

Consumer Purchasing Behavior and Brand Preference in Fast-Moving Consumer Goods Personal Care Items

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Abstract: Consumer buying behaviour encompasses the process by which individuals recognize their needs, seek information, assess alternatives, make purchasing choices, and utilize products or services. This behaviour is influenced by a variety of internal and external factors, including personal preferences, income levels, lifestyles, cultural backgrounds, emotions, and social influences. For marketers, comprehending consumer behaviour is crucial, as it enables them to create products and strategies that meet customer expectations. In recent years, the Indian consumer market has experienced substantial changes due to increasing disposable incomes, heightened urbanization, digital exposure, and a growing awareness among consumers. These developments have affected purchasing behaviours in both urban and rural markets. Consequently, consumers are now motivated not only by price but also by considerations such as brand reputation, product quality, trust, and emotional significance when making purchasing decisions. Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG), especially personal care items, play a vital role in the daily lives of consumers. Given the frequent use and fierce competition in this sector, companies face ongoing pressure to maintain customer loyalty and foster long-term brand allegiance. This study aims to explore consumer buying behaviour and brand preference regarding FMCG personal care products, with a particular focus on the factors that influence purchasing decisions and customer satisfaction.

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I. INTRODUCTION

A. FMCG Industry In India

The Indian Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector ranks as the fourth largest sector within the Indian economy. This industry has a history spanning over 115 years. It encompasses consumable products (excluding groceries and pulses) that individuals typically purchase at regular intervals. These items are utilized on a daily basis, resulting in a rapid consumption rate and significant returns. FMCG can be broadly divided into three categories: firstly, Household items such as soaps, detergents, and household accessories; secondly, Personal care products including shampoos, toothpaste, and shaving items; and lastly, Food and Beverages, which consist of snacks, processed foods, tea, coffee, edible oils, and soft drinks.

The Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG) sector is among the rapidly growing sectors of the Indian economy, having witnessed remarkable expansion over the last decade. This sector is comprised of three primary segments: personal care, household care, and food and beverages. The personal care segment includes oral care, hair care, toiletries, soaps, and cosmetics; the household care segment encompasses

fabric wash and household cleaners; while the food and beverages segment features health beverages, soft drinks, cereals,

dairy products, bakery items, and chocolates. The FMCG sector plays a crucial role in contributing to India's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and stands as the fourth largest sector in the Indian economy, also providing significant employment opportunities.

This sector generates employment for approximately three million individuals in downstream activities, which are predominantly conducted in smaller towns and rural areas of India. Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCGs) are products that are consumed quickly and are frequently used on a daily basis. FMCGs represent one of the most vital sectors of an economy and are often classified as defensive goods, as they fulfill the essential daily needs of the populace. The fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) segment is recognized as the fourth largest sector in the Indian economy. The market size of FMCG in India is projected to increase from US\$ 30 billion in 2011 to US\$ 74 billion by 2018. Food products lead this segment, accounting for 43 percent of the market.

B. Brand Preference

India's fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector is experiencing significant growth. Fueled by rising demand and evolving consumer preferences—driven by increased disposable incomes and a retail transformation—the sector has achieved double-digit growth over the last few years. This industry has witnessed the introduction of new product categories and offerings aimed at meeting the heightened aspirations of a new generation of Indians, who are becoming increasingly discerning consumers. Furthermore, FMCG products cater to the essential needs of consumers and typically consist of low-cost items that are vital for most households. "The FMCG sector is expected to continue thriving not only because it is a resilient and well-established industry but also due to its direct correlation with the fundamental economic growth potential of the nation," states Milind Sarwate, Chief of Human Resources and Strategy at Marico Ltd, a company known for its hair care, skin care, edible oils, and fabric care products. "As income levels keep rising (albeit now at a rate of six to seven percent rather than the previous eight to nine percent), a greater number of individuals are likely to transition to the consumption of branded products and services.

Therefore, the growth trend is anticipated to persist.

➤ Rural – Set to Rise

Rural areas expected to be the major driver for FMCG, as growth continues to be high in these regions. Rural areas saw a 16 per cent, as against 12 per cent rise in urban areas. Most companies rushed to capitalize on this, as they quickly went about increasing direct distribution and providing better infrastructure. Companies are also working towards creating specific products specially targeted for the rural market. The Government of India has also been supporting the rural population with higher minimum support prices (MSPs), loan waivers, and disbursements through the National Rural Employment Guarantee Act (NREGA) programme. These measures have helped in reducing poverty in rural India and given a boost to rural purchasing power. Hence rural demand is set to rise with rising incomes and greater awareness of brands.

➤ Urban Trends

As disposable incomes increase, consumers in urban areas with mid- to high-income levels have transitioned their buying habits from essential goods to premium products. In response, companies have begun to expand their portfolios of premium offerings. Both Indian and multinational FMCG companies are utilizing India as a strategic sourcing center for cost- effective product development and manufacturing aimed at international markets. A study conducted by TMW and Marketing Sciences, which surveyed 2,000 individuals across various age demographics, indicates that younger consumers are the most 'rational' and tend to invest more time in evaluating potential purchases. The survey further reveals that younger individuals are increasingly relying on peer recommendations regarding products and services to make informed purchasing decisions. The findings suggest that shoppers aged 18 to 24 are 174 percent more inclined to consider social media recommendations compared to those aged 25 and older.

Another significant factor in today's market is speed. Modern consumers demand packaged goods that are more efficient, quicker, and smarter. The trend of 'need for speed' underscores the critical role of speed as a potentially decisive factor in purchasing packaged goods, especially in a landscape where product distinctions are diminishing. Younger consumers exhibit the highest demand for speed, which is not surprising given their familiarity with smartphones. Data Monitor's 2013 Consumer Survey revealed that younger consumers, particularly those aged 15 to 24, were twice as likely to assert that the promptness of results significantly influences their choices in health and beauty products compared to the oldest demographic, those aged 65 and above. The importance of speed cannot be overstated, and it is highly likely that 2014 will witness the launch of innovative time-saving products.

➤ Road Ahead

FMCG brands must prioritize research and development, along with innovation, as a strategy for growth. The companies that thrive will be those that cultivate a culture encouraging the use of customer insights to develop either next-generation products or, in some instances, entirely new product categories. A significant area of investment for both global and local FMCG brands is health and wellness. This sector represents a major trend influencing consumer preferences and shopping behaviors, and FMCG brands are responding accordingly. Prominent global and Indian food and beverage brands have adopted this trend, concentrating on the establishment of new emerging brands within the health and wellness domain.

According to the PwC-FICCI report "Winds of Change, 2013: The Wellness Consumer," the market for wellness consumers, which includes nutrition foods, beverages, and supplements, is valued between INR 145 billion and 150 billion in India, with a growth rate of 10 to 12% CAGR.

- Some of the leading FMCG companies globally include: Colgate-Palmolive
- Notable brands: Colgate toothpaste; Palmolive soap and cleaning products; AJAX cleaning products.
- Johnson & Johnson
- Notable brands: Johnson's Baby; Neutrogena; Acuvue; Listerine oral care.
- Kimberly-Clark
- Notable brands: Kleenex paper products; Kotex feminine care; Huggies baby products.
- L'oreal
- Notable brands: L'oreal Paris; Garnier; Maybelline New York; Biotherm; Kiehl's.
- Nestle
- Notable brands: Nestle Pure Life; Nescafe; Nesquik; KitKat; Purina.
- Procter & Gamble
- Notable brands: Ariel; Gillette; Pampers; Olay; Duracell; Pantene.
- Unilever
- Notable brands: Dove body care; Axe; dairy products; Domestos; Cif; PG Tip

C. Personal Care FMCG Products :

In India, personal care and cosmetic products, as a consumer-oriented sector, continually strive to meet the contemporary and evolving needs of the country's residents. This industry primarily focuses on the production of items associated with personal hygiene and beauty enhancement. Over the last few years, India's cosmetic sector has experienced significant growth due to heightened awareness of hygiene, rising income levels, and extensive mass media influence. As a key component of the FMCG (Fast Moving Consumer Goods) market, these products encompass cosmetics, soaps, hair care items, shampoos, perfumes, oral care, skin care products, and more.

D. List Of Leading Indian Personal Care Brands

In order to satisfy the daily needs of the vast population of the nation, numerous national and multinational corporations are engaged in the production and marketing of a diverse range of personal care items. They compete with one another to offer the highest quality products to their consumers at reasonable prices. Below are some of the most prominent cosmetic brands in India, which are widely utilized by the populace:

➤ Itclimated

Located in Kolkata, one of the principal metropolitan areas of the country, this Indian conglomerate has been experiencing rapid growth in the domestic market for personal care products. The production of various types of personal care items is an integral part of their operations. This company is listed in the Forbes 2000.

➤ Johnson And Johnson

Featured in the Fortune 500 list, this American corporation is recognized for producing a variety of baby care products. As a pharmaceutical entity, Johnson & Johnson also manufactures several types of medical products and devices, which are packaged for consumer use. This highly esteemed manufacturer of personal care products globally is renowned for its offerings such as baby powders, face washes, first aid supplies, contact lenses, diapers, creams, oils, shampoos, and many other personal and baby care items. Beyond this nation, the brand is present in fifty-six additional countries.

➤ Procter And Gamble

This is among the leading personal care brands in India. With an extensive selection of personal care products, Procter and Gamble offers a wide variety of items from which customers can easily select their desired products. Gillette is one of the well-known brands under this company, offering products such as razors and various other personal hygiene items. Other notable products from this company include Ariel, Head & Shoulders, Tide, Vick's, and Pantene, among others.

➤ Godrej Consumer Products Limited

Renowned for a variety of personal care products such as hair color, toilet soaps, and liquid detergents, Godrej primarily operates out of Mumbai.

They also engage in contract manufacturing of soaps. Notable brands under their umbrella include Cinthol, Eze, Fair Glow, Nupur, among others.

➤ Hindustan Unilever Limited

Based in Mumbai, HUL, or Hindustan Unilever Limited, is a leading manufacturer of personal care items including soaps, detergents, and cosmetics. Among the most widely used products from one of India's largest exporters are Lakme beauty care items, Lux, Lifebuoy, Rin, and Surf Excel.

➤ Marico:

This company, located in Mumbai, boasts a range of well-known personal care brands in India. Some of their popular products include Aromatic, Hair & Care, Kaya, Mediker, Nihar, Parachute, Revive, Saffola, Shanti, Sundari, and Sweekar.

In addition to the aforementioned brands, other notable personal care and cosmetic brands in India include:

- Dabur India
- L'Oreal India
- Maybelline
- Nirma

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE (EDITED & REFINED)

Chitra R. (2014) conducted an empirical study on customers' purchase intention towards branded apparel. The study identified both general consumer variables such as normative influence and consumer confidence, and brand-specific variables such as perceived quality and emotional value as significant determinants of purchase intention. The research highlighted that strong brand perception positively influences consumers' intention to buy branded products.

Rajasekaran and Saravanan (2014) examined consumer satisfaction towards Fast Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG). Their study emphasized that consumer attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions play a crucial role in determining brand preference. The findings revealed that satisfaction levels are influenced by consumers' opinions regarding popular brands and their perceived value.

Shamuyarira and Sethuraman (2014) explored consumer satisfaction towards Hamam soap in Thanjavur town. The study highlighted that post-liberalization competition in the FMCG sector, especially in personal care products, has intensified significantly. Brand loyalty was found to be shaped by multiple psychological factors, including perception, trust, and satisfaction.

Sonia and Garima Dalal (2014) studied customer satisfaction towards consumer goods brands among rural consumers. The research emphasized that the FMCG sector plays a vital role in the Indian economy and directly impacts daily life. The study found that rural consumers are increasingly becoming brand conscious, though availability and affordability remain critical factors.

Vidhya Jawahar and Tamizhjyothi (2013) analyzed consumer attitudes towards cosmetic products. Using survey data from female consumers in Bangalore, the study concluded that demographic factors such as age, occupation, and marital status significantly influence cosmetic buying behaviour, whereas income had no significant impact on attitude towards cosmetic products.

Mohammad Ali Daud (2013) observed that although rural consumers may have sufficient monthly income, liquidity constraints often prevent them from purchasing branded products at one time. This leads to a preference for loose or small-sized packs, highlighting the importance of affordability and packaging strategies in rural markets.

Deliya (2012) emphasized the growing importance of packaging design as a communication and branding tool in FMCG products. The study revealed that packaging plays a vital role in influencing in-store purchase decisions by providing information, brand identity, and usage instructions at the point of sale.

Rasool et al. (2012) examined the impact of advertisements on consumer behaviour and found a strong relationship between marketing strategies and buying behaviour. Similarly, Rajput et al. (2012) highlighted that product quality and price are the most significant factors influencing consumer purchasing decisions, reinforcing the importance of value perception.

Ali, Thumiki, and Khan (2012) stressed that companies targeting rural FMCG markets must adopt region-specific marketing strategies rather than replicating urban approaches. Understanding rural consumer behaviour, purchasing power, and cultural factors was found to be essential for market success.

Anupam Jain and Meenakshi Sharma (2012) studied brand awareness in rural markets, particularly in beauty care products. Their findings revealed that rural consumers are increasingly willing to pay higher prices for branded products as they associate brand usage with social status and quality assurance. Factors such as brand quality, availability, advertisement, and family influence significantly affect brand perception.

Kavitha (2012) identified a new phase of rural consumption, indicating growing awareness and openness among rural consumers. The study highlighted that FMCG companies must evolve innovative communication and distribution strategies to effectively reach rural markets.

Garga, Ghuman, and Dogra (2009) found that rural consumers prefer small-sized packs at lower prices, seeking value for money. The study also emphasized the importance of promotional tools and phased market entry strategies for FMCG companies in rural areas.

Banumathy and Hemameena (2006) studied brand preference for soft drinks in rural Tamil Nadu and found that product quality and price were the most influential factors.

Availability was also identified as a key determinant in brand selection.

Kubendran and Vanniarajan (2005) observed that changes in income levels and urbanization significantly impact consumption patterns. Urban consumers showed a higher preference for branded products compared to rural consumers, with factors such as accessibility, quality, and mode of payment influencing buying decisions.

Nagaraja (2004) concluded that buying behaviour is strongly influenced by personal experience, family, and neighbours. Product quality and easy availability were identified as the most critical determinants of purchase decisions.

Nandagopal and Chinnaiyan (2003) found that brand awareness among rural consumers was relatively high, primarily driven by word-of-mouth communication and advertisements, followed by influence from family and friends.

Schiffman et al. (2000) defined consumer behaviour as the process involved in searching, purchasing, evaluating, and disposing of products and services. The study emphasized that understanding not only what consumers buy, but also how and why they buy, is essential for effective marketing strategies.

➤ *Objectives of the Study*

- To examine the perception and buying behaviour of consumers towards personal care products at the time of purchase.
- To identify the key factors that most strongly influence consumers' purchase decisions for personal care products, such as price, quality, brand image, packaging, advertisement, and availability.

III. RESEARCH METHODS

The approach employed to gather information and data for the purpose of making informed business decisions. The methodology may encompass publication research, interviews, surveys, and various other research techniques, potentially including both current and historical data. Research methodology can be categorized into two types: Quantitative and/or Qualitative. Qualitative research methodology involves interviews, while Quantitative research methodology utilizes questionnaires.

A. *Research Design*

Numerous designs are utilized in research, each with its own specific advantages and disadvantages. The choice of design by the researcher depends on the objectives of the study and the characteristics of the phenomenon:

B. *Descriptive Research Design*

Descriptive research is a type of study aimed at accurately portraying the participants. In simpler terms, descriptive research focuses on detailing the individuals

involved in the study.

There are three methods a researcher can employ to conduct a descriptive research project, which are:

C. Methods of Descriptive Research

Descriptive research can be conducted using various methods, depending on the nature and objectives of the study. The commonly used methods are as follows:

➤ *Observational Method*

The observational method involves systematically viewing, monitoring, and recording the behaviour of participants in their natural settings without direct interaction. This method helps the researcher understand actual consumer behaviour during the purchase process and provides insights into real-life buying patterns.

➤ *Case Study Method*

The case study method involves an in-depth and comprehensive analysis of a particular individual, group, organization, or situation. It allows the researcher to gain a detailed understanding of specific consumer behaviour patterns, brand performance, or marketing practices over a period of time.

➤ *Survey Method*

The survey method involves collecting data directly from respondents through structured questionnaires or interviews on a specific topic. In this study, a questionnaire was designed and administered to respondents to gather information regarding their perception, preferences, and buying behaviour towards personal care products. The survey method is effective in collecting quantitative data from a large sample within a short period of time.

D. Tools & Techniques Employed for Data Gathering

Data gathering is an essential phase in the research process, as the quality of the results significantly relies on the precision and dependability of the data obtained. In this study, both primary and secondary data sources have been utilized.

➤ *Primary Data*

Primary data pertains to information that is gathered directly by the researcher for the explicit aim of the study. This type of data is original and is collected straight from the participants.

In descriptive research studies, primary data can be gathered through various techniques such as observation, interviews, and questionnaires. For the current study, primary data was obtained via a structured questionnaire distributed to participants to gain insights into their perceptions and purchasing behavior regarding personal care products. The questionnaire comprised both closed-ended and multiple-choice questions to facilitate ease of response and ensure data accuracy.

➤ *Secondary Data*

Secondary data refers to information that has been previously collected and processed by other researchers or organizations for purposes other than the current study. This data aids in comprehending the context of the research issue and bolsters the interpretation of primary data results.

Secondary data for this study was sourced from the following:

- Books concerning marketing and consumer behavior Research journals and academic publications Magazines and newspapers
- Research reports, articles, and online resources
- Secondary data was primarily utilized to construct the literature review, identify research gaps, and formulate the questionnaire for the study.

E. Tools & Techniques Utilized for Data Gathering

Data gathering is an essential phase in the research process, as the integrity of the results significantly relies on the precision and dependability of the data obtained. In this study, both primary and secondary data sources have been employed.

➤ *Primary Data*

Primary data pertains to information that is gathered directly by the researcher for the explicit aim of the study. This type of data is original and is collected straight from the participants.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

In light of the study's findings regarding consumer perception and purchasing behavior towards personal care products, the following recommendations are proposed:

FMCG companies ought to implement clearly defined product positioning strategies that effectively convey the product's image, quality, and advantages to consumers. The product's contents, ingredients, and benefits of use should be transparently presented to foster consumer confidence.

Companies should concentrate on the critical factors that influence the purchase of personal care products, including quality, price, brand reputation, packaging, and availability. Advertising strategies and product development must be synchronized with the evolving needs and preferences of consumers.

Establishing trustworthiness is vital for developing a robust and enduring brand image. FMCG companies should guarantee consistent product quality, transparent communication, and adherence to safety and quality standards to bolster consumer trust.

FMCG companies should initiate and enhance customer loyalty programs, emphasizing not only transactional benefits but also emotional loyalty. Tailored communication, brand engagement initiatives, and value-driven branding can assist in retaining customers and promoting repeat purchases.

V. CONCLUSION

This study delved into consumer purchasing habits and brand preferences within the FMCG personal care sector, revealing the complex factors that drive consumer choices in the Indian market. The results show that while price is still a key consideration, product quality, brand image, trust, packaging, advertising, and product availability significantly shape consumer preferences. The research also confirms the importance of building brand awareness, fostering emotional connections, and creating perceived value to cultivate long-term brand loyalty, especially in the competitive FMCG landscape.

Furthermore, the study highlights distinct differences in consumer behavior between urban and rural markets. Urban consumers are increasingly drawn to premium and branded personal care products due to rising incomes and lifestyle shifts. In contrast, rural consumers remain highly price-conscious, prioritizing affordability, pack size, and product availability. However, growing exposure to branded products in rural areas suggests significant future growth potential for FMCG companies that tailor their marketing and distribution strategies to specific regions.

In summary, this research provides a more in-depth understanding of consumer behavior in the FMCG personal care sector, offering valuable insights for marketers to develop effective product positioning, communication, and loyalty strategies by aligning marketing efforts with evolving consumer expectations.

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