



Brand preference on selected fast moving consumer goods in rural markets

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ABSTRACT

Rural market potential has higher income and competes with their urban counterparts today who lead to higher demand. The growing developments in rail and road commuting for the passengers have added mobility to rural consumers of neighboring locations of Dibrugarh as well to reside in rural/suburban areas and travel to/from workplaces. The research work has been carried out by taking samples in one of the seven villages under the Barbaruah Development Block of Dibrugarh District. This paper aims at creating awareness programs, to provide information about the brand, the range of products, prices for such products, and the utility that would be derived from the same should be organized at regular intervals in rural areas. The researchers took to the use of a schedule to collect primary data directly related to the concerned area of the study. The researchers decided to take the sample size as 102 consumers of the village. This was done by keeping the confidence level at 90%, with a margin of error of 4%. The samples have been selected based on the multistage sampling technique of probability sampling. A greater percentage of the respondents, taken into consideration for this study, are more concerned about having a means of livelihood rather than learning and education. Awareness programs, to provide information about the brand, the range of products, prices for such products, and the utility that would be derived from the same should be organized at regular intervals in rural areas.

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INTRODUCTION

The increase in the rural literacy levels and the exposure to media have made the rural consumers more conscious about their buying decisions, just like their urban counterparts. Studies indicate that there has been a visible shift in people's preference for brands. Consumers in rural areas are upgrading from the use of tooth powders to kinds of toothpaste, and from using traditional mosquito repellants to using mats and coils. An Indian farmer today wears branded jeans, talks on a mobile phone owns a car or a motorbike, owns a television, and has a music system or a DVD player in his house. To understand the consumption pattern and the needs and wants of the rural consumer, a marketer should have an in-depth understanding of the buying behavior of the rural consumer. A marketer must always keep in mind that the requirements of the rural market are different. Organizations need to develop special products and strategies for the rural consumer.

There has been a significant rise in brand awareness among rural consumers. As a result, they have become more selective and demanding in their buying preferences. Therefore, a marketer has to appropriately analyze the psychographics before entering the rural market. Hence, if a company becomes complacent and takes the rural consumers for granted, it is ultimately going to lose in the market. Companies have to constantly innovate and make their products appealing to the consumers to succeed. As we know, consumers have a different frame of reference formed out of the information gathered from their experience. They try to fit the goods and services in these frames of reference. If they do not fit they reject the things. Many of these reference points are subconscious because they are deeply embedded in the subconscious mind. It is important to know assumptions and beliefs held by consumers. Some consumers may use price as an index of quality. They may declare a product or service as cheap if it sells at a price substantially below the level at which competitive brands are selling.

Consumers make several assumptions regarding products, services, and producers often without fact, e.g. the beer in pastel color bottles is thought to be lighter and beer in the colored bottles is considered stronger. Similarly, natural fabrics e.g. wool are considered better than synthetic; and the products produced in one country are considered superior to those produced in other countries. Attributes and beliefs are closely related to attitude but harder to change than attitudes. Many times, they are obtained from previous generations and are implanted at an early age of the person. People above certain group affiliations and their assumptions and beliefs are drawn from affiliations as in the case of a social class (Sumathi, et al., 2003). Consumer awareness in rural markets with a view of studying the awareness of the consumers regarding consumer movement and to study the awareness of the consumers towards cosmetics, shampoos, and toothpaste. He concluded that awareness of the rural consumers about the consumers' movements is qualitative and cannot be measured directly in quantitative terms. There is no fixed value or scale which will help to measure the awareness. But the awareness has been studied with the help of their responses to various questions. Little wonder then that success has eluded most corporate in rural markets but with urban markets getting saturated and fiercely competitive, they have to look at rural markets due to the emerging potentiality in these markets. (Naidu, 2004)

The consumer attitudes and perceptions towards eco-friendly products in the FMCG sector and their willingness to pay for green products. The study revealed that green products have substantial awareness among urban Indian customers and they are willing to pay something more for green products. The majority of customers considered that package is the most important element of such products. (Vernekar and Wadhwa,2011)The factors responsible for the boom in rural marketing, consumers' preference for FMCG products based on 4A's (i.e. Awareness, Affordability, Adaptability, and Availability) by employing a convenient sampling method for administering the questionnaires using the Likert Scale to a total of 200 respondents of HUL & ITC in rural areas of

Agra district from January 2011 to June 2011. The study found that skincare and fragrance have been found as the prime reasons for using bathing soaps (personal wash) and consumers buy detergent due to its primary function for cleanliness and few purchase it for its fragrance. The cleanliness followed by freshness has been the primary motive to purchase toothpaste (oral care) and some consumers also purchase it for protection of gums and whiteness value.

Consumers purchase hair oil for hair care and good looks. The study also found that the factors influencing the purchase decision of the respondents, consumers buying influences the most by the product factor due to design, quality, durability, made from a safe environment and product range but few respondents are not satisfied with the packaging, image, and size of the product. Both the companies are almost on the same platform regarding the factors of competitive price, shape, design, Haats, and mandis, and message/languages/ presentation of the advertisement. The consumers are showing their dissatisfaction for malls and supermarkets, greater mobility, shop is conveniently situated, and product display is attractive, value for the price paid, cash discount and pricing policy. Lastly, the study concluded that in parameters like image, shape and size, packaging, durability, small size products, low priced sample packets, price scheme, celebrity endorsement, and use of transport like autos, camel carts, HUL has an edge over ITC. (Gautam and Gangal, 2011).

The consumer buying behavior and brand loyalty in rural markets regarding fast-moving consumer goods and found that brand loyalty is more in Badangpet and Nadergul region and less in Chintulla in soaps category. In the hair oil category, branded products usage is more in Badangpet and Nadergul villages, and consumer preferences to purchase local brands in Chintulla village. It is also found that Vatika and Navratan hair oils dominate in Badangpet, Parachute hair oil in Nadergul and Gograa local brand, and Dabur in Chintulla. In the case of the Biscuits category, consumers mostly buy in loose, which are available in nearby shops like Salt biscuits, Osmania biscuits, etc. Parle-G and Tiger have mostly used brands in Badangpet. Tea is purchased in loose, which is available in local shops. The popular brands Red Label, Three Roses, and Gemini are used in Badangpet village. Further, the study found that coffee consumption is very less or no consumption in Nadergul and Chintulla villages. In the case of washing powder, Nirma dominates all the three selected sample rural markets regions. In remote area like Chintulla, Nirma sell Rs. 1 sachets. In the washing soap category, Rin, 501, Nirma, XXX, and Extra Local Brand dominates all the three selected rural markets. It is also concluded that Ponds, Chintol, and Santoor face powder dominated the market, and Pond's have dominated the market in consumption in Badangpet. In sum, the study also found that male members of the family are alone going to buy consumer products and women are not interested in shopping and do not come out from their houses frequently (Chandrasekhar, 2012).

The brand awareness and customer preferences for FMCG products in the rural market of the Garhwal region. The study found that the average awareness of the respondents in the rural market is approximately 75%, 70%, 72%, 64%, and 73% in case of shampoo, washing powder, soap, tea, toothpaste respectively, which infers that people in the rural market have on an average awareness about most of the products. In the shampoo category, the study found that the respondents give 1st rank to Pantene and last rank to Chik; in case of washing powder, 1st rank to Surf Excel and last rank to Nirma; to soap category, 1st rank to Dettol and last rank to Rexona; in case of Tea, 1st rank to Tata tea and last rank to Maharani tea and in the category of toothpaste, 1st rank to Colgate and last rank to Cibaca which infers that advertising and marketing activities have major influences in choices of people in the rural market. The study further found that among various factors like quality, price, easy availability, family liking, advertisement, variety, credit attributes of brand preference; quality is the first preference in case of brand choices and rural people give the least preference to variety and credit attributes. It is also concluded that there is a positive impact of media on brand preference of FMCG products among consumers. (Jain and Sharma, 2012)

Brand preference is when one chooses a specific company's product or service when there are other, equally priced and available options. Brand preference is a reflection of customer loyalty, successful marketing tactics, and brand strengths. FMCG products are consumed frequently by every section of the society, rural as well as urban. Nowadays, rural consumers are also using branded products in almost all product categories. The changing marketing environment is reducing the gap between rural and urban consumers. Still, due to differences in socio-cultural environment, significant contrast is observed between rural and urban consumers' behavior. These factors may result in the difference between rural and urban consumers' brand preferences. Agriculture is the main source of income for the people in rural areas. Agriculture, in turn, is greatly dependent on the monsoons. However, it is unlikely for the income obtained from agriculture to remain proportionate every year. Hence, depending on this, the demand pattern of the consumers/potential customers has been affected accordingly, which also has an impact on their brand preferences. The review of the literature suggests that even though several studies have been carried out to study the brand preferences for Fast Moving Consumer Goods in most regions of rural India, a study such as this, in the specific village taken into consideration has not been carried out by any researcher yet. Every customer/consumer counts in making a brand outperform its rivals. Even so, the village remains unknown to the masses and has not been approached for an extensive study. Hence, it has been established that there is a considerable amount of gap.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in one of the rural areas of North-East India viz. DibuwalDihingiaGaon of the Barbaruah Development Block, Dibrugarh, Assam. It is believed that the findings in this village are fairly representative of the other parts of the State and the lifestyle and other parameters are not much different from what exists in the area of the survey. The study aims to understand consumer brand preference developed from various impacting factors, especially advertisements, and, in turn, its impact on future purchasing decisions. To achieve this aim, the study focused on identifying the different brand factors constituting consumer knowledge. In addition, it focuses on consumer descriptions of brand experiences, presenting their response to various brand elements. Furthermore, the study focuses on Fast Moving Consumer Goods, in rural markets which is a promising market for the same. The objective of the study was to understand the buying perception of rural consumers towards Fast Moving Consumer Goods Products in rural markets. For this, the objectives of the research work are as under:

1. To study the factors influencing brand awareness and preferences towards Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) in DibuwalDihingiaGaon of the Barbaruah Development Block, Dibrugarh.
2. To ascertain the buying behavior of consumers in the said area of study.
3. Is there a significant association between the factors determining FMCG brands and the purchase intention of rural customers?

METHODS

Research Design

To carry out this study, the researchers decided to take the sample size as 102. This was done by keeping the confidence level at 90%, with a margin of error of 4%. The samples have been selected based on *the multistage sampling technique of probability sampling*. Multistage sampling is defined as a sampling method that divides the population into groups (or clusters) for conducting research. It is a complex form of cluster sampling, sometimes, also known as multistage cluster sampling. During this sampling method, significant clusters of the selected people are split into sub-groups at various stages to make it simpler for primary data collection.

Respondents and Sampling Technique

The various stages of sampling and the justification for the same are: The Barbaruah Development Block is one of the 7 blocks under the Dibrugarh district. This block has been selected by the Researchers based on Convenience Sampling. They looked for the block which would be convenient for them to travel to and from. Also, the Barbaruah Development Block happens to be the closest to their vicinity. The Dibuwal Dihingia Gaon was selected based on Purposive Sampling, since it happens to be the largest village among the seven villages under the Barbaruah Development Block, with the largest number of households, i.e., 615, comprising of a total of 2906 individuals, according to the census of 2011. Finally, the sample size of 102 individuals has utilized the basis of Simple Random Sampling. The individuals are the consumers of the rural area of Barbaruah development block Dibrugarh, Assam.

Research Instrument

The methodology of the study is based on primary, as well as secondary data. The study depends mainly on the primary data collected through a structured interview schedule. The secondary data are collected from journals, magazines publications, reports, books, publications, websites, research papers, periodicals, articles, etc.

Data Collection

The researchers took to the use of a schedule to collect primary data directly related to the concerned area of the study. They have also made use of secondary sources of data collection such as e-books, e-journals, and various websites to fulfill the requirements of this research work.

Data Analysis

The data are analyzed with the help of tables and interpreted as to the data trends and implicated to existing studies.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The primary data collected from the consumers are analyzed to obtain the results concerning the objectives of the study. Appropriate tables and graphs are used to depict the said objectives adequately. Brand Awareness and Preferences, the influencing factors, and the buying behavior of consumers in Dibuwal Dihingia Gaon. This chapter deals with the analysis of the responses recorded by the Researchers based on the schedule used by them to fulfill the set objectives of this project work. The data thus analyzed have been interpreted by them in the best possible manner to arrive at conclusive findings. Reference groups have a role to play when it comes to influencing the respondents in their buying decision process. Even though advertisements attract these respondents and they may have a desire to purchase the products of such brands, their purchasing capacity says otherwise, because of which they tend to refrain from purchasing these products. A lot of respondents often think that branded products are better than unbranded ones. However, the purchase depends on the price they would be charged and the quantity of purchase is usually less in the case of those families which struggle with meeting their monthly requirements. The present study is exploratory, descriptive, pure, and empirical. The present research paper attempts to identify the factors affecting the purchase decisions of customers towards the purchase of FMCGs and to recommend the particular factors that should be considered most important for such type of decision. The study used primary data collected with the help of a well-structured questionnaire by following the 'Foot-in-Door Strategy' (FIDS) (Malhotra, et al., 2010). The results provide evidence that brand experience reflecting consumer responses to

various brand stimuli and the acquired knowledge can be a source of preference and generate evaluations or judgments towards a brand. These responses are induced regardless of the type or level of experience (Brakus et al., 2009; Daugherty, Li, & Biocca, 2008; Gupta & Vajic, 1999; Meyer & Schwager, 2007), ensuring the delivery of the brand value to consumers (Gentile et al., 2007; Sheng & Teo, 2012). The holistic nature of consumer experience emphasizes other non-cognitive responses in building consumer preference such as emotional responses, investigated in prior studies (Allen et al., 2005; Grimm, 2005).

Table 1. Promotional offers which influences a consumer

Promotional offers	Weighted score	Rank
Price Discount	5.70	1
Free gift	5.10	2
Extra quantity	4.42	3
Buy one get one	3.50	4
Trial packs	3.10	5
Coupon	2.10	6
Seasonal offers	2.00	7

From the above table, the respondents give 1st rank to the Price Discount, 2nd rank to the gift, 3rd rank to the Extra quantity, 4th rank to the Buy one get one offer, 5th rank to the trial pack, 6th rank to the Coupon, 7th rank to the seasonal offers.

Table 2. Brand preference of selected FMCG products WS-weighted Score; R-rank

Shampoo Soap					
Shampoo	WS	R	Soap	WS	R
Pantene	3.3	1	Hamam	3.2	1
Sun silk	3.2	2	Lifeboy	3.1	2
Dow	3.1	3	Cinthol	3.1	3
Clinic plus	2.8	4	pears	3.0	4
Garnier	2.5	5	Fiama	2.5	5

Tooth paste Washing powder					
Tooth paste	WS	R	Washing powder	WS	R

Pepsodent	4.1	1	Surf	3.4	1
Colgate	3.9	2	Rin	3.6	2
Babool	3.0	3	Arial	3.1	3
Cibaca	2.1	4	Nirma	2.9	4
Dabarlal	1.9	5	Wheel	2.0	5

From the above table, it is inferred that the respondents give 1st rank to the Patene, 2nd rank to the Sunsilk, 3rd rank to the Dow, and 4th rank to the Clinic plus, 5th rank to the Garnier. In the case of Soap, the respondents give 1st rank to the Hamam, 2nd rank to the Lifeboy, 3rd rank to the Cinthol, 4th rank to the Pears, 5th rank to the Fiam. In the case of Toothpaste, the respondents give 1st rank to the Pepsodent, 2nd rank to the Colgate, 3rd rank to the Babool, 4th rank to the Cibaca, 5th rank to the Dabarlal In case of Washing powder the respondents give 1st rank to the Surf, 2nd rank to the Rin, 3rd rank to the Arial, 4th rank to the Nirma, 5th rank to the Wheel.

Table 3. Use of other brands before using the current brand

Always		Often		Sometimes		Not at all		Total	
Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
23	12	18	16	6	17	10	0	65	37

The responding females showcase brand loyalty towards the products that they have been using. None of them have switched over from another brand to the current brand as of yet. However, the tastes of the responding males in this village keep fluctuating with time, depending on various factors such as price, availability, quality, and the like. Most of them have shifted over from other brands to the current brand and may continue with the trend for the times to come. They are not loyal to just one brand.

Table 4. Frequency of purchase of (selected) products

Merchandise	Always		Often		Sometimes		Not at all	
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female
Cold Drinks	7	3	26	10	25	14	7	10
Toothpastes	40	30	20	7	5	0	0	0
Detergents	45	33	15	2	5	2	0	0
Skin And Hair Care	35	30	10	5	10	2	5	0
Toilet Soaps	37	31	13	4	15	2	0	0

Table 4 highlights the fact that all the respondents taken into consideration for this study purchase toothpaste, detergents, and toilet soaps now and then since they are part and parcel of daily requirements. Apart from these products, the other products are not considered as essential ones by the respondents of this village. Some of the respondents do not even purchase cold drinks. This shows that they are judicious when it comes to their spending capacity, due to the limited monthly incomes of their family.

Table 5. Awareness of (selected) brands available in the market

Products		Awareness	
		Male	Female
Skin care	Fair & lovely	65	37
	Garnier	45	29
	Ponds	65	37
Hair care	Head & Shoulders	57	34
	Clinic Plus	65	37
	Sunsilk	65	37
Detergent powder	Surf	65	37
	Rin	51	29
	Tide	53	31
Toilet soap	Lux	65	37
	Pears	20	30
	Dettol	65	37
Cold drinks	Coca Cola	65	37
	Pepsi	65	37
	Mirinda	47	27
Toothpaste	Colgate	65	37
	Pepsodent	65	37
	Closeup	42	24

Table 5 showcases that even though marketers try their best to reach out to customers in far-flung areas, there remain loopholes because of which most customers remain oblivious to the existence of products that have been in existence for a considerable amount of time, even today. Most respondents who fall in this category happen to be individuals of the senior citizen brackets.

Table 6. Frequency of purchase and the factors leading to such decision

Brand \ Factor	Price		Availability		Brand Image		Advertisement		Quality	
	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F
Skin Care										
Fair n lovely	55	20	10	0	20	19	0	29	60	32
Garnier	0	11	0	3	0	9	11	4	0	11
Ponds										
(Moisturizer)	0	25	0	19	0	15	0	12	0	22
(Powder)	42	30	12	23	30	35	4	33	27	34
Hair Care										
Head & Shoulders	0	15	9	10	0	0	3	0	2	6
Clinic Plus	44	26	22	25	18	20	26	36	19	33
Sunsilk	50	31	60	32	62	32	49	33	47	28
Detergent Powder										
Surf	39	34	63	37	34	19	15	12	61	35
Rin	28	28	29	9	15	13	6	12	22	30
Tide	47	23	4	15	10	13	7	6	12	19
Toilet Soap										
Lux	58	34	9	10	52	27	19	35	62	35

Pears	10	27	22	25	2	24	11	21	12	21
Dettol	48	19	53	22	43	12	12	20	53	29
Cold Drinks										
Coca Cola	60	32	49	14	58	32	31	15	61	24
Pepsi	57	25	32	16	45	26	21	14	47	19
Mirinda	20	17	21	21	10	19	11	12	16	11
Toothpaste										
Colgate	65	19	60	30	67	36	56	34	64	37
Pepsodent	21	17	26	11	14	25	31	18	19	16
Closeup	14	13	8	2	16	16	12	12	9	11

The table shows that most of the responding individuals purchase the products of specific brands depending on the price, brand image, and quality. The size and quantity of the purchase differ from consumer to consumer. More than one factor may influence the buying behavior of a consumer at the same time while he/she makes the purchase. These factors lead to the buying decision that the consumer makes in the end, after a careful analysis of all the options available to him/her at the time of purchase. The degree of involvement, however, may differ between different sets of consumers, depending on various demographic and economic variables.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

Though the market has so many other brands apart from the ones that have been presented in this study, only 18 brands (3 brands each for each product category) were studied for brand awareness and preference. The research work covers only one village. The respondents might have been confused about the options provided to them. Hence, there may be biases on their part. The sample size does not ensure conclusive findings.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

More robust analysis is needed to reach a strong conclusion. The rural areas in India are an emerging market with tremendous potential for grabbing a large market share. Therefore, if the Indian organizations want to reach out to rural India efficiently and more effectively, they need to re-strategize their policies and should consider rural perceptions, values, and traditions. They have to immerse themselves in rural colors, customs, traditions, and modes of communication so that they can satisfy the needs and desires of the rural society. The companies have to gain popularity and the trust of the rural masses by weakening their excessive dependence on western styles of advertising on one hand and the use of deceptive and manipulative claims on the other so that they can bring about the desired behavioral changes. Dibuwal Dihingia Gaon of the Barbaruah Development Block, Dibrugarh shows more of a rigid buying behavior process, which can, however, be redesigned and remolded to suit the interests of the changing market scenario as well as that of the consumers at large. A market is a dynamic place. It is almost impossible to predetermine the outcome of one's efforts. Hence, proper and careful analysis and planning of strategies is a must to ensure that both parties are benefitted

In the course of the preparation of this project work, the researchers have come across a wide range of observations. Hence, based on such observations, the recommendations that they would put forward to tackle the issues that they found to be the major deviators for marketers awareness programs, to provide information about the brand, the range of products, prices for such products, and the utility that would be derived from the same should be organized at regular intervals in rural areas. Even though large business houses aim at profit maximization, they must not forget that the *Customer is King* and consider the purchasing capacity of the rural consumers to adopt proper pricing strategies for them. They should be grand and elaborate to generate the effect of viral marketing not only in the particular locality, but should also cover the nearby areas. The stalls including game stalls, food stalls, rides, etc should be vivid as vividness appeals to human minds and usually results in viral spreading of messages. This should be the marketing strategy for the marketers to capitalize on. Communication should be done in regional languages in the form of game shows, magic shows, movies, and skits. This will encourage them to participate and stimulate the interest level of the rural population. Distribution of test samples of different products and gathering feedbacks from the rural consumers to make them feel important. This will also induce trials among the rural customers. Moreover, it will be quite helpful for the marketers who can collect valuable consumer insights which are often difficult to gather through market research. Brand Melas can ensure participation from all members of the family thereby increasing brand recall by any one of the members of the family. This is essential as purchase decisions often involve all the members of the family.

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