

The Impact of Brand Awareness Strategies on Rural Consumer Brand Preferences: An Empirical Study

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of brand awareness strategies on brand preference among rural consumers in India. Surveys and focus groups were employed to collect data from a sample of 1200 rural customers. The survey collected data on brand awareness strategies, brand preference, and demographic information. Focus groups were used to gather qualitative data on consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behavior towards different brands of pressure cookers. Five brands (United, Hawkins, Prestige, Bajaj, and Pigeon) were selected to represent the consumer durable segment. The results revealed that the level of preference for various brands among rural customers in India was associated with factors such as quality, pricing, design, after-sales services, and brand reputation. The findings of this study have important implications for marketers and companies, highlighting the need to focus on optimizing the primary factors that influence brand preference and creating brand awareness strategies that take into account these factors.

Keywords: Brand Awareness Strategies, Brand Preference, Rural Consumers.

Introduction

Brand awareness strategies are considered vital for building and maintaining a strong brand image and enhancing brand recall among consumers. In today's competitive marketplace, rural consumers have become an essential segment for many companies operating in India. According to the Census of India 2011, around 68% of the country's population resides in rural areas, highlighting the significant untapped potential of this market (Government of India, 2011). As a result, companies are increasingly focusing on building brand awareness among rural consumers. However, the impact of these strategies on rural consumer brand preferences remains an area of limited research.

Several studies have explored the impact of brand awareness strategies on brand preferences in the Indian context (e.g., Bhimrao & Pal, 2018; Kumar & Agarwal, 2019). However, most of these studies have focused on urban consumers. Few studies have examined the impact of brand awareness strategies on brand preferences in rural consumers (e.g., Singh & Jain, 2016). Therefore, this study aims to fill this research gap by examining the impact of brand awareness strategies on rural consumer brand preferences in India.

Objectives of the Study

- 1) Evaluate the effectiveness of different brand awareness strategies in building brand awareness among rural consumers.
- 2) Determine the relationship between brand awareness and rural consumer brand preferences.
- 3) Identify the factors that influence rural consumers' brand preferences.
- 4) By addressing these objectives, this study seeks to contribute to the literature on brand awareness strategies and rural consumer behavior in India.

Research Methodology

The study used quantitative and qualitative research methods, such as surveys and focus groups, to collect data from a sample of 1200 rural customers in the six districts of Lucknow division, Uttar Pradesh, India, selected using stratified random sampling. The survey collected data on brand awareness strategies, brand preference, and demographic information using a structured questionnaire. The focus groups were used to gather qualitative data on consumers' perceptions, attitudes, and behavior towards different brands of pressure cookers in the consumer durable segment. Six focus groups of 10 people each were selected from each district of the Lucknow Division.

This paper discusses the selection of brands for a study on the impact of brand awareness strategies on brand preference in rural customers in India. The study will use pressure cookers as a product category due to their popularity and competition in the Indian market, as well as their range of prices and the variety of media channels used for their advertising. The five selected brands are United, Hawkins, Prestige, Bajaj, and Pigeon, all of which offer high-quality pressure cookers with safety features and versatile options.

Effectiveness of Brand Awareness Strategies in Building Brand Awareness Among Rural Consumers

Brand awareness is a critical component of a brand's success, as it refers to the extent to which consumers are aware of a brand, its products or services. Brand awareness helps a brand to stand out in a competitive market, attract new customers, and retain existing ones. Therefore, brands employ various strategies to enhance their brand awareness.

Table 1 *Different Advertising Strategies Adopted by Different Brands Across Districts*

Sr. No.	Brand	Advertising Promotions	Traditional Media	Digital Media	Word of Mouth	Others	
1.	United	193	211	203	170	223	200
2.	Hawkins	189	230	191	208	171	211
3.	Prestige	194	210	201	189	194	212
4.	Bajaj	169	230	234	176	172	219
5.	Pigeon	204	200	209	192	182	213

Table 1, "Brand Awareness Strategies Adopted by Brands," shows the advertising, promotions, traditional media, digital media, word of mouth, and other strategies adopted by five different brands (United, Hawkins, Prestige, Bajaj, and Pigeon). The data suggests that each brand employs a different set of strategies based on their target audience, competition, budget, and resources.

For example, United has invested more in advertising, promotions, and traditional media. Meanwhile, Bajaj has invested more in traditional media and promotions. Other brands like Hawkins and Prestige have used a combination of advertising, promotions, and other strategies.

If we restructure table1 like this:

Table 2 *Strategy Adopted Vs. % of Mean of Strategy*

Strategy	% of Mean of Strategy
Advertising	15.82
Promotions	18.02
Traditional Media	17.3
Digital Media	15.58
Word of Mouth	15.7
Others	17.58

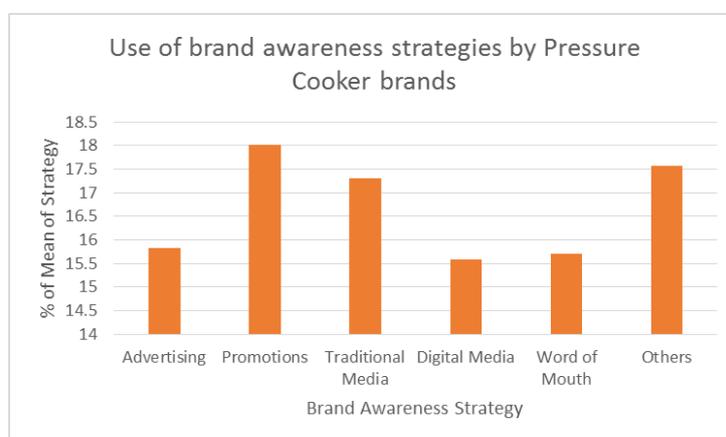


Chart 1 *Strategy Vs. Percent of Mean of Strategy*

This provides a clearer picture of the relative investment in each strategy across different brands.

By looking at the table, it can be seen that promotions (18.02%) and traditional media (17.3%) are the two most heavily invested strategies by the brands in rural market. Advertising (15.82%), digital media (15.58%), and word of mouth (15.7%) are also important strategies, but they are invested in slightly less. Other strategies (17.58%) have a relatively smaller share of investment as compared to the other strategies.

Overall, the table shows that brands have invested in a mix of different strategies to raise brand awareness, with a focus on traditional and promotional strategies. However, the investment in each strategy varies based on the brand's target audience, competition, budget, and resources. Therefore, it's important for brands to evaluate the effectiveness of different strategies and adjust their investment over time to maximize their brand awareness efforts.

Table 3 *Effectiveness of Advertising Strategies Adopted by Different Brands Across Districts*

Sr. No.	Brand	Moderately Effective	Very Effective	Mean Effectiveness
1.	United	189	217	0.34
2.	Hawkins	194	221	0.35
3.	Prestige	223	188	0.34
4.	Bajaj	197	230	0.36
5.	Pigeon	209	182	0.33

Table 3, "Effectiveness of Brand Awareness Strategies," shows the effectiveness of each brand's advertising strategies. The data shows that all brands have a similar mean effectiveness, which indicates that each brand's strategy is equally effective in making the rural consumers aware about their brand.

Based on the data, it can be suggested that effective brand awareness strategies should focus on creating a combination of advertising, promotions, traditional and digital media, word of mouth, and other strategies to reach a wider audience and increase brand awareness. The strategies should also aim to increase brand familiarity and positive perceptions among the target audience to increase brand effectiveness. To achieve these goals, the brands can invest in a mix of different strategies and evaluate their effectiveness over time to make informed decisions.

Impact of Brand Awareness Strategies on Brand Preference Among Rural Consumers

The study found that different brands had invested in various strategies such as advertising, promotions, traditional media, digital media, word of mouth, and others, in order to raise awareness of their product amongst their target audience. It was determined that the choice of brand awareness strategies was dependent on the respective brand's target audience, competition, budget and resources. Moreover, the research revealed that the level of preference for various brands among rural customers in India was associated with factors such as quality, pricing, design, after-sales services, and brand reputation. After analyzing the data, it was determined that Bajaj had the highest mean preference among both the focus group and survey data, followed by Prestige and Pigeon, while United and Hawkins had the lowest mean preference. The t-value calculated for the comparison of the means of the survey data with focus group data also revealed that brand awareness has a significant impact on brand preference among rural consumers for pressure cookers.

The study used mean of familiarity as expected popularity parameter and compared with chi-square statistic. Chi-square test revealed that there is not enough evidence to suggest that there is a significant difference between the expected and observed popularity of the brands. Means the popularity of brands is not a consequence of brand familiarity.

Similarly chi-square test was applied on the popularity of brands taking it as expected preference and compared this with actual brand preference. Chi-square test in this case found no association of brand popularity with brand preference.

Similarly the study tested whether the effectiveness of brand awareness strategies (taken as expected brand preference) is associated with existing brand preference in terms of likeliness to purchase a brand. The study found no association between effectiveness of brand awareness strategies and brand preference among customers.

So on the basis of Chi-Square tests we can say that brand familiarity, brand popularity, brand awareness strategies and brand preference although are associated terms but don't have any direct association on each other.

In conclusion we can say that brand preference is more associated with quality, pricing, design, after-sales-services and brand reputation. Thus these factors prove to be primary factors in brand preference other factor can play significant roles in combination with these primary factors. These factors must be considered in creation of brand awareness strategies for rural customers in India.

Previous Researches and Findings

Previous researches have highlighted various strategies such as opening new stores, ensuring availability of all brands, opening service centers, and developing websites. (eg. Mathew 2015; Rana 2019) Some studies have found that brand awareness is the most significant factor in the effectiveness of brand awareness strategies (Venugopal et al 2022). The effectiveness is also fully mediated through brand reputation, customer engagement, and brand trust. (Santoki et. al, 2017) Some studies have noted that brand awareness of pressure cookers varies by brand, manufacturer brands, private labels, price, composition differences, and brand image cues. (Hsu et. al. 2015) Finally, brand awareness has a positive influence on perceived quality, brand attitude, and purchase intention. (Vijayadharani et. al. 2022) Price was found to serve as an indicant of product quality when it was the only cue available, but not when embedded in a multicue setting. Brand image had a stronger effect upon quality perception, particularly for brands with strong positive images, and beer drinkers can distinguish among different brands of beer on the basis of composition cues alone. (Jacoby et. al. 1971)

Comparison of the Study with Previous Research Findings

Previous researches have also found that brand preference is associated with factors such as quality, pricing, design, after-sales services, and brand reputation (Rastogi & Jain, 2014; Chaudhary & Singhal, 2011; Mishra, Jain, & Mishra, 2016). These studies suggest that brand familiarity, brand popularity, and brand awareness strategies may not have a direct effect on brand preference. However, they may still have an indirect effect on brand preference when combined with the primary factors. For example, Chaudhary and Singhal (2011) found that brand recognition and brand salience had a significant impact on brand preference when combined with quality and pricing. Similarly, Mishra et al. (2016) found that brand loyalty had a significant impact on brand preference when combined with price, promotion, service quality, and product quality.

Implications of the findings for the marketers and companies

The findings of this study have important implications for marketers and companies. Firstly, this study reinforces the importance of quality, pricing, design, after-sales services, and brand reputation in determining brand preference among rural consumers. Thus, marketers and companies should focus on optimizing these factors in order to gain a competitive advantage over rivals. Secondly, this study highlights the need for marketers and companies to carefully consider their target audience, competition, budget and resources when creating brand awareness strategies. Finally, this study suggests that while brand familiarity, brand popularity, and brand awareness strategies may not have a direct effect on brand preference, they can still have an indirect impact when combined with the primary factors. Thus, marketers and companies should ensure that their brand awareness strategies take into account the primary factors that influence brand preference. By doing so, marketers and companies can effectively increase their brand preference among rural consumers.

Conclusion

The study examined the impact of brand awareness strategies on brand preference among rural consumers in India. The study found that the level of preference for various brands among rural customers was associated with factors such as quality, pricing, design, after-sales

services, and brand reputation. Moreover, the study revealed that there is not enough evidence to suggest that there is a significant difference between the expected and observed popularity of the brands. Similarly, the study found no association of brand popularity with brand preference, or between the effectiveness of brand awareness strategies and brand preference among customers. In conclusion, this study suggests that marketers and companies should focus on optimizing the primary factors such as quality, pricing, design, after-sales services, and brand reputation in order to increase brand preference among rural consumers. Furthermore, marketers and companies should ensure that their brand awareness strategies take into account these primary factors in order to effectively increase their brand preference.

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