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Consumer Perception and Usage Experience of Toilet Soaps with Special Reference to 'Indulekha' Brand: A Study in Tirurangadi Municipality of Malappuram District of Kerala

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ABSTRACT

Toilet soap industry has been facing severe cut-throat competition among the Multi-National Companies, national and local and international as well as global players. The level of penetration in toilet soaps spread in urban and semi-urban areas are very high. Consumer satisfaction happens when the perceived performance and the expectations match equally. If the perceived performance crosses the expectations results in customer delighting and better satisfaction. Customer satisfaction results in quality related issues. Many studies in this area show that the costs and efforts of acquiring a new customer are more than retaining the existing ones.

Keywords: Toilet Soaps, Marketing Strategies, Indulekha Brand.

1. INTRODUCTION

Toilet soap industry has been facing severe cut-throat competition among the Multi-National Companies, national and local and international as well as global players. The level of penetration in toilet soaps spread in urban and semi-urban areas are very high. The per capita level of consumption remains low. Thus, it is crucial for marketers and players to know the consumer behaviour regarding the toilet soaps, useful in shaping suitable marketing strategies.

Consumer satisfaction happens when the perceived performance and the expectations match equally. If the perceived performance crosses the expectations results in customer delighting and better satisfaction. Customer satisfaction results in quality related issues. Many studies in this area show that the costs and efforts of acquiring a new customer are more than retaining the existing ones.

Customer satisfaction also leads to better profitability, customer loyalty, and retention of existing customers for repeat purchases. So, it is imperative for marketers and researchers to understand the critical factors influencing the consumer behaviour. The Indian market structure shows that it has over 1200 million people living nearly 5000 towns and cities and about 600,000 villages.

Products need to pass through several price points and conditions to satisfy all consumers. The reports show that the toilet soap's per capita consumption in India is very low as 800g when compared to the US, which is 6.5kgs, 4 kgs in China and 2.5 kgs in Indonesia the toilet soaps can be put into four groups and categories namely, premium, popular, economy and carbolic soaps.

The Premium group of soaps includes the brands like Dove, Mysore Sandal, Pears and also some international brands. Brands in the popular category include Lux, Santoor, Cinthol, Rexona, Chandrika etc. The brands in the economy category are Fairglow, Godrej No.1, Vep etc. The carbolic category brands include Lifebuoy, Dabur and Nima toilet soaps.

The popular brand's segment has been witnessing rapid growth and has been regarded as the category driver. Consumers are willing to shift from the premium category segment to popular category as and when they found better value for their money. Likewise, the consumers also upgrading from the economy category to better premier brands upon the increased disposable incomes in all urban and rural areas. The result is the growth of premium brands by at least 15%.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There have been many types of research has been done and going through the consumer buying patterns on FMCG products.

According to Kotler & Armstrong (1989) influencing factors for purchasing behaviour are marketing mix & personal characteristics. The studies have been showing that the marketing mix factors play a vital role and exist a relationship on the purchasing behaviour of the consumer. The tracking and proper alignment of the marketing mix are, therefore, essential for achieving the consumer's mindshare for the particular brand.

Gupta, A. K., & Wilemon, D. (1988) having the opinion that the marketing mix factor has a good and strong relationship with brand choices, consumers buying behavioral patterns leading for the happening of purchases. The price factor of the product may differ based on the economic conditions & consumer perceptions. It could influence the perceived value of a brand.

Kotler & Armstrong, (1989) a lot of consumers use price factor as an indicator of the quality of the brand which is very important in purchasing decision. Certain characteristics of the products like packages, contents, and ingredients, and fragrance of toilet soaps play a vital role.

Peter & Olson, (1990). The consumer buying behavioral attributes will be evaluated based on consumer beliefs, values, and previous experiences.

Dr. Dharam Sukh Dahiya, (1996) Observed that purchasing a particular brand requires a strong positive attitude of the consumers on the advertisement.

Nivas Shirur, (1999) it is also established fact that Indian middle-class consumers are always willing to pay more or pay a premium for better quality than getting satisfied with existing generic products with less or inferior quality.

Shekhar Trivedi, (2000) Consumer tends to define and compare with products in terms of the symbolic value of their possessions.

Debashis Bhattacharya (2002). They developed a 'risk reduction' strategy to boost greater confidence in product purchasing decisions.

Dr. Sarwade W. K. (2002). Increased disposable income of families allows exercising more choice in the selection of FMCG from the cost perception.

D. P. S. Verma (2003) In FMCG sector, the major influencing factors like quality, price, and availability of products decides the purchase decisions.

Prof. S. A. Telang (2003). However, suggests that the age and other demographic variables also have their effect on behavioral and cognitive patterns of the buying behaviour of consumers.

Dr. A. Vinayaga Moorthy, (2007) asserts that Urban consumers preferring branded products

P. Antony George, (2007). Brand usage and Brand awareness and are highly correlated.

3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The following are the specific objectives of the study.

1. To identify the product attributes that influence the purchasing process
2. To examine the brand switching behavior among respondents
3. To evaluate the satisfaction level of users with respect to their present brand
4. To offer suggestions to FMCG companies regarding their market share and brand loyalty

4. SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The present study examined the consumer perception and satisfaction towards the toilet soaps and their influence on product attributes over the purchasing decisions. The study was made by taking each attribute as independent of other attributes, hence their inter-dependence is ignored. As this study was conducted in only Tirurangadi Municipality area in Kerala, a southern state of India, the findings and suggestions of this study may not be representative of the universe and may not be generalized since the consumer taste and preferences may vary from place to place. Some discrepancies may be occurred due to sample method used also.

SOURCES OF DATA

The study was conducted with the help of primary data collected from 64 respondent consumers drawn at convenience in Tirurangadi Municipality. Secondary data was also used.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Sampling Method: The questionnaires were only distributed among the consumers who are using toilet soap at home. Care was taken to ensure that the sample would cover adequately all the leading brands in the study. The sampling method used was convenience sampling. The size of the sample was selected from 100 respondents covering all the leading toilet soap brands used in Tirurangadi Municipality area. The demographical variables also covered in the desired sample.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was done through descriptive statistics, using the Chi-Square method at 5% level of significance.

ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

Profile of Respondents

Table 1: Quantity of Questionnaire

Distributed Questionnaires		Useful Questionnaires		Useless Questionnaires	
Questionnaires	Percentage	Questionnaires	Percentage	Questionnaires	Percentage
100	100	64	64	36	36

Total 100 questionnaires were distributed and out of which 64 questionnaires found eligible for analysis and interpretation.

Age Group Classification

The respondents are classified as per their age group table-2 show the classification.

Table 2: Age Group Classification of Respondents

Age Group		
Age Group	Frequency	Percentage
16-24 Years	06	21 %
25-35 Years	13	43%
36-44 Years	04	12%
45-65 Years	09	24%
Total	32	100%

Educational status Classification

The educational classification is shown in table no-3

Table 3: Educational Status of Respondents

Education		
Education	Frequency	Percentage
XI STD	8	12
XII STD	24	38
Graduate	22	34
Post Graduate	10	16
Other	--	--
Total	64	100

It can be observed from the table no 3 that the maximum respondents i.e. 40 % are having xii std. education followed by graduate i.e 3 %.

MARKETING MIX FACTORS

Price

Table 4: Relationship between Price and Brand Preference

Price Level	Brand Name							Total Freq	%	Sig. Chi-Square
	Godrej No.1	Indulekha	Midimes	Rexona	Lifbuoy	Chandrika	Other			
	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq	Freq			
Low	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	4	6	0.031
Medium	10	4	4	16	8	6	8	56	88	
High	2	-	-	-	-	2	--	4	6	
Total	12	4	4	16	10	8	10	64	100	

There is a statistical significant relationship between price factor & brand preference at the significant level of 0.031. Around 88 % of the respondents indicated that the price level as medium as per their perception about the price of respective brands. While 6 % indicated that the price level is high.

Product

Table 5: Relationship between Product Attributes & Brand Preference

Attribute of Soap	Brand Name							Total Freq.	%	Sig. Chi-square
	Godrej No.1	Indulekha	Midi mex	Rexo na	Lifebuoy	Chan drika	Other			
	Freq.	Freq.	Freq.	Freq	Freq.	Freq	Freq.			
Attractive packaging	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	0.012
Shape	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	
Color	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	
Fragranc e	2	-	-	-	2	-	2	6	10	
Size	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	2	0.33	
Ingredi ents	6	10	2	12	6	4	-	40	67	
Moisturin g effect	-	2	-	-	-	2	-	4	8	
lathering	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	
Softness	-	4	-	4	-	2	-	10	14.33	
refreshme nts	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	
Skin protection	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	0	
Dirt removal	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	2	0.33	
other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0	
Total	8	16	2	16	10	10	2	64	100	

There is a statistically significant relationship between product factor and brand preference at the significant level of 0.012. Around 67 % of the soap ingredient when a brand is selected for use and while 10 % look for the fragrance as the first choice. Around 14.33 % of the respondents expect the softness provided by the product as the prime characteristic when a brand is selected. 8 % respondents prefer moistening effect while Dirt removal and size attribute have very low consideration. . Above details indicates that the consumers are more conscious on the perception of price & product characteristics of the brand at the point of purchase.

Demographic Factors

Table 6: Relationship between Education and the Brand Preference

Education Level	Brand Name							Total Freq.	Sig. Chi-square
	Godrej No.1	Indulekha	Midi mex	Rexo na	Lifebuoy	Chan drika	Other		
	Freq.	Freq.	Freq.	Freq	Freq.	Freq	Freq.		
X	2	-	-	-	2	-	-	4	0.004
XII	2	-	2	2	2	-	-	8	
U. G	2	6	2	2	2	4	2	20	
P.G	2	4	2	2	2	8	-	20	
Other	2	2	2	2	2	-	2	12	
Total	10	12	8	8	10	12	4	64	

The analysis reveals that there exists a strong and statistically significant relationship between education factor and brand preference at the desired 5% significant level (0.004). The p value of chi-square at 5% level for 64 Nos is 83.675, which is much higher than the calculated value

This also implies that the age, income levels & marital status do not significantly influence the purchasing decision of a toilet soap brand.

6. FINDINGS

The findings emerged from this study are:

1. The consumers consider the unique ingredients of a toilet soap and its impact on skin and price while making a brand choice decision,
2. Santoor is the most preferred common brand used by both men and women which comes in the popular category. Mysore Sandal, Cinthol, and Pears are other preferred brands next to Santoor.
3. More than half of the respondents knew only 5 to 10 brands of toilet soaps. From the remaining ones, approximately equal number of respondents knew less than five and more than ten brands. The education level of the consumers has a positive bearing on the brand awareness.
4. Most of the consumers have a very positive image and perception of their present brand. They felt that it is the best one and market leader in its category.
5. A strong brand loyalty on certain brands as they are using the same brands over 5 years.

The reasons cited by respondents for brand switching are mainly better quality and cheaper price of the new brand and inferior performance of the old brand. Surprisingly, very few respondents are attracted by advertisements of new brands.

7. SUGGESTIONS

1. Constantly innovate after understanding their consumers.
2. Strip out costs permanently by focusing on what adds value to the customer.
3. Suggested to enhance the attribute of skin suitability of the product with emphasizing the factor of skin care in the marketing campaigns.
4. High level of brand shift of existing users lead to the decline of the market share of the brand, hence need to hold this factor at all cost.
5. Recommended to hold the price aspect intact and any change or increase should be communicated to the consumer and avoid in creating the high end price perception in the consumer's mind.

8. CONCLUSION

The regular users had never felt that the brands were at a high price since none of the respondents showed that the price was high for their brands. The respondents search for the skin protection characteristic while fragrance has the second priority for the brand selection. Then consumers prefer for the softness and then by ingredients and moisturizing effect. The study indicates that the consumers are more conscious on the perception of price and product characteristics of the brand at the point of purchase.

Respondents gave the least importance to advertisements of new toilet soaps. Quality and price of new brands motivated them to brand switching. This has to be carefully studied by the marketers. It was observed that most of the respondents were attached to a particular brand and using the same brand for a quite long period. The new entrants like 'Indulekha' need to devise a marketing strategy and plans to attract and influence the customers of existing loyal brands.

The new product innovation, the smart, soft and flexible merchandising and distribution will have to be the key importance area for products to continue to become market leaders in the FMCG industry.

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