

Consumer Perception and Preferences towards Toilet Soaps: A Comparative Study of Rural and Urban Consumers in Warangal District (Telangana)

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Abstract

Consumers' understanding of a product plays a very crucial role in success or failure of a business or product. It becomes an imperative in the present hyper competitive FMCG market which offers innumerable choices to customers. In this backdrop, a study is conducted to know the consumer perceptions and their preferences towards toilet soap which is a regularly used FMCG. For the sake of comparison, respondents are chosen equally from both urban and rural areas. Their opinions on brand preferences, loyalty, satisfaction, influencing product attributes etc. are elicited. The data collected is analysed by using Chi-square test and Rank correlation test. It is found that consumers from rural and urban areas differ on brand choice, store choice etc. At the same time, their satisfaction levels towards their present toilet soap brand are almost similar.

Key Words: FMCG, Loyalty, Perception, Satisfaction.

Introduction: In the broad realm of marketing of goods and services, FMCG marketing assumes a very unique role. The main reasons for this it involves low involvement and low cost products characterized by frequent brand switching. The success or failure of any marketing depends on the firm's ability in understanding of why an individual consumer acts in certain consumption related ways. It is also observed that complexity of consumers' behavior varies with the nature of the product and need. In this context, it becomes imperative for marketers to know the influence of consumers' perception on buying decision of a particular product or brand.

Significance of the Study: India has two types of markets urban and rural. The perceptions, preferences and buying behavior of consumers in these two markets are observed as different with regard to many product categories. In this backdrop, the present study is undertaken to analyze the perceptions and preferences of both rural and urban consumers towards the select FMCG product i.e. toilet soap.

Objectives of the Study: The primary objective of the proposed study is to compare the perceptions and preferences of rural and urban consumers with regard to toilet soap. Pertaining to it, following specific objectives have been framed.

- To assess the brand preferences of respondents towards toilet soap,
- To examine the respondents' purchase and consumption habits,
- To analyze the influence of product attributes on purchase decisions,
- To appraise consumer satisfaction towards various toilet soap brands,
- To study consumer perceptions towards various sales promotion schemes, and
- To identify the level of brand loyalty among consumers.

Data and Methodology: This study depends mainly on empirical data. The primary required for the study is collected from 400 consumer respondents who use toilet soaps in Warangal district of Telangana State. To maintain equal representation in the sample, 200 respondents each from rural and urban areas are selected by using convenience sampling method. A well structured questionnaire is prepared and administered to collect the relevant data from them. At the same time, in order to address the above mentioned objectives, secondary data is also collected from various sources. The data collected is analyzed with the help of suitable statistical tools, presented in tabular format and interpreted.

Limitations of the Study: Following are some of the limitations of the study;

- This study is limited to only 400 consumers who live in Warangal district. Hence, is applicable to only Warangal district.
- As the sample size taken is small, the results of the study may not represent those of the whole universe.

- It is assumed that the respondents are honest in expressing their opinions. There might be some ambiguity about it.
- In computation of percentages, figures have been rounded off.

Respondents’ Profile: From out of 400 respondents, there are 53% male and 47% female. So sample has an almost balanced contribution of male and female respondents. With regard to age, 68% respondents are in the age group of 20-30 years, around 15% are below 20 years. Further, 6% are below 30-40 years and the remaining 11% above 40 years. Most of the respondents are quite educated as 52% are Graduates, 23% are Post Graduate or above, and the remaining 25% have completed Intermediate.

Data Analysis & Interpretation: In the following section, the data collected from respondents is tabulated, analysed and interpreted. Wherever required, Chi-square test at 5% significance level has been administered to identify, if any, significant differences between behaviour of rural and urban respondents. The null hypothesis and alternative hypothesis are formulated and presented here.

H₀: There is no significant difference between rural and urban respondents.

H₁: There is significant difference between rural and urban respondents.

1. Brand Preferences: It is observed that, in rural segment, Lifebuoy is the dominant brand used by 33% respondents followed by Santoor (30%) and Cinthol (10%). Cinthol leads urban market with 15% users, followed by Mysore Sandal (12%), Liril (10%) and Santoor (10%).

2. Product Attributes Influence on Buying Decision: Respondents’ perceptions on different product attributes are analyzed in terms of their influence on buying decision process. Further, Rank Correlation test is administered to ascertain the significance of correlation between the rural and urban respondents in terms of influence of product attributes’ influence on their buying decisions. The relevant data is presented in Table - 01.

Table – 01: Product Attributes Influence on Buying Decision

Area/ Product Attribute	Rural Respondents			Urban Respondents		
	Wt. Score	Wt. Avg	Rank	Wt. Score	Wt. Avg	Rank
Price	2131	20.30	1	2005	19.10	1
Unique Ingredients	2038	19.41	2	1999	19.04	2
Protection from Germs	1514	14.42	5	1723	16.41	4
Protection from Weather	1509	14.37	6	1567	14.92	6
Impact on Skin and Complexion	1915	18.24	3	1877	17.88	3
Durability	1360	12.95	10	1451	13.82	7
Presentation	1403	13.36	8	937	8.92	14
Colour	1502	14.30	7	1210	11.52	12
Foaming	1097	10.45	13	1435	13.67	9
Size	1376	13.10	9	1015	9.67	13
Fragrance	908	8.65	14	1440	13.71	8
TFM	1348	12.84	11	1341	12.77	11
Protection from pimples	1254	11.94	12	1384	13.18	10
Freshness	1645	15.67	4	1616	15.39	5
Total	21000	200.00		21000	200.00	

Source: Data compiled from Questionnaire

Rank Correlation Coefficient Test Results

Calculated Value	Table Value	N	Result
0.684	0.5341	14	Reject H ₀

H₀: There is no significant correlation between rural and urban respondents.

From the above data, it may be inferred that, in both rural and urban areas, price has been assigned first rank by majority of the respondents followed by unique ingredients and impact on skin and complexion. In rural area, freshness is given fourth rank. Protection from germs, protection from weather and color are in the fifth, sixth, and seventh positions. In case of urban area, protection from germs is given fourth rank, and freshness has got the fifth rank. Protection from weather, durability are placed at sixth, seventh positions respectively. Further, the calculated value of rank correlation coefficient is more than the table value resulting in null hypothesis rejection. Hence, it can be concluded that the ranks given by rural and urban respondents are correlated to the extent of 68.4% on product attributes of toilet soap.

3. Influence of Sales Promotional Offers: The influence of sales promotional offers on consumers is presented in Table - 02.

Table – 02: Influence of Sales Promotional Offers

Promotion Schemes	Rural Respondents	Urban Respondents
Price Discount	74(37%)	58(29%)
Free Gifts	36(18%)	22(11%)
Extra Quantity	62(31%)	82(41%)
Others	28(14%)	38(19%)
Total	200(100%)	200(100%)

Source: Data compiled from Questionnaire

X² Test Results

Calculated Value	Table Value	Df	Result
9.612	7.815	3	Reject H₀

It is observed that in rural area majority of respondents are influenced by price discount (37%) and extra quantity (31%). In the urban markets, consumers are more influenced by extra quantity (41%) and price discount (29%). The calculated value of Chi square test is greater than the table value leading to rejection of null hypothesis. Hence, it can be concluded that there is a significant difference between rural and urban respondents with regard to influence of sales promotion schemes.

4. Factors influencing Store Choice: Table No- 03 presents factors influencing store choice of customers in purchasing toilet soap.

Table-03: Factors Influencing Store Choice

Factor	No of Respondents	
	Rural	Urban
Store Location	50(25%)	28(14%)
Price	28(14%)	24(12%)
Courtesy of Shopkeeper	12(6%)	20(10%)
Promotion Activities	16(8%)	28(14%)
Credit Facility	62(31%)	46(23%)
Personal Rapport	22(11%)	12(6%)
Product Assortment	10(5%)	42(21%)
Total	200(100%)	200(100%)

Source: Data compiled from Questionnaire

X² Test Results of Factors influencing Store Choice

Test Name	Calculated Value	Table Value	Df	Result
Chi-square	36.789	12.592	6	Reject H ₀

From the above table it can be inferred that, in rural market, credit facility and store location are cited by 31% and 25% of respondents respectively. Another 14% respondents are influenced by price. At the same time, credit facility and product assortment are two important factors influencing urban consumers' store choice behaviour. Location of the store and promotion activities at the store attracted 14% of respondents each. The calculated value of chi-square test is 36.789, while table value is 12.592. Since the calculated value is greater than the table value, null hypothesis is rejected. Hence, it can be concluded that behaviour of rural respondents is statistically different from that of urban respondents with regard to factors influencing store choice behaviour.

5. Non-availability of preferred Brand: It is proposed to examine the brand loyalty of consumers in the event of non availability of their preferred toilet soap brand in a particular outlet. The relevant data is presented in Table - 04.

Table - 04: Non-availability of Preferred Brand

Response	Rural Respondents	Urban Respondents
Purchase the same brand in another shop	118(59%)	128(64%)
Purchase another brand in the same shop	82(41%)	72(36%)
Total	200(100%)	200(100%)

Source: Data compiled from Questionnaire

X² Test Results

Calculated Value	Table Value	Df	Result
1.056	3.841	1	Accept H ₀

It is observed that 59% rural respondents and 64% urban respondents preferred to purchase the same brand in another shop. The remaining respondents wished to purchase another brand in the same

shop. The calculated value of Chi square test is less than the table value leading to acceptance of null hypothesis. Hence, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between rural and urban respondents with regard to non availability of preferred brand.

6. Satisfaction towards the Present Toilet Soap Brands: Customer satisfaction refers to customers' post-purchase evaluation of a product or service offering. It is observed that quality, price, contextual and individual factors influence customer satisfaction. Satisfaction of consumers towards a particular brand also influences their perception. The details are furnished in Table - 05.

Table -05: Satisfaction towards the Present Toilet Soap Brands

Opinion	Rural Respondents	Urban Respondents
Highly Satisfied	58 (29%)	56 (28%)
Just Satisfied	74 (37%)	82 (41%)
Indifferent	68 (34%)	62 (31%)
Total	200 (100%)	200 (100%)

Source: Data compiled from Questionnaire

X² Test Results

Calculated Value	Table Value	Df	Result
0.722	5.991	2	Accept H₀

H₀: There is no significant difference between rural and urban respondents.

It is observed that 37% rural respondents and 41% urban just satisfied are just satisfied with their present toilet soap brand. Further, 34% rural respondents and 31% are indifferent about it. The calculated value of Chi square test is less than the table value leading to acceptance of null hypothesis. Hence, it can be concluded that there is no significant difference between rural and urban respondents with regard to satisfaction towards their present toilet soap brands.

7. Continuation with Present Brand: Brand loyalty results in continued purchase and use of a particular brand. In this context, respondents' opinions about continuation with their present brand are presented in Table - 06.

Table - 06: Continuation with Present Brand

Whether continue with the present Brand	Rural Respondents	Urban Respondents
Yes	106(53%)	88(44%)
No	34(17%)	64(32%)
Can't Say	60(30%)	48(24%)
Total	200(100%)	200(100%)

Source: Field Survey

X² Test Results

Calculated Value	Table Value	Df	Result
12.187	5.991	2	Reject H₀

It is seen that 53% rural respondents and 44% urban respondents are ready to continue with their existing brand. Around 30% rural respondents are indecisive. At the same time, 32% urban respondents are not willing to continue with their present brand. The calculated value of Chi square test is more than the table value leading to rejection of null hypothesis. Hence, it can be concluded that there is significant difference between rural and urban respondents with regard to continuation with their present brand.

Conclusion: The overall conclusion derived from this study is that the rural and urban consumer respondents differ in their Brand Choice, and continuation with the present brand. Further, there are differences in their opinion towards influence of various factors on store choice and promotional offers. At the same time, there is no statistical difference in their perceptions on satisfaction towards their present toilet soap. Further, their opinion regarding the influence of product Attributes on the buying decision process are positively correlated. Finally, it is seen that majority of consumers are brand loyal than store loyal.

Recommendation: The emerging youth population is a great opportunity for marketers. If all the players come under one umbrella and promote the functional and health benefits of toilet soaps to consumers, it will be of a great boost for the total industry. Companies should also analyze their promotional strategies as some respondents are not aware about them. They should also work upon improving product quality and variants, as lots of customers are just satisfied with their present brand.

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