

CONSUMER AWARENESS AND BEHAVIOUR IN THE PALGHAR DISTRICT: A STUDY

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Abstract

The primary objective of this study is to analyse the dynamic interaction between rural consumers and specific market products, while considering the most recent trends. It is of utmost importance for companies offering products in rural areas to recognise and emphasise the significance and growing prominence of innovative marketing strategies. In light of the increasing interest among businesses to tap into rural markets and diversify their product offerings, it becomes imperative for them to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the purchasing patterns exhibited by rural customers. The aim of this study is to provide insight into the behaviour of individuals residing in rural areas. It seeks to analyse their behaviours and choices prior to, during, and subsequent to participating in a transaction.

Keywords: Awareness, Behaviour, Consumer, Market, Product, Purchase

INTRODUCTION

The opening up of the Indian economy resulted in significant achievements, including the integration of international brands into the Indian market. In the past, companies directed their marketing strategies towards metropolitan areas with the aim of appealing to knowledgeable customers. Due to the intense competition in urban markets, numerous companies shifted their focus towards the rapidly expanding rural sector. Furthermore, the development of agricultural markets in India is currently in progress, and the industry presents a multitude of obstacles. Rural inhabitants have distinct consumption patterns, preferences, and needs that greatly contrast with those of their urban counterparts. The rate at which the city-dwelling people of India have adjusted exceeds that of their rural counterparts, all thanks to the rise in media consumption and evolving lifestyles. Conversely, it is crucial to recognise that rural consumers are also witnessing progress in this domain, as indicated by the study carried out by Vidyavathi in 2008. Therefore, there has been a recent emphasis on examining the purchasing patterns of customers living in remote regions. The main reason for this is the growing trend in rural India to buy a wide range of products, including everything from hair care products to motorcycles. The increasing phenomenon of buying products in remote areas is being seen as a noteworthy topic for market analysis. It is worth mentioning the noteworthy research carried out by Arpita Khare in the year 2010. The economy of India heavily relies on the rural regions, as they make a significant contribution of over 50% to the country's overall income. Based on a research report titled "India's Expanding Consumer Market: Unveiling the Silver Plume" carried out by McKinsey Global Institute in May 2007, it is estimated that by 2025, a substantial 63% of the populace in India will persistently reside in rural areas. Conversely, there is anticipation of a significant increase in rural consumption, with a predicted growth rate of 5.1% in the next 20 years. This is in stark contrast to the growth rate of 3.9% observed in the preceding two decades. According to Arpita Srivastava's projections in 2008, the anticipated expenditure in rural areas is predicted to rise significantly. In 1985, the total expenditure amounted to Rs. 4,498 billion, which then increased to Rs. 9,688 billion in 2005. It is estimated that by 2025, the expenditure will reach a staggering Rs. 26,383 billion.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

In 1977, Mouly put forth assertions suggesting that humans possess a unique ability to acquire and utilise the collective wisdom passed down through previous generations. Our unique capacity distinguishes us from other creatures, as it enables us to evade the need for commencing anew with every subsequent era. The undeniable significance of this fact becomes apparent in the field of investigation, where it acts as an ongoing expedition towards a heightened comprehension. The researcher can feel assured that their exploration is not solitary and that substantial steps have already been implemented to address issues that are closely linked to their intended investigation.

In 1977, Mouly put forth a theory suggesting that humans possess a unique ability to acquire and utilise the collective wisdom and abilities passed down through generations. This characteristic distinguishes them from other creatures, who must start anew with each successive generation. That the significance of data in scientific inquiry cannot be overstated, as it serves as an ongoing quest to reveal the truth with growing precision. The researcher can rest assured that their inquiry is not solitary, and that significant actions have already been

implemented to address issues that are closely associated with their intended study.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY

Marketers and scholars have the opportunity to delve into the vast untapped potential of rural markets. There is a notable contrast in the buying behaviours between individuals residing in rural regions of India and those living in urban areas. It should be noted that there is a noticeable absence of research conducted on the subject of rural consumer behaviour. As a result, marketers often strive to incorporate strategies of urban marketing in these regions; however, this approach typically fails to yield the intended outcomes. Gaining a thorough understanding of the mindset and purchasing patterns of rural communities is essential for successfully penetrating the rural market. With its dense population, India presents a profitable market for a wide range of industries. Therefore, the current study focuses on examining the usage of consumer goods in the market, as selected by the researcher. The items selected for the study consist of hair conditioners, body washes, mouthwash for oral care, baked goods, and bug sprays that can be easily found in retail establishments. The research examined a range of items that were selected based on their accessibility in the domains of hair maintenance, skincare, dental care, food and drink consumption, and mosquito management.

RURAL MARKETING IN INDIA

The countryside division, which includes around 70% of the entire populace, has a significant impact on advancing the nation as a whole. The transformation of India's rural scenery is experiencing a remarkable change due to various extensive initiatives focused on enhancing the development of rural areas. India's countryside is exhibiting encouraging indications of burgeoning affluence. The prosperous state of countryside regions has unveiled thrilling prospects. As a result, there is a clear rise in the need for long-lasting and short-lived products. Moreover, rural consumers have displayed noticeable shifts in their purchasing and utilisation behaviours, adopting novel concepts, perspectives, and lifestyles. Over the past thirty years, rural areas in India have experienced a significant socio-economic transformation due to the implementation of the "eco-conscious revolution." Rural areas have experienced significant improvements due to the advancements in various aspects of agriculture. These include a better understanding of fertilisers, improved water management techniques, the development of effective insecticides, the availability of superior quality seeds, the introduction of state-of-the-art farming machinery, and the implementation of innovative farming practises. Farmers are experiencing a rise in their individual income, resulting in a noticeable shift in how they spend their money. The state of the agricultural industry is anything but static. The progress is flourishing and expanding rapidly. If the current rate of progress persists, it is likely that the rural market will surpass the urban market in the coming times. Rural areas have wholeheartedly embraced contemporary farming techniques as a profitable entrepreneurial opportunity, while also embracing contemporary lifestyles. The rancher is shrewd when it comes to purchasing. In addition to everyday essentials and personal belongings, his interest lies in collecting compact radios and televisions, as well as a diverse range of vehicles with two wheels, specifically bicycles and motorcycles. Furthermore, his aspirations encompass acquiring timepieces for his wrists, fuel for culinary purposes, and embellishments for his living space. The shifts in the socio-economic landscape of rural areas have prompted the inhabitants to contemplate their monetary stability. The rapid spread of a new perspective is taking place among agricultural workers in rural areas of India. The agricultural industry plays a significant role in driving India's economic progress. As conditions evolve, marketing professionals are increasingly directing their attention towards rural areas. "Embrace the rural landscape" has become the resounding call for marketers. The purchasing and consumption patterns of individuals residing in rural regions offer valuable insights into their economic condition. Due to their improved financial capacity, they have developed a greater desire to acquire contemporary electronic devices. Understanding the marketing environment in rural areas requires a thorough analysis of the current conditions, influenced by various social, economic, and cultural factors. In order to develop a successful marketing plan, it is essential to possess a comprehensive comprehension of the rural landscape. Lately, there has been a focus on examining the distinct disparities between urban and rural markets, taking into account a range of socio-economic factors (Kumar, 2004).

RURAL CONSUMERS IN INDIA

The characteristics of rural consumers are distinct from those of urban consumers, encompassing various aspects such as their social interactions, psychological tendencies, physiological traits, and literal qualities. Individuals residing in isolated areas frequently choose economical products when engaging in transactions. Each of them appears to possess a collective predisposition towards a specific item or company, leading to a prevalent trend of purchasing.

In terms of a rural hamlet or a specific locality. In the countryside, it is common for men to assume the role of decision-makers when it comes to making purchases, as they have limited exposure to market activities.

Conversely, women tend to have minimal participation in this aspect. Rural markets often rely on communal decision-making, which is influenced by various factors such as caste and social hierarchies, as well as lower literacy rates. Individuals residing in isolated areas often experience emotions of restriction and inadequacy in relation to making assured acquisitions. The reason for this is their unfamiliarity with the quality of the products, services, and the reputation of the company. According to the criteria established by the census, it is conceivable that individuals residing in rural areas may lack sufficient literacy skills. On the other hand, it is crucial to acknowledge that this does not necessarily imply a lack of intellect. Consumers residing in rural areas generally exhibit a diminished degree of brand familiarity, preference, and loyalty in contrast to their urban counterparts. The level of fondness that rural consumers display towards a particular brand varies depending on the characteristics of the products. It can be quite a difficult task to alter the brand preference of rural consumers who possess a strong sense of loyalty towards a particular product. According to the data from the 2001 Census, approximately 740 million individuals, accounting for roughly 70% of India's overall population, reside in rural areas. In contrast to the crowded city centres, the countryside is made up of an extensive array of 638,365 villages, each with a dispersed population. The rural market is widely dispersed and exhibits significant differences in terms of purchasing power, education, electricity access, hygiene, traditions, and various other factors (Selvaraj A. 2007). Individuals residing in remote areas are impacted by logical reasoning, firsthand encounters, and the extent of advantages obtained from consumption, among a multitude of other factors. The purchasing habits of individuals can be shaped by the personal encounters of their acquaintances, relatives, and loved ones. Consumer purchasing behaviours are greatly influenced by two key elements: the outstanding excellence of goods and the convenience of obtaining them. The impact of bombarding customers with advertising material is restricted. According to a study conducted by Shivaraj B. in 2006, it was discovered that individuals residing in rural areas demonstrate a strong emotional connection and are highly susceptible to the visual elements of diverse advertising initiatives.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The primary objective of the research is to examine how rural consumers interact with specific market products, taking into account the existing trend. It is essential to emphasise the importance and growth of inventive approaches in marketing to rural areas that are adopted by companies when selling their products. Given the increasing interest of various companies in exploring rural markets, it becomes imperative for them to extensively analyse the purchasing patterns of rural consumers in order to effectively market their products. The aim of this research is to provide insight into the habits of consumers residing in rural areas regarding their pre-purchase, purchase, and post-purchase activities.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To assess the extent of familiarity among rural consumers in Palghar district with different products and services.
- To evaluate the choices available and gauge the extent of brand awareness and understanding among consumers living in the Palghar district.
- To explore the views of rural customers prior to and following their acquisition of a product or service.
- To analyse the factors that influence consumer behaviour following a purchase and their commitment to a specific brand. Our main attention will be directed towards the people living in the Palghar region.
- To explore the influence of demographic variables on the dimensions of identifying requirements, assessing options, and post-acquisition conduct.

AREA OF THE STUDY

Rural communities are chosen for analysis due to their diverse and varied characteristics.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Within this segment, we shall delineate the strategy employed in this investigation, encompassing the organisation of the study, techniques for gathering information, and the formulation of the interview survey. The conclusive research includes a comprehensive examination of the sampling strategy employed, as well as a detailed description of the techniques employed to collect and analyse data during the initial evaluation, pilot phase, and final investigation.

SAMPLING PLAN AND DATA COLLECTION

We are currently evaluating the effectiveness of the proposed research methodology by conducting trials with customers residing in rural areas in order to assess its appropriateness. Primarily, the attention is directed towards the purchasing patterns exhibited by consumers in relation to the diverse range of products available in the market. There are numerous significant factors behind choosing this subject, specifically:

- (i) The existence of an extensive selection of marketable products that are easily accessible to customers.
- (ii) The prevalence of partnerships with vendors and clients in the industry. The approach employed in the study relies on a blend of primary and secondary data sources. The research relies extensively on unique information collected through a meticulously designed and organised questionnaire, aiming to capture valuable viewpoints from the participants. Proportional random sampling is the technique employed to collect data from the rural residents of the chosen villages. The approach used in this research integrates inductive and descriptive methods. There are two clearly defined stages in the research, beginning with an initial test run and then proceeding to the primary examination. A wide array of sources, such as scholarly publications, periodicals, studies, literary works, news articles, academic papers, online platforms, business documents, instructional guides, and promotional pamphlets, collectively contribute to the supplementary information.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENT DEVELOPMENT

Multiple structures were required to evaluate the suggested theoretical framework. The study involved assessing all the structures through the utilisation of multi-item scales. These scales consisted of response options on a five-point Likert scale. The research was customised to suit the unique circumstances of the study, utilising measurements that emphasised the actions of individuals living in rural regions. The criteria for assessing the comprehensive analysis were determined by employing a rating system that assesses the level of customer understanding. Originating from the assessor and under their complete jurisdiction. A thorough examination was conducted to gather and analyse various measurement scales associated with the concepts, with the aim of evaluating their suitability for the current study. The evaluation of the measuring instruments was carried out, taking into account the subsequent factors.

A comprehensive study on consumer behaviour involved a thorough examination of the suggested framework's five components: customer demographics, qualities, variables that influence the buyer, need identification, alternative evaluation, and post-purchase behaviour. The analysis was conducted extensively to gain valuable insights. In past studies, scientists utilised Likert's scale as a means of gauging consumer knowledge pertaining to characteristics, opinions, and actions subsequent to making a purchase. The interview timetable was formulated according to the primary framework of investigation and presumptions. The data gathered was predominantly obtained through the implementation of a questionnaire that encompassed a sequence of organised discussions. A comprehensive approach to conducting interviews, consisting of five distinct sections, was formulated and ultimately approved. The initial segment of the interview questionnaire consists of inquiries regarding personal details and voluntary prompts. In the upcoming section, we will discuss the examination of data, the familiarity of the buyer with various brands in the market, and their perspectives. In addition to the evaluation queries, we incorporate supplementary investigations that relate to optional subjects and are displayed in a binary structure. The final section encompasses declarations concerning the impact of the buyer, the identification of requirements, and the assessment of market alternatives through a hierarchical rating system. The purpose of this segment is to recognise the factors associated with the acquisition of Market Goods. When it comes to conducting a thorough assessment of options, the fourth section of the interview questionnaire centres around gathering feedback from customers. The survey consists of a mix of Likert scale inquiries featuring five response choices and ranking queries, alongside a handful of voluntary prompts. The last section of the interview survey includes inquiries regarding the customer's post-purchase conduct, their contentment level, brand loyalty, and perspectives on Market Products. The evaluation of these elements is conducted utilising a Likert-developed scale consisting of five points. Solutions have been derived by integrating all pertinent assertions.

INTERVIEW SCHEDULING METHOD OF SCALING

The study's interview schedule comprises a blend of queries that facilitate unrestricted answers and statements that participants will evaluate using a 5-point Likert scale. Consumers in the Palghar District hold a diverse range of opinions when it comes to various market products. I completely concur. I concur. Three - Remaining impartial without any inclination towards a favourable or unfavourable stance. I have a different perspective. I have a completely different perspective. A rating of 5 indicates an extremely high level of satisfaction. A feeling of immense contentment fills the air. An acceptable level of contentment. 2 - Reduced contentment 1 - Completely dissatisfied. Participants found it more convenient to complete the survey due to the implementation of result standardisation. During the meeting, the writer and manager deliberated on incorporating Likert's five-point scale into the project. Eventually, they mutually decided to assign a numerical value of three to responses

indicating uncertainty or neutrality. After conducting a thorough analysis of various statistical methods, it has been concluded that the numeric representation for the state of neutrality will be 3. The term "indecisive" implies that the questions on the interview schedule are not specifically connected to the individuals' personal experiences or perspectives. The idea of being "neutral" suggests that the individual possesses a thorough understanding of the topics discussed in the interview schedule but consciously chooses to maintain an impartial stance that falls in the middle ground, avoiding both complete agreement and disagreement..

HYPOTHESES

Ho₁ Consumers tend to perceive the attributes of various products in the market in a fairly uniform manner, with no notable differences.

Ho₂ There's no connection between how well a rural consumer knows a brand and how much they actually understand about it.

Ho₃: The perceptions of rural consumers show little variation in their post-purchase behaviour.

Ho₄: There are no significant differences in the factors that contribute to the acknowledgment of needs.

Ho₅: There is no connection between the loyalty of rural consumers towards a specific brand and their behaviour after making a purchase.

DATA ANALYSIS

Consumer data was effectively analysed using Microsoft Excel, leading to the successful achievement of the study objectives. Examining market reactions may require the application of diverse statistical techniques, including but not limited to determining the middle value, measuring the spread, conducting the Mann-Whitney U test, performing the Kruskal-Wallis test, and employing principal component analysis.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

1. Only rural communities are included in the research. The study is limited to a single district due to time and cost constraints.
2. The research was carried out using feedback from chosen participants residing in rural regions.
3. The research is confined to 400 replies from rural customers. Additional answers would have shed sufficient illumination on the complete investigation.
4. The study is limited to 2021-2022.

RESULT & MAJOR FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Distribution of sample items across different FMCG categories according to brand.

Having a deep understanding of the brand, being knowledgeable about the product, and having a strong brand presence all contribute to making informed and dynamic purchasing choices. The research domain in Palghar District emphasises the importance of distributing fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) based on specific brands.

1.1 Shampoo

According to the findings, Clinic Plus dominates the market with a share of 34.2%, while Head and Shoulders trails behind with 14.7%. Chik holds a respectable 9.8% of the market, closely followed by Meera with 11.28%. Sunsilk, on the other hand, captures 9.28% of the market. Urban consumers frequently opt for alternative options. Based on the provided information, it is evident that Chik emerged as the preferred brand among the participants, surpassing other options such as Clinic Plus, Meera, and Head & Shoulders.

Biscuits

According to the data presented in Table 4.6, Britannia biscuits have emerged as the leading choice with a significant share of 39.8%. Parle, on the other hand, closely follows Britannia with a market share of 37.8%. These two brands are primarily favoured by consumers residing in rural areas. The study's participants showed a strong preference for Britannia and Sun feast, which were identified as the leading biscuit brands.

Bathing Soap

Based on the statistics, it appears that Cinthol is the preferred choice for 13.8% of the participants, while Lux is favoured by 12.2% and Lifebuoy by 11.5%. Interestingly, Hamam seems to be the soap of choice for a significant majority, with 38% of the respondents opting for it. Several other companies find themselves in a similar situation, albeit with minor differences in their distribution methods. The percentage of Medimix is 8.8%, while Margo has a slightly lower percentage of 6.5%. On the other hand, Mysore Sandal has a percentage of 5.8%. According to the information available, Hamam has emerged as the leading brand in the rural regions of Palghar

District.

Toothpaste

The oral hygiene industry in India encounters challenges in terms of the acceptance and utilisation levels. According to the data presented in Table 4.1, the majority of participants, accounting for 52.8%, expressed a preference for Colgate toothpaste. Pepsodent, on the other hand, garnered a preference of 19%, while Close-up received a preference of 8.7%. More than half of the participants use Colgate, suggesting that it is well-liked in rural areas.

Mosquito Repellent

The average score achieved by students at Palghar University on the "Evaluation of Consumer Awareness Regarding Various Aspects of Personality" examination.

Hypothesis related to Gender for Consumer Awareness

- Male college students outperform their female counterparts in Consumer awareness.
- Rural male college students have a significantly higher mean score on consumer awareness than rural female college students.
- Urban male college students' mean score on consumer awareness is not significantly greater than that of urban female college students.

Hypothesis regarding Habitat-based Sampling for Consumer Awareness.

Hypothesis related to Habitat for Consumer awareness

- There is no notable difference in the average consumer awareness scores between rural and urban college students.
- Male college students from rural areas do not exhibit a significantly higher level of consumer awareness compared to their male counterparts from urban areas.
- There is no substantial difference in the average score of Consumer awareness between rural and urban female college students.
- The average score of urban Post-Graduation students in Consumer awareness is not noticeably higher than that of rural Post-Graduation students..

Hypothesis related to enrolled in college for Consumer awareness

- Male Graduate students tend to achieve lower average scores on consumer awareness compared to male Post-Graduate students.
- There is no substantial difference in the average scores between female postgraduate students and female college students in the field of Consumer awareness.
- There is no significant difference in the average score of urban postgraduate students and urban college students when it comes to consumer awareness.
- The average score of rural postgraduate students does not show a significant difference compared to rural college students in terms of their level of consumer awareness.

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