



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS RESEARCH: E
MARKETING

Volume 14 Issue 3 Version 1.0 Year 2014

Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal

Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)

Online ISSN: 2249-4588 & Print ISSN: 0975-5853

Household Behaviour towards Personal Care Products: A Comparative Study of Rural and Urban Mizoram

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GJMBR-E Classification : JEL Code: R20, R29



Strictly as per the compliance and regulations of:



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I. INTRODUCTION

The market players' performance with respect to product, price, distribution and promotion results in perceptions held by buyers and prospective buyers. Perceptions, in turn, affect purchases and the market share. The consumers and their behaviour constitute the causal variables in marketing, making the roots of any strategic design. All marketing plans embody myriad assumptions about the buyer. Whether the marketers are trying to retain customers, to convert buyers from rivals, to attract new users, or simply to increase sales with existing customers, marketing strategy seeks to influence the buyer (Jyoti Kumar NVR, 2003).

In marketing literature, much attention has been devoted to urban customers even though the rural India is nearly three times the urban population. Sakthivel Rani (2010) identified markets according to their urban-rural characteristics as developed markets and developing markets, respectively. In his study, Srinivas Rao (2002) observed that the rural marketing scenario was quite contrasting in nature and characteristics. The rural markets were undeveloped and unorganised as the people who constitute them generally are so. Poor standard of living, economic backwardness, and also social and cultural backwardness were some of the features of rural markets. Level of literacy was seen to be lower in rural areas and the rate of literacy varies across the region and sex. Another important feature of rural market was that it was largely agriculture oriented,

inaccessible because of transportation bottlenecks. All such parameters give an impression that the rural markets are less attractive from the marketers' point of view.

However, the Indian marketers have realised the strength of the rural markets in terms of its size and purchasing power. To elaborate further, the Indian Market Demographics Report (2003), submitted by the National Council of Applied Economics and Research (NCAER), the rural households spent Rs. 3,384 a year on average for 22 non-durable products including packaged foods while the urban households spent Rs. 7,559 on such products. According to Ruchi Trehan (2009), the rural India is changing at a great pace and catching up with the urban India in its own unique way. Growing population, growing rural incomes and government investment in rural development programmes are some of the factors contributing to the growth of Indian rural market. Growth in cosmetics and toiletries is expected to be robust during 2008-2013 in constant value terms. While urban consumers will drive growth, rural consumers are expected to contribute to rising volume sales of basic necessities, such as hair care and oral hygiene. Improved distribution chains in rural areas will give consumers better access to cosmetics and toiletries (The Marketing Whitebook 2010-2011, 2010).

Mizoram, being one of eight States in the North East India, is identified with its own signature of homogeneous population and common ethnicity. The Mizoram population is almost evenly distributed in rural and urban areas (Statistical Handbook, 2008), though the distribution of wealth would be skewed sharply towards the urbanites. The penetration of media into even remote rural areas is found to be quite aggressive, and resultantly the awareness level of rural consumers has been rising. It is in this context that the researcher made an attempt to make a comparative study on the buying behaviour of households towards personal care products in rural and urban Mizoram.

II. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To identify the purchase frequencies of personal care items by the households in rural and urban areas

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2. To study the factors influencing the purchase of personal care items by the households in rural and urban areas.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The descriptive research design is applied for the study. A comprehensive questionnaire was designed to enquire into the problem. The questionnaire was administered to the sample households from both rural and urban areas. For allocation of sample, Bowley's allocation was used to select the rural and urban areas. The study was conducted in all the eight functioning districts, namely, Aizawl, Champhai, Kolasib, Lawngtlai, Lunglei, Mamit, Saiha and Serchhip. All the district headquarters were identified as urban areas for the purpose of the study. The rural household samples were drawn from the following villages: Saitual and Aibawk from Aizawl district, Khawbung and Khawzawl from Champhai district, Bilkhawthlir and Vairengte from Kolasib district, Chawngte and Diltlang from Lawngtlai district, Hnahthial and Zobawk from Lunglei district, Rawpuichhip and Kawrthah from Mamit district, Tuipang and Sangau from Saiha district and N. Vanlaiphai and Thenzawl from Serchhip District. 40 urban households were taken from each district headquarters to represent the urban customers and 20 households from each of the villages mentioned above to represent the rural customers, making it 40 rural households for every district. In all, 640 households i.e. 80 households from each district, 40 from urban areas and 40 from rural areas were drawn as a sample to represent the whole State. The random sampling method was used for the purpose of identifying the household customers in each area. Pearson Correlation Analysis was used to determine correlations between variables and their significance of relationship was fitted at 95% level of significance. Microsoft Excel 2007 was used for the calculation of the correlation coefficient.

a) *Buying behaviour of households toward personal care product*

For the study, proprietors of six prominent wholesaling business houses viz. BT Enterprise, H Huliana & Sons, Bama Charan Dey & Sons, Masuma Traders, Mizoram Agencies, Hauva & Sons and RTP were interviewed on the different brands that are well-positioned in the Mizoram market. Four personal care products – toothpaste, bath soap, hair oils and creams, and body lotions were the products in point for the present research. In all, Hindustan Levers, Godrej and Dabur are the major brand players for personal care products in Mizoram.

i. *Toothpaste*

Toothpaste is one of the personal care representations for nondurable products. From the information obtained from the wholesalers and stockists, some of the popular brands found in the Mizoram

market are: *Colgate* produced by Colgate India Pvt. Ltd., *Pepsodent* and *Close-Up* (Hindustan Unilever), *Promise* (Dabur Ltd.), *Calcium* (Sarvotham Care Ltd.), *Vi-John* (Mja Healthcare Division) and *Red Toothpaste* (Dabur Ltd.). Table 1 shows the purchase frequency of toothpaste by the sample household customers in Mizoram.

Table 1 : Purchase frequency of toothpaste

Purchase Frequency	Number of household customers		
	Total	Rural	Urban
Daily	-	-	-
3 times a week	-	-	-
2 times a week	-	-	-
Once a week	125 (19.53)	45 (14.06)	80 (25)
Twice a month	175 (27.34)	66 (20.62)	109 (34.06)
Once a month	340 (53.13)	209 (65.31)	131 (40.93)
Total	640	320	320

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages.

Over half of the sample household customers purchase toothpaste on monthly basis while more than one-fourth of households would buy toothpaste twice a month. About two-thirds of rural respondents preferred to buy toothpaste once a month compared to 40.93% of urban respondents.

Further, Table 2 shows the factors affecting the purchase of a brand of toothpaste.

Table 2 : Buying factors for toothpaste

Factors	Number of household customers		
	Total	Rural	Urban
Price	131 (20.46)	67 (20.94)	64 (20)
Packaging	86 (13.44)	32 (10)	54 (16.88)
Health	89 (13.91)	41 (12.81)	48 (15)
Flavour	58 (9.06)	21 (6.56)	37 (11.56)
Promotion	184 (28.75)	82 (25.63)	102 (31.88)
Word-of-mouth	86 (13.44)	71 (22.19)	15 (4.69)
Others	6 (0.94)	6 (1.88)	-
Total	640	320	320

*Notes: 1. Figures in parentheses are percentages.
2. Others include: family habit, and discount*

The table indicates that promotion was the most important buying factor for toothpaste for 25.63% of the rural customers and 31.88% of the urban customers. Since a variety of toothpaste brands were found in the

market, promotion was perceived as the most important determinant affecting the purchase decision of 28.75% of the respondents.

Price was the most significant factor for about one-fifth of the household customers, both urban and rural. It is interesting to note that word-of-mouth was perceived as more important buying factor by the rural customers (22.19%) than the urban customers (4.69%).

Fitting the Pearson's correlation analysis, the coefficient between rural and urban samples is arrived at 0.6282. The critical value of Pearson's product correlation at .05 level of significance is 0.754 for degree of freedom (df) = 5 i.e. (n-2), which is greater than the calculated coefficient. Therefore, it can be deduced that the relationship between the buying factors for rural and urban samples for toothpaste is insignificant.

ii. Bath soap

The Mizos were introduced to bath soap by the Christian missionaries as means of keeping personal hygiene in the late 19th century.¹ As stated earlier, bath soap is considered as a product relating to a segment of personal care, along with toothpaste, hair oil/creams and body lotions. Some of the popular brands of bath soap identified on the basis of data collected from the wholesalers and stockists in the Mizoram market are: *Cinthol* (produced by Godrej), *Frama di Wills* and *Vivel* (ITC), *Lux*, *Pears* and *Lifebouy* (HUL), *Aloe Vera* (VVF Ltd.), *Park Avenue* (SK Helen Curtis International), *Eve* (PT Megasurya), *Dyhna* (Anchor H & BC Pvt. Ltd.), *Margo* (Henkel Co.) and so on.

With regard to the frequency of purchase, Table 3 shows that almost 36% of the sample household customers in Mizoram purchase bath soap once a month, 32.50% purchase twice a month and 30.94% once a week.

Table 3 : Purchase frequency for bath soaps

Purchase Frequency	Number of household customers		
	Total	Rural	Urban
Daily	-	-	-
3 times a week	-	-	-
2 times a week	5 (0.78)	2 (0.62)	3 (0.93)
Once a week	198 (30.94)	96 (30)	102 (31.87)
Twice a month	208 (32.50)	100 (31.25)	108 (33.75)
Once a month	228 (35.62)	124 (38.75)	107 (33.44)
Total	640	320	320

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages. It may be noted that the rural and urban household customers do not differ much with regard to purchase frequency of bath soaps.

The factors influencing the purchase of bath soap can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4 : Buying factors for bath soap

Factors	Number of household customers		
	Total	Rural	Urban
Price	82 (12.81)	31 (9.69)	51 (15.94)
Packaging	57 (8.91)	32 (10)	25 (7.81)
Health	112 (17.5)	46 (14.38)	66 (20.63)
Fragrance	137 (21.41)	66 (20.63)	71 (22.19)
Promotion	174 (27.19)	84 (26.25)	90 (28.13)
Word-of-mouth	67 (10.47)	55 (17.19)	12 (3.75)
Others	11 (1.72)	6 (1.88)	5 (1.56)
Total	640	320	320

*Notes: 1. Figures in parentheses are percentages.
2. Other factors include: Family habit, foam, and durability*

For bath soap, promotion was indicated as the most important buying factor by both the rural respondents (26.25%) and urban respondents (28.13%). *Business Standard*² (2009) stated that personal care products, primarily bath soaps, lead TV advertising in all India level. It may be inferred that for media savvy Mizoram household customers, promotion was the most important buying factor for personal care products such as bath soaps. AdEx (2010), from their study, observed

¹ A tradition as told by the early church leaders. When the Welsh missionaries first came to Mizoram, they exclaimed that the Mizos are the dirtiest tribe. They started personal hygiene campaigns and even gave soap as prizes to those who stood ranked in various contests in elementary schools and Sunday schools.

² The source of data was from TAM (Television Audience Measurement) Media Research, *Business Standard* published on December 17th, 2009.

that many companies concentrated on 'Freshness-Fragrance' feature for positioning their bath soap. This phenomenon may be observed from the present study as fragrance of the soap was perceived to be the most significant buying factor for 20.63% of the rural customers and 22.19% of the urban customers. Health related attributes such as medicated, moisturising and nourishing of soap was considered as the most important buying factor by 14.38% of rural customers and 20.63% of urban customers. However, a significant difference existed in the responses given to word-of-mouth as the most important buying factor by the rural respondents (17.19%) as against their urban counterparts (3.75%).

Fitting the Pearson's correlation analysis, the coefficient between rural and urban samples is arrived at 0.7492. The critical value of Pearson's product correlation at .05 level of significance is 0.754 for degree of freedom (df) = 5 i.e. (n-2), which is more than the calculated coefficient. Therefore, it can be deduced that the relationship between the buying factors for rural and urban samples for bath soap is insignificant.

iii. Hair oils and creams

Hair oils and creams are an important personal care product in Mizo society. As per the researcher's observation, some of the popular brands of hair oils/creams in Mizoram are: *All-Clear* (manufactured by HUL), *Hair and Care* (Marico Ltd.), *Ayush* (HUL), *Vasmol* (Hygeinic Research Institute Pvt. Ltd.), *Parachute* (Marico Ltd.), *Brylcreem* (Godrej), *Almond Drops* (Bajaj Co.), *Jasmine* (Marico Ltd.) and *Simax* (Sirmour Herbals).

Recently, the younger generation started emulating hair styles of Koreans and Americans that resulted in rising sales of styling gels like *Gatsby*, *Style-Up*, and *Country Gel*. Television broadcasted advertisements for hair creams with superior hair fixing properties to target these young emulators. *Brylcreem*, *Parachute* etc. are the regularly advertised hair oils and creams in the television. The purchase frequency of hair oils and creams by the respondents in the present study are displayed in Table 5

Table 5 : Purchase frequency of hair oils/creams

Purchase Frequency	Number of household customers		
	Total	Rural	Urban
Daily	-	-	-
3 times a week	-	-	-
2 times a week	-	-	-
Once a week	86 (13.44)	32 (10)	54 (16.87)
Twice a	226	126	100

month	(35.31)	(39.37)	(31.25)
Once a month	328 (51.25)	161 (50.31)	166 (51.88)
Total	640	320	320

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages

The table indicates that about half of the household customers purchase hair oils and creams on monthly basis while 35.31% of the respondents would buy twice a month. The factors which motivate the sample household customers to buy a particular brand of hair oils and creams are shown in Table 6. Promotion was the most important factor for buying hair oils and creams for 38.13% of the sample customers. AdEx stated that ad volume is growing year by year in hair care sector, indicating 33% jump in the year 2009 alone. Price was the significant motivating factor for 17.97% of the respondents.

Table 6 : Buying factors for hair oils/creams

Factors	Number of household customers		
	Total	Rural	Urban
Price	115 (17.97)	101 (31.56)	14 (4.38)
Features	85 (13.28)	32 (10)	53 (16.56)
Packaging	32 (5)	21 (6.56)	11 (3.44)
Fragrance	72 (11.25)	30 (9.38)	42 (13.13)
Promotion	244 (38.13)	84 (26.25)	160 (50)
Word-of-mouth	81 (12.66)	49 (15.31)	32 (10)
Others	11 (1.27)	3 (0.94)	8 (2.5)
Total	640	320	320

Notes: 1. Figures in parentheses are percentages.

2. Others include: Habit, and family members

However, the table shows stark differences in the responses given to promotion and price as buying factors by the rural and urban households. While half of the urban households indicated promotion as the most important buying factor, only 26.25% of the rural households indicated the same opinion. 31.25% of rural customers opined that the price of hair oils and creams as the main buying factor. Only 3.75% of the urban customers were price sensitive. It may be inferred that more number of urban respondents were influenced by the promotional efforts of hair oils and creams companies than the rural respondents. The urban respondents seemed to be more fashionable in hairstyling and grooming than their rural counterparts.

Fitting the Pearson's correlation analysis, the coefficient between rural and urban samples is arrived at 0.4467. The critical value of Pearson's product

correlation at .05 level of significance is 0.754 for degree of freedom (df) = 5 i.e. (n-2), which is greater than the calculated coefficient. Therefore, it can be deduced that the relationship between the buying factors for rural and urban samples for hair oils and creams is insignificant.

iv. Body lotions

Mizoram has a cool climate with an average temperature of maximum 26.15C and a minimum of 17.28C (as per records in 2007) and an average relative humidity range from 95% to 60%. The climate and humidity of the State invite a good market for body lotions, in the category of personal care products. With the entry of cosmetic brands, including some international brand names, such as *Lakme*, *Oriflame*, *Avon*, *Aviance*, *Garnier*, *Dove*, *Loreal* and *Mary Kay* in Mizoram, body lotions, now have become almost a necessity especially to the urban household customers. Another reason may be the multilevel marketing used by many cosmetic companies. This strategy is used extensively by many companies like *Avon*, *Aviance*, *Mary Kay*, and *Oriflame*, to name a few. Campaigners of different designations for different companies at different levels are 'recruited' to bring in more customers. Multilevel marketing is the main reason why these companies have made presence in almost every town and bigger villages. However, it is difficult to document the actual number of these networks as they do not register themselves as business entity. Apart from the well-known brand names, many products from the neighbouring country, Myanmar are occupying market shelves too. These products are comparatively low priced and come in bigger containers. The purchase frequency of body lotions for the household customers can be seen in Table 7.

Table 7: Purchase frequency of body lotions

Purchase Frequency	Number of household customers		
	Total	Rural	Urban
Daily	-	-	-
3 times a week	-	-	-
2 times a week	-	-	-
Once a week	100 (15.63)	39 (12.18)	61 (19.06)
Twice a month	176 (27.50)	97 (30.31)	79 (24.68)
Once a month	364 (56.88)	184 (58.43)	180 (56.25)
Total	640	320	320

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages

56.88% of the sample household customers preferred to buy body lotions once a month and 27.50% of them twice a month. Interestingly, body lotions were found to be an essential household product of every household respondent in Mizoram.

Table 8 shows the factors motivating the respondents in buying of body lotions.

Table 8: Buying factors for body lotions

Factors	Number of household customers		
	Total	Rural	Urban
Price	91 (14.22)	57 (17.81)	34 (10.36)
Packaging	54 (8.44)	41 (12.81)	13 (4.06)
Features	126 (19.69)	65 (20.31)	61 (19.06)
Fragrance	65 (10.16)	30 (9.38)	35 (10.94)
Promotion	281 (43.91)	111 (34.69)	170 (53.13)
Word-of-mouth	23 (3.59)	16 (5)	7 (2.19)
Total	640	320	320

Note: Figures in parentheses are percentages.

Almost 44% of the sample household customers expressed promotion as the most important buying factor for body lotions, followed by product features (19.69%) and price (14.22%). Product features include skin nourishment, moisturising and sun protection. As per AdEx data, there was 24% rise in advertising in 2009 for skin care products, of which body lotions constituted one-fourth of all skin care advertising. Therefore, it may be inferred that promotion played a crucial role as a factor influencing the purchase of body lotions. However, there was a significant difference between the rural (34.69%) and urban (53.13%) customers. This may be due to the increased media exposure on the part of the urban respondents.

Fitting the Pearson's correlation analysis, the coefficient between the rural and urban samples is arrived at 0.93533. The critical value of Pearson's product correlation at .05 level of significance is 0.811 for degree of freedom (df) = 4 i.e. (n-2), which is lesser than the calculated coefficient. Therefore, it can be deduced that the relationship between the buying factors for rural and urban samples for body lotions is significant.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

In case of personal care products, the sample respondents' choicest factor influencing their buying behaviour was promotion for all the four items of personal care products, namely, toothpaste, bath soap, hair oils/creams and body lotions as indicated in Table 9.

Table 9 : Respondents' three choicest buying factors for personal care products

Ranks	Toothpaste	Bath soap	Hair oils/creams	Body lotions
1	Promotion	Promotion	Promotion	Promotion
2	Price	Fragrance	Price	Health
3	Health	Health	Packaging	Price

Note: Ranking is given on the basis of the figures shown in Tables 2, 4, 6 and 8

Price was the second choicest buying factor for toothpaste and hair oils/creams while fragrance was the second choicest buying factor for bath soap and health was the second choicest factor for body lotions. Coming to the third choicest buying factor, health was a buying factor for both toothpaste and bath soap while packaging and price were the buying factors for hair oils/ creams and body lotions, respectively. It may be concluded that promotion, price, health, fragrance and

packaging were the prominent factors (not necessarily in the same order) influencing the purchase of personal care products.

With regard to the rural and urban respondents, promotion was the choicest buying factor for all items of personal care products, except in the case of rural respondents for hair oils/creams as indicated in Tables 10 and 11. Price was considered the choicest buying factor by the rural respondents for hair oils/ creams.

Table 10 : Rural respondents' three choicest buying factors for personal care products

Ranks	Toothpaste	Bath soap	Hair oils/creams	Body lotions
1	Promotion	Promotion	Price	Promotion
2	Word-of-mouth	Fragrance	Promotion	Health
3	Price	Word-of-mouth	Word-of-mouth	Price

Note: Ranking is given on the basis of the figures shown in Tables 2, 4, 6 and 8

Table 11 : Urban respondents' three choicest buying factors for personal care products

Ranks	Toothpaste	Bath soap	Hair oils/creams	Body lotion
1	Promotion	Promotion	Promotion	Promotion
2	Price	Fragrance	Packaging	Health
3	Packaging	Health	Fragrance	Fragrance

Note: Ranking is given on the basis of the figures shown in Tables 2, 4, 6 and 8

There was no unanimity among the rural respondents in respect of their second choicest buying factor for all types of personal care products studied. Price was considered the third choicest factor for toothpaste and body lotions by the rural respondents while word-of-mouth was considered as the third choicest factor for bath soap and hair oils/creams by them. Overall, it can be inferred that the important factors affecting the rural respondents in their purchase of personal care products were: promotion, word-of-mouth, price, fragrance and health (not necessarily in the same order).

Promotion was the urban respondents' choicest buying factor for all types of personal care products. Fragrance was considered one of the three choicest buying factors influencing the urban respondents in case of three types of personal care products, namely, bath soap, hair oils/creams and body lotions. While packaging was an important consideration for toothpaste and hair oils/creams, health was considered an important buying factor in case of bath soap and body lotions. It can be inferred that the important factors affecting the urban respondents in their purchase of personal care products were: promotion, fragrance, packaging, health and price (not necessarily in the same order).

It can be concluded that the rural respondents were more price sensitive than their urban counterparts in case of personal care products, and word-of-mouth was considered as an important buying factor by the rural respondents.

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