

Rural Consumer Insights: A Study of the Factors Influencing Brand Preferences in Rural Markets

By

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Abstract

The aim of this study was to determine the factors responsible for brand preference among rural consumers in India for pressure cookers. The study collected data from both survey and focus group discussions and analyzed the preference score of different brands. The results showed that quality, price, design, after-sales service, and brand reputation are the most significant factors for brand preference among rural consumers for pressure cookers. The study also found that each brand had a different approach to raising awareness, with advertising, promotions, traditional media, digital media, and word of mouth being some of the strategies used. The study concluded that the choice of brand awareness strategies is dependent on the brand's target audience, competition, budget, and resources. The results of this study provide valuable insights into the level of awareness and preference of different brands among rural consumers for pressure cookers and can help companies and marketers create effective brand awareness strategies.

Keywords: Brand Preference, Consumer Behavior, Marketing Strategies, Rural Consumers.

Introduction

Rural areas in India represent a significant market for consumer goods and services. According to a report by the National Sample Survey Organization (NSSO), over 68% of India's population lives in rural areas, making it a crucial segment for businesses to target (Business Standard, 2019). However, despite the large population base, rural markets in India have their own unique characteristics and challenges that need to be considered by businesses to succeed in these markets. One of the key factors that can influence the success of a brand in rural markets is understanding the factors that influence brand preferences among rural consumers.

The study of factors influencing brand preferences in rural markets has gained increasing attention in recent years. Various studies have explored the preferences of rural consumers for different product categories such as FMCG, agricultural inputs, and consumer durables, among others (Shukla et al., 2016; Rani & Dhar, 2019; Singh & Thakur, 2021). These studies have identified various factors that influence the brand preferences of rural consumers, such as product quality, price, availability, and trust in the brand.

Overall, understanding the factors that influence brand preferences in rural markets is crucial for businesses seeking to enter or expand their presence in these markets. By understanding the unique characteristics and preferences of rural consumers, businesses can develop effective marketing strategies and tailor their products and services to meet the needs of these consumers.

Research Methodology

The study employed a combination of quantitative and qualitative research methods to collect data on rural consumers' behavior, preferences, and attitudes towards different brands and products in the consumer durable segment in India. The sample was selected using a stratified random sampling technique, where the population was divided into strata based on demographic characteristics such as age, gender, education level, and income. Surveys and focus groups were used to collect data on brand awareness, brand preference, and the effectiveness of different brand awareness strategies. The study aimed to target 1200 rural customers from Lucknow Division in India, who are likely to have a preference for brands. Six focus groups of 10 people each were selected from each district of the Lucknow Division to collect qualitative data. The study aimed to understand the rural customers' perception and attitude towards the different brand of pressure cookers.

Factors influencing brand preferences among rural consumers

Brand Preference

(Sample Size: 1200) How likely are you to purchase [Brand X] over other similar products? The data shows the frequency of likeliness to purchase of five different brands (United, Hawkins, Prestige, Bajaj, and Pigeon) among the sample size. The frequency of likeliness to purchase was divided into four categories: Not likely, slightly likely, moderately likely and Very likely. Mean score was calculated considering Moderately and Very Likely categories, and by dividing the total of these two with the total population. Finally the values were rounded to two digits after the decimal point.

Table 1 *Mean of preference in terms of likeliness to purchase, of different Brands across districts*

Sr. No.	Brand	Moderately Likely	Very Likely	Mean Preference
1.	United	333	356	0.57
2.	Hawkins	377	353	0.61
3.	Prestige	346	358	0.59
4.	Bajaj	361	387	0.62
5.	Pigeon	316	330	0.54

The mean preference has been calculated by adding up the number of people in both categories (Moderately Likely and Very Likely) and dividing the sum by the total number of respondents.

Based on the data, Bajaj has the highest mean preference of 0.62, followed by Hawkins with 0.61 and Prestige with 0.59. United has a mean preference of 0.57 and Pigeon has the lowest mean preference of 0.54.

Factors of Brand Preference

(Sample Size: 1200) What factors influence your preference for [Brand X]?

Table 2 Factors Responsible for Brand Preference in terms of likeliness to purchase

Sr. No.	Brand	Quality	Price	Design	After-sales service	Brand Reputation	Others
1.	United	217	191	214	210	204	164
2.	Hawkins	214	197	201	195	200	193
3.	Prestige	211	188	206	234	177	184
4.	Bajaj	210	222	202	186	192	188
5.	Pigeon	185	197	225	175	197	221

Based on the data, it can be seen that the mean preference of different brands across districts ranges from 0.54 to 0.62. The brands with a higher mean preference score are Bajaj and Hawkins with 0.62 and 0.61, respectively, and the brands with a lower mean preference score are United and Pigeon with 0.57 and 0.54, respectively.

Table 2 can be rearranged for factors and can be compared with mean preference value with the help of following graph.

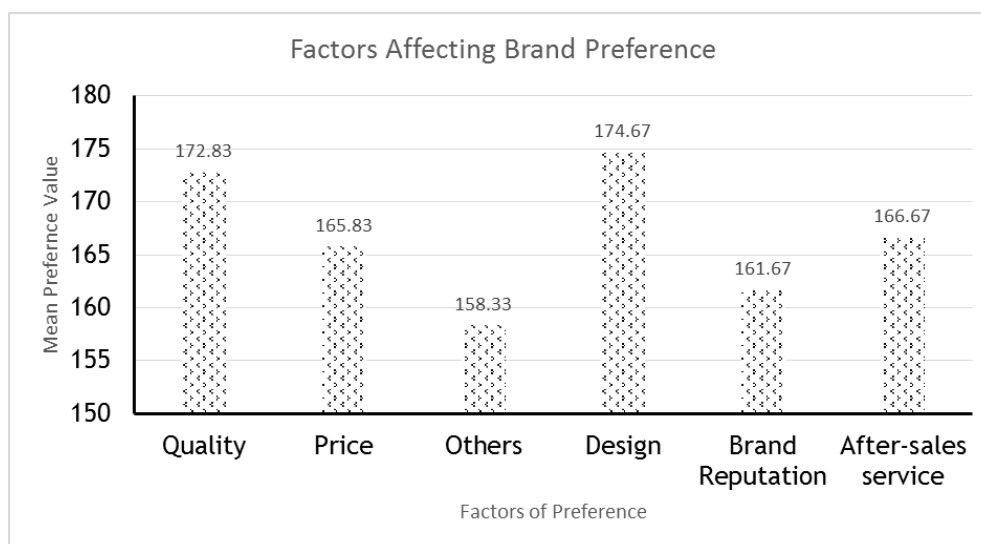


Chart 1 Factors of preference vs mean preference value

The factors responsible for brand preference data show the number of people who mentioned each factor as the reason for their preference for a particular brand. The factors include quality, price, design, after-sales service, brand reputation, and others. It can be seen that quality is one of the most significant factors for brand preference across all brands, with United and Hawkins having the highest number of people mentioning quality as the reason for their preference.

Design and after-sales service are other significant factors for brand preference, and Prestige has the highest number of people mentioning after-sales service as the reason for their preference. Brand reputation is also a significant factor, and Bajaj has the highest number of people mentioning brand reputation as the reason for their preference.

In conclusion, the brands with a higher mean preference score, such as Bajaj and Hawkins, seem to be performing well in terms of quality, design, after-sales service, and brand reputation, which are important factors for brand preference. The brands with a lower mean preference score, such as United and Pigeon, may need to improve in these areas to increase their brand preference.

Impact of brand awareness strategies on brand preference among rural consumers

Study found that all brands had invested in different ways in different strategies such as advertising, promotions, traditional media, digital media, word of mouth, and others. This shows that each brand had a different approach to raising awareness and each brand considers a different set of strategies as more effective for their target audience. The study concluded that the choice of brand awareness strategies is dependent on the brand's target audience, competition, budget, and resources.

The study concluded that brand preference is more associated with factors such as quality, pricing, design, after-sales services and brand reputation. These factors should be considered when creating brand awareness strategies for rural customers in India.

In conclusion, the analysis of the given data has provided valuable insights into the level of awareness and preference of different brands among rural consumers for pressure cookers. The comparison of the mean of the preference of survey data with focus group data showed that the brand Bajaj had the highest mean preference among both the focus group and survey data, followed by Prestige and Pigeon. On the other hand, the brand United and Hawkins had the lowest mean preference among both the data sets. The t-value calculated for the comparison of the means of the survey data with focus group data revealed that there is a significant impact of brand awareness on brand preference among rural consumers for pressure cookers.

Implications of the study for companies and marketers

- 1) Quality is one of the most significant factors for brand preference across all brands.
- 2) Design and after-sales service are also significant factors for brand preference.
- 3) Brand reputation is a significant factor for brand preference.
- 4) Brands with a higher mean preference score perform well in quality, design, after-sales service, and brand reputation, which are important factors for brand preference.
- 5) Brands with a lower mean preference score may need to improve in quality, design, after-sales service, and brand reputation to increase their brand preference.
- 6) Brands should invest in different strategies such as advertising, promotions, traditional media, digital media, word of mouth, and others to raise awareness.
- 7) Each brand should consider a different set of strategies as more effective for their target audience.
- 8) The choice of brand awareness strategies is dependent on the brand's target audience, competition, budget, and resources.
- 9) Brand preference is more associated with factors such as quality, pricing, design, after-sales services, and brand reputation.
- 10) Companies and marketers should consider these factors when creating brand awareness strategies for rural customers in India.
- 11) Companies and marketers should pay attention to the factors that influence brand preference, as these are key drivers of consumer behavior in rural markets. This knowledge can be used to inform product development, pricing strategies, and marketing campaigns.
- 12) Brand reputation is a key factor in driving brand preference, which suggests that companies should focus on building a strong brand image and reputation in order to increase their market share and customer loyalty.

- 13) The study highlights the importance of after-sales service as a driver of brand preference. Companies and marketers should prioritize providing excellent after-sales service, as this can be a key differentiator in a competitive market.
- 14) The fact that each brand had a different set of preferred strategies for raising awareness highlights the importance of understanding the target audience and tailoring marketing campaigns accordingly. Marketers should conduct market research to identify the most effective channels and messaging for their target audience.
- 15) The study provides evidence of the impact of brand awareness on brand preference, which suggests that companies should invest in brand-building activities to increase their market share and brand loyalty. This could include advertising, sponsorships, and other initiatives aimed at increasing brand visibility and awareness among rural consumers.

Areas of Future Research

- 1) Exploring the impact of different advertising and promotion strategies on brand awareness and preference among rural consumers.
- 2) Investigating the role of social media and online platforms in shaping brand awareness and preference among rural consumers.
- 3) Examining how cultural factors and social norms influence brand preference among rural consumers.
- 4) Conducting a comparative analysis of brand awareness and preference among rural and urban consumers to identify potential differences and similarities.
- 5) Investigating how brand awareness and preference may change over time, and what factors drive these changes.
- 6) Examining how price sensitivity and perceived value impact brand preference among rural consumers.
- 7) Exploring the role of distribution channels and access to products in shaping brand awareness and preference among rural consumers.
- 8) Examining the relationship between brand preference and customer loyalty, and how companies can leverage brand preference to build long-term customer relationships.

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