect stock on average (5.09 units) than Medium-visibility (4.74) or Low-visibility (4.50) outlets, a pattern consistent with the expectation that shelf placement is associated with stocking levels, though the difference across visibility tiers is modest (0.59 units between High and Low) and is reported here descriptively rather than tested for significance given the sample size.

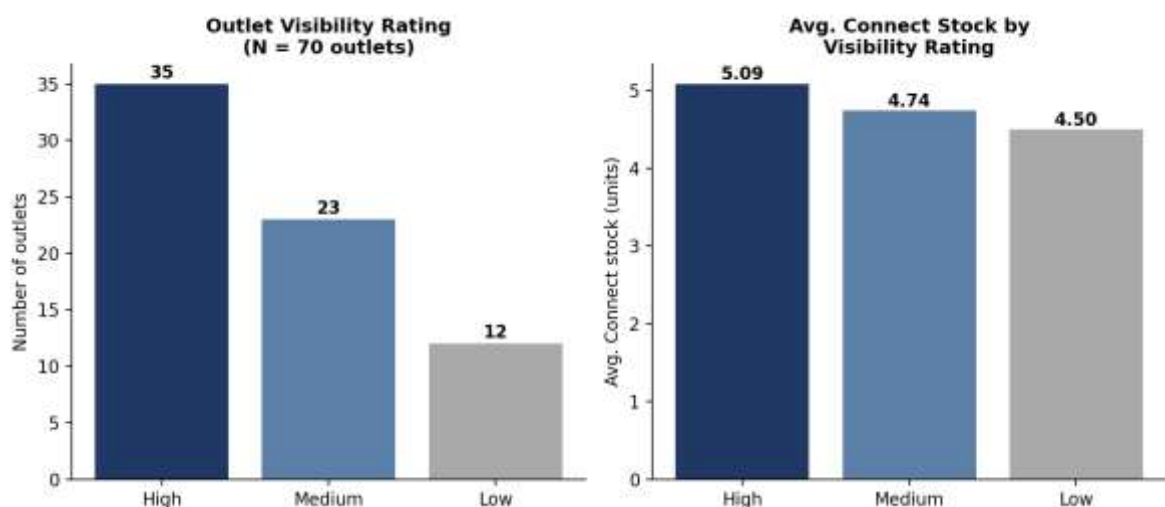


Figure 3. Outlet visibility distribution (left) and average Connect stock by visibility rating (right), $N = 70$ outlets.

5.2 Pricing Observations

Field price observations indicated a consistent gap between the two brands' actual retail selling prices. Most sampled retailers sold Connect at approximately ₹25–30 (frequently at a modest discount to printed MRP), while Stellar Shift was sold at approximately ₹20. No sampled outlet was observed selling Connect consistently at or above ₹30, indicating that ₹25 was the more common realised price point. This approximately ₹5–10 price advantage for the competitor — a



20–30% differential relative to Stellar Shift's ₹20 price — offers a plausible partial explanation for Stellar Shift's higher average stock levels. Because this price differential alone did not appear sufficient to account for the full stock gap, the analysis below examines whether it corresponds to a systematic, outlet-level trade-off in stock levels.

5.3 Correlation Analysis

To test for a direct outlet-level trade-off between the two brands' stock levels, Pearson correlation coefficients were computed between Connect stock and Stellar Shift stock across the 70 sampled outlets. Connect stock showed a negligible correlation with Stellar Shift singles ($r = -0.019$, $p = 0.878$) and with Stellar Shift duos ($r = -0.101$, $p = 0.406$); the combined Stellar Shift total (singles + duos) yielded $r = -0.080$ ($p = 0.510$). None of these coefficients reached conventional statistical significance, indicating no significant inverse relationship in this sample: outlets carrying more Stellar Shift stock did not systematically carry less Connect stock. This suggests that factors other than direct shelf-space substitution — for example, fixed order sizes, independent replenishment cycles, or outlet-specific demand signals — are also at work, and that observed differences in replenishment appear to reflect demand signals and distributor practice rather than a simple, mechanical brand trade-off.

5.4 Retailer Feedback Themes

All 70 sampled retailers provided a coded feedback remark during the field visit, recorded in the accompanying visit tracker. Nine distinct themes emerged (Figure 4, Table 2):

Feedback Theme	Outlets (of 70)	% of Sample
No complaints; product available and displayed properly	25	35.7%
Customers aware of Connect; repeat demand observed	19	27.1%
Trial purchases happening; expects repeat customers	5	7.1%
Good response from young adult smokers; visibility appreciated	5	7.1%
Premium-segment smokers prefer competing brand; retailer willing to push Connect	4	5.7%
Price point accepted; sales need retailer recommendation	4	5.7%
Retailer requested regular stock supply	3	4.3%
Low demand currently; retailer needs consumer awareness support	3	4.3%
Retailer interested in growing slims-segment sales	2	2.9%

Table 2. Retailer feedback themes recorded across the 70 sampled outlets.

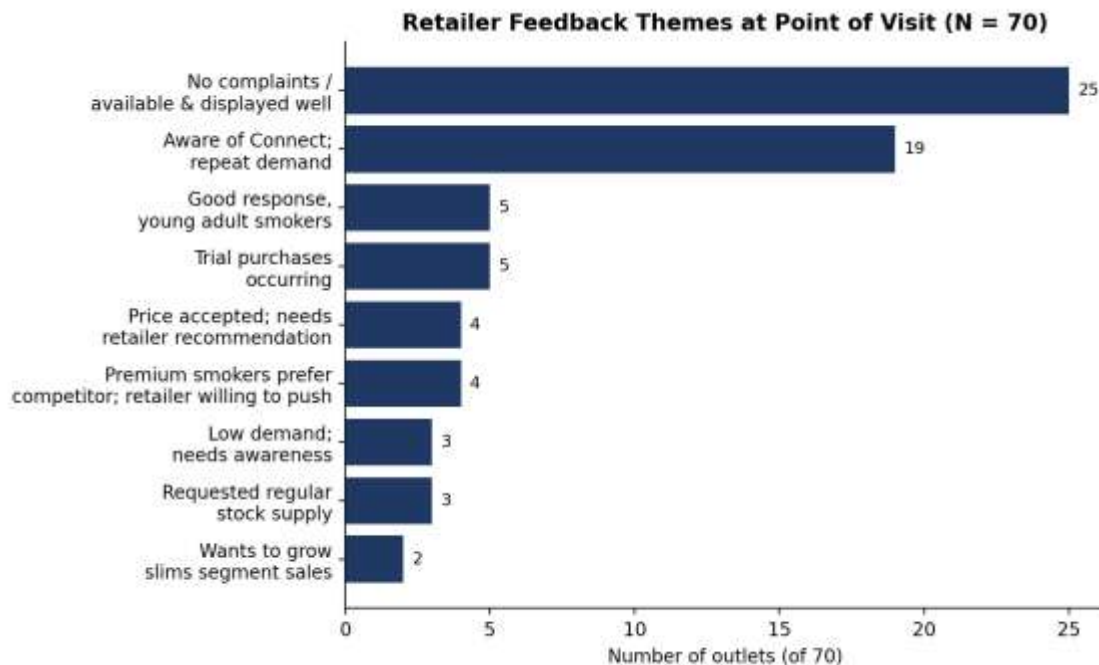


Figure 4. Retailer feedback themes at point of visit (N = 70 outlets).

The two dominant themes — “no complaints, available and displayed properly” (35.7%) and “aware of Connect, repeat demand” (27.1%) — together account for nearly two-thirds of all outlets, indicating that at a majority of sampled outlets, availability and consumer familiarity were not perceived as barriers. A smaller but analytically important cluster of feedback speaks directly to competitive and price dynamics: 5.7% of outlets explicitly reported that premium-segment smokers preferred the competing brand, while a further 5.7% noted that price was accepted by consumers but that sales still depended on active retailer recommendation — suggesting that, at the margin, retailer advocacy rather than price alone determines brand choice at these specific outlets. A further 7.1% of outlets reported an early, favourable response from young adult smokers, and 7.1% reported active but not yet repeat trial purchase, both consistent with a brand still building consumer habituation in this territory.

5.5 Supplementary Observation: American Club (AC) Presence

The same outlet audit also recorded the stocking status of American Club (AC), a second slim-cigarette brand in ITC’s regional portfolio, though it was not a primary focus of this study. Across the 70 outlets, AC was recorded as in stock (“Yes”) at 8 outlets (11.4%), at low stock at 27 outlets (38.6%), absent (“No”) at 24 outlets (34.3%), and not available for sale at 11 outlets (15.7%). This pattern — AC held at full stock in barely one in nine outlets — suggests that the availability challenge documented for Connect in this territory is not unique to a single brand but may reflect a broader pattern in how this segment of ITC’s portfolio is stocked relative to the established competitor, a question that falls outside this paper’s primary scope but merits dedicated future study (Section 9).

6. Discussion

The results indicate that Connect’s comparative retail underperformance in the study territory is shaped by multiple, interacting factors rather than price alone. The modest average stock of approximately 4.9 units per outlet, against 7.8 units for Stellar Shift, indicates that Connect is systematically under-represented on shelves relative to its competitor; this is consistent with the finding that Stellar Shift held a stock advantage in 78.6% of sampled outlets, and plausibly reflects a combination of established brand strength and stronger distributor push behind the competing brand. The observed price gap (≈₹25–30 for Connect versus ≈₹20 for Stellar Shift) is consistent with the broader literature on Indian consumers’, and particularly rural and semi-urban consumers’, price sensitivity: absent compensating promotional support or margin incentive, retailers may reasonably favour the lower-priced alternative when advising undecided consumers.



At the same time, the absence of a significant inverse correlation between the two brands' stock levels suggests that Connect is not simply being displaced from the shelf by Stellar Shift, nor vice versa; the two brands appear to coexist based on distinct outlet-level demand and replenishment patterns rather than a fixed, zero-sum allocation of shelf space. This is consistent with a conceptual reading in which retailer margin and distributor-visit frequency interact with price to shape stocking behaviour: an outlet selling Connect strictly at MRP (in keeping with company pricing guidance) may protect its margin while nonetheless facing softer sell-through if price-sensitive consumers perceive Connect as comparatively expensive — a pattern consistent with the retailer feedback theme of Connect being described as “too expensive.” Meanwhile, both brands may separately benefit from promotional activity, and Stellar Shift's more visible recent promotional support may explain part of its stock advantage independent of headline price.

These field observations also informed a practical intervention undertaken during the study period: following discussion with the territory sales manager, the researcher participated in a company-led initiative to encourage MRP-compliant selling of Connect — that is, ensuring outlets displayed and sold Connect at its printed MRP rather than applying inconsistent, informal discounts. The stated rationale was twofold: protecting retailer margin (and thereby retailer enthusiasm for stocking Connect) and avoiding a race-to-the-bottom price dynamic that could erode the brand's positioning. This is broadly consistent with ITC's stated emphasis on “judicious pricing actions” and net revenue management in its investor communications (ITC Limited, 2026a). The outcome of this intervention within the study period was mixed: some outlets appeared to increase Connect stock following the policy, plausibly anticipating improved margin, but overall retail sell-through remained constrained by pre-existing consumer price perceptions in at least some outlets. This is an observational finding from a field intervention, not a controlled experiment, and should be interpreted accordingly.

Finally, the visibility finding — that higher-visibility outlets carried marginally more Connect stock — is consistent with established retail research linking shelf prominence to sales probability, and suggests that manufacturer investment in point-of-sale display assets (branded danglers, counter stands) could plausibly support Connect's stock position independent of any pricing action.

6.1 Managerial and Practical Implications

The following implications are framed as evidence-based observations arising from the field study, not as directives representing official ITC Limited policy.

- **Reinforce MRP discipline.** The MRP-compliant selling initiative observed during this study should be sustained and periodically monitored, since consistent MRP selling protects retailer margin and outlet goodwill while avoiding a low-price positioning for the brand.
- **Favour targeted over blanket promotions.** Conditional promotional formats — for example, buy-one-get-one structures or limited-period bonus packs — are more likely to stimulate trial without eroding headline price, consistent with the Indian deal-seeking consumer profile documented by Dawra et al. (2016) and the promotional-response evidence of Nigam et al. (2022).
- **Strengthen retailer engagement at underperforming outlets.** Given that Connect's stock position varies meaningfully by route and by visibility rating, route-level sales management could prioritise additional retailer support — improved margins, contests, or more frequent visits — at outlets identified as comparatively weak.
- **Sustain trade-incentive design.** Vyas's (2005) finding that well-designed incentive schemes support retailer loyalty suggests continued investment in structured trade promotions, rather than ad hoc discounting, is warranted.
- **Recognise the centrality of kirana retail.** Given the continued dominance of kirana stores in this territory, brand-building and retailer-education efforts focused on the neighbourhood-store channel are likely to be more cost-effective than mass-media approaches alone.



7. Key Findings

- Connect held a materially lower average retail stock position (4.87 units/outlet) than the leading competing brand (7.81 units/outlet) across the 70-outlet sample, with the competitor holding a stock advantage in 78.6% of outlets audited (55 of 70).
- A consistent actual-selling-price gap was observed between Connect ($\approx ₹25-30$) and the competing brand ($\approx ₹20$).
- Despite this co-occurring price gap, correlation analysis found no statistically significant inverse relationship between the two brands' outlet-level stock ($r \approx -0.02$ to -0.08 , $p > 0.10$), indicating that price alone does not mechanically explain the observed stock disadvantage.
- Retailer feedback identified promotional support, distributor visit frequency, and retailer margin — alongside price — as recurring, co-occurring factors associated with stocking preference.
- Shelf visibility showed a modest positive association with Connect stock levels, consistent with the broader retail literature on point-of-sale prominence.

8. Limitations

- The sample is confined to one sales territory (Osmanabad) and, for the detailed stock analysis, to the 70 top-performing outlets audited in the initial phase; findings may not generalise to other regions, other outlet types, or lower-volume outlets.
- Stock data reflect point-in-time counts rather than continuous sales or inventory-turnover data, so recorded stock may partly reflect recent delivery timing rather than underlying consumer demand.
- Retailer feedback is qualitative and self-reported, and is therefore subject to recall bias.
- The MRP-compliant selling initiative discussed in Section 6 was a field intervention undertaken as part of routine sales activity, not a controlled experiment; its effects cannot be statistically confirmed from the available data.
- The study did not have access to the competing brand's internal sales or distribution data; Stellar Shift is treated throughout as an observed field reference rather than as a subject of independent verification.

9. Scope for Future Research

Future research building on this case study could usefully (a) track verified sales-register data (rather than point-in-time stock counts) for the same outlets over an extended period to test whether the observed patterns hold across a full seasonal cycle; (b) extend the outlet sample beyond the initial top-performing 70 to test whether the findings generalise to lower-volume outlets; and (c) incorporate a structured consumer-level survey to directly measure price sensitivity and brand-switching intent, complementing the retailer-level evidence presented here. A formal experimental test of the coupon-based promotional format proposed in Section 6.1 would also help establish whether conditional incentives can shift Connect's stock position independent of headline price.

10. Conclusion

This field-based case study of ITC Connect in Osmanabad territory finds that the interplay of pricing, competition, and retail execution shapes the brand's comparative market position in complex ways. Connect's modest stock presence (341 units across 70 outlets) contrasted with a stronger competitor stock position, and a consistent actual-price disadvantage was observed in the field. However, the absence of a significant correlation between the two brands' stock levels indicates that price reduction alone would not straightforwardly close this gap; rather, disciplined MRP practice, targeted promotional design, and sustained retailer engagement appear to be the more actionable levers available to the



brand team in this territory. These findings are consistent with the broader literature on FMCG pricing strategy and India's retail structure, and they suggest that Connect's retail performance is likely to improve not through price competition alone, but through promotional and retailer-incentive design that is closely aligned with the price-sensitive, deal-responsive character of the Indian FMCG consumer documented in the literature reviewed in this paper.

More broadly, this case illustrates the continuing influence of the independent retailer within India's general-trade structure, and the corresponding need for agile, field-informed pricing and promotional strategy at the territory level. Future work combining verified sales data with direct consumer research would help establish more precisely how price elasticity operates for Connect within this specific competitive set.

11. Ethical Considerations

This study was conducted with due regard to ethical principles applicable to field-based business research. Retailer interactions were undertaken for research purposes, participation in interviews was voluntary, and no retailer was required to disclose information they were unwilling to share. To protect respondent confidentiality, individual retailer names and other personally identifiable information have not been reported; findings are presented in aggregated or thematically summarised form. The study distinguishes throughout between primary field observations (stock audits, price observations, retailer feedback) and information obtained through informal discussion with sales personnel; statements presented as findings of this study should not be read as official positions of ITC Limited or its management. The analysis does not draw on, or claim access to, proprietary company or competitor data beyond what was directly observable in the field, and the researcher's recommendations in Section 6.1 are presented as independent academic interpretation rather than as company guidance.

12. Author Contribution and AI-Assistance Disclosure

Rushikesh Muthal conceived the study, collected and analysed the field data, and drafted the manuscript. Portions of this manuscript were prepared with the assistance of an AI writing tool for language editing, structural organisation, and citation formatting under the author's direction and review; all data collection, analysis, interpretation, and conclusions are the author's own. This disclosure is provided in accordance with academic-integrity and AI-use reporting expectations of the target publication venue.

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