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PROSPECTS OF TRADITIONAL THERAPY: CONSUMER'S PERCEPTION - AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF RURAL MARKET WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO INDORE DISTRICT

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ABSTRACT

Ayurveda is maintenance and promotion of positive health and cure of diseases through medicine, dietary restrictions and regulated life style. Ayurveda is the name for a comprehensive health care system that began in ancient India. Ayurveda proposes for an omnipresence of basic building blocks of life in the universe suggesting that beginning of synthesis is subject to the availability of optimal conditions. The study was undertaken in the rural market in and around Indore. Questionnaire was administered on 200 adult respondents (119 Males and 81 females), of which 193 valid responses were obtained (107 Males and 86 Females). Research finding about the consumers' perception regarding the ayurvedic products in rural areas in and around Indore indicated that 68% people use Ayurvedic products and 32% of the people use Homoeopathic and Allopathic products. Findings further showed that the percentage of people using ayurvedic medicine is very less and restricted to only 25% of the whole population. Analysis revealed that there is no significant difference between Male and Female consumers on their experience in using Ayurvedic product. The same data when analyzed with respect to the income showed that the experience in the use of ayurvedic product is independent of income effect. Preference for type of therapy showed no effect of Gender or Incomes.

KEYWORDS

Ayurveda, Rural Market, Preference, Perception, Awareness.

INTRODUCTION

he health of a nation is a reflection of the health of the people. The health of a nation is a composite variety of health indicators, of which the chief are infant mortality rate, maternal mortality rate, and life expectancy. The Health of India lags behind that of many nations both developed and developing, something which the Government has been trying to improve for the last 64 years. In recent past, an upsurge has been observed in India towards healthy and stress-free life. Obviously our country needs to divert more resources to health than the amount countries ahead of us do. Yet, there is the problem that resources are limited and many other developmental works are all vying for them. The country is caught in a bind: The poor health of the people demands more resources, yet shortage of resources means that no more can be allocated to health. In this situation, the Ayurveda which is maintenance and promotion of positive health and cures the diseases through medicine, dietary restrictions, yoga and regulated life style certainly play an important role in providing inclusive, affordable, and accessible healthcare services to millions of people.

Ayurveda is the name for a comprehensive health care system that began in ancient India. Ayurveda proposes for an omnipresence of basic building blocks of life in the universe suggesting that beginning of synthesis is subject to the availability of optimal conditions. This justifies the life process to begin only a few billion years ago despite availability of the basic materials since eternity. Primitive earth was proposed to be characterized by Sattva, Rajas and Tamas (Triguna) symbolizing the physical properties prevalent to the primitive earth. Sattva, the foremost of Triguna, symbolizes the energy required for creation, Rajas, the second of Triguna symbolizes the particle movements and Tamas finally symbolizes inert material having a capacity to convert into new forms under the constant influence of Sattva and Rajas. (Rastogi 2010).

Ayurveda has been recognized by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a complete system of natural medicine. Medicinal herbs as potential source of therapeutics aids has attained a significant role in health system all over the world for both humans and animals not only in the diseased condition but also as potential material for maintaining proper health. Rural markets in India constitute a wide and untapped market for many products and services which are being marketed for the urban masses. India is one of the largest economies in the world in terms of purchasing power and has a strong middle class base of more than 300 million. The Indian rural market with its vast size and demand base offers a huge opportunity for investment. Rural India has a large consuming class with 41 per cent of India's middle-class and 58 per cent of the total disposable income. With population in the rural areas set to rise to 153 million households by 2009-10 and with higher saturation in the urban markets, future growth in the FMCG sector will come from increased rural and small town penetration. Technological advances such as the internet and e-commerce will aid in better logistics and distribution in these areas.

During last two decades, use of Ayurveda and other Traditional Medicines has expanded globally and gained popularity. It has not only continued to be used for primary health care of the poor people in developing countries, but has also been used in countries where conventional medicine is predominant in the national health care system. With the tremendous expansion in the use of Traditional medicines worldwide especially in developed countries, safety and efficacy as well as quality control of herbal medicines and Traditional procedure – based therapies have become important concerns for both health authorities and practitioners.

The 21st century began with a few landmark observations that helped decisively to rediscover the lost links between modern Science and Ayurveda. This period has also proposed certain new models to comprehend Ayurvedic fundamental tenets on grounds acceptable to the Western world. The evolved and explicit human physiology and behavioural science have been described to have their seeds in the philosophy of Ayurveda. The identification of a genomic link to the theory of Prakriti led to a search for possible classification of people on their Prakriti based on their genetic makeup. These studies could eventually lead to a personalization of medical practice on the basis of prakriti as is conceived in Ayurveda.

Consumer Satisfaction: Consumer satisfaction and acceptance are often considered in the literature to be closely linked yet these are distinct concepts. Satisfaction is the fulfillment and gratification of the need for a stated good or service, here, Traditional Therapy.

Consumer Preferences: This is used primarily to mean an option that has the greatest anticipated value among a number of options. Preference and acceptance can in certain circumstances mean the same thing but it is useful to keep the distinction in mind with preference tending to indicate choices among neutral or more valued options with acceptance indicating a willingness to tolerate the status quo or some less desirable option.

Consumer Awareness: Consumer awareness is the level of knowledge about, in this case, the traditional therapy and the various effects and outcomes of ayurvedic products. In most research the adequacy or otherwise of this awareness is anchored against the service provider or regulator's perspective on the supply. Where consumer awareness does not equate with this industry perspective this is often termed a consumer (mis)perception. (TECHNEAU CONSUMER PREFERENCES an Overview (2006); an Integrated Project Funded by the European Commission under the Sixth Framework Programme, Sustainable Development, Global Change and Ecosystems Thematic Priority Area).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the past several decades, support for traditional medicine has dramatically increased worldwide. In the Alma Ata Primary Health Care Delivery Declaration of 1978, which called for "health for all by the year 2000," the World Health Organisation (WHO) acknowledged the importance of traditional medicine in providing primary health care and encouraged countries to develop official policies on traditional medicine (Saleh 1993: 21–22). The WHO General Guidelines for Methodologies on Research and Evaluation of Traditional Medicine (2000) provide a strategy for assessing the safety and the efficacy of traditional medicine.

Wharton marketing professor Lisa Bolton (2007), New York University doctoral student Wenbo Wang and Peking University marketing professor Hean Tat Keh (2007) looked at how people's perceptions of a given remedy, their perceptions of their illness and other factors influence medical decision making. The researchers also examined how the choice of remedy, be it Western medicine (WM) or traditional Chinese medicine (TCM), impacts the decision to follow a healthy lifestyle. They found that on the whole, Chinese consumers tend to prefer TCM but will opt for Western medicine in particular situations, such as when they are hoping to quickly alleviate their symptoms or when they are certain about what is making them sick.

Their study has implications beyond the Chinese market, Bolton and her co-authors note. "Consumers today face a wide array of choice options. Proliferation in choice extends to remedies for illness or disease -- including drugs, supplements, radiation, surgery, chiropractics, acupuncture, massage therapy, homeopathy, Ayurveda and traditional Chinese medicine, to name a few. In many countries of the world, medical pluralism is the norm, with Western and traditional medicine existing side-by-side in the marketplace. Even in countries with a dominant medical tradition, complementary and alternative medicines are increasingly available. Treatment goals and patients' time frames influenced their preferences. "Consumers perceive TCM (versus WM) to have slower action and milder side effects and a greater focus on treating the underlying illness versus alleviating the symptoms," the authors note. Likewise, when consumers were uncertain about their condition and not in any particular hurry for a resolution, they preferred traditional remedies. Bolton and her colleagues also discovered that the decision to select Western medicine over traditional remedies has broader implications for health.

The researchers found that, in general, Western medicine (versus TCM) "reduces the perceived importance of, and motivation to engage in, complementary health-protective behaviour, thereby undermining a healthy lifestyle." In other words, patients taking pills for their high blood pressure may be less apt to see the need to exercise, watch their diet or lose weight.

"We know what remedies are supposed to do. They are supposed to improve your health, but Western drugs can actually backfire and boomerang healthy lifestyle intentions," Bolton says. For example, people taking cholesterol drugs may figure they don't need to cut fat from their diet because the pills are protecting them from heart disease.

Emily Hillenbrand (2006): A 2002 report from the Ministry of Public Health confirms that the economic crisis and the failure of the social security system have created an intensive return to traditional health services. Today, 7% of the average household health budget goes to traditional medicines. Nearly twice as many people from poor households rely on traditional medicine as do people from rich households (Strategie Sectorielle de Sante, 2002: 32–49).

Herbal medicinal products have become popular because of perceived safety and economy and inability of allopathy to cure everything. However, recent reports of contamination and potential for adverse reactions, have tempered the enthusiasm of consumers for these "natural" cures, resulting in decline of sales of herbal products in the United States. The consumers now want more authentic information on quality, safety and efficacy of HMPs. Arun Bhatt MD (Med) FICP (Ind) MFPM (UK), President, ClinInvent Research Pvt Ltd, Mumbai. (2008):

The medical perceptions about complementary medicine (including HMPs) are diverse. Surveys show that, overall, physicians believe it is moderately effective, while many doctors regard complementary therapies as scientifically unproved. The doctors' are concerned about 1) use of such therapies as an adjunct or an alternative to conventional care, 2) comparative efficacy of complementary and allopathic therapies and 3) the possibility of adverse effects. In general, globally, the trend amongst doctors is to support the patients' preferences for complementary therapies. However, they want published information from reliable sources on quality, safety and efficacy of HMPs.

The use of herbal supplements is prevalent among patients who are taking prescription medications, particularly senior citizens. (J Altern Complement Med 2001). Yet few clinical studies have systematically assessed potential interactions between herbs and medications Most patients do not readily disclose their use of complementary ayurvedic medicine to their health care providers (Eisenberg DM, Davis RB, Ettner SL, 1998) and physicians may not routinely ask about such use. As a result, dangerous herb–drug interactions may be missed. However, potentially serious consequences might be avoided by obtaining a more careful history about complementary ayurvedic medicinal use. In this review, we highlight some common herbal remedies used, their adverse cardiovascular effects, and their potential interactions with cardiovascular drugs. We also discuss issues about the use of herbal products and suggest ways to improve their safety. J Am Coll Cardiol (2005)

Pareek (1999), the finding of their research showed that the Indian rural market has immense untapped potential. The rural market's importance arises out of the fact that India lives in the villages, both literally and metaphorically. According to National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) surveys, the income of the average villager is rising. Recession is hardly possible in rural India.

Raj and Selvaraj (2007), the finding of their research coins that there is an opportunity for makers of branded products, who can convert consumers to buy branded products. Many companies including MNCs and regional players started developing marketing strategies to lure the untapped market. Their study also covers the marketing strategies adopted by many companies in rural areas.

Hundal and Anand (2008), the finding of there research conducted a study to gain insight into perception of rural and urban consumers about various promotional measures adopted by durable goods manufacturing companies. Their results indicate that though both the groups seem to have considered all the factors as important in sales promotion, a minute observation states that urban respondents have assigned high priority for these schemes, installment purchase, off-season discount, zero interest system.

Pirakathesswari P. (2010), the finding of their research emphasized that success of a brand in the India rural market is as unpredictable as rain. It has always been difficult to gauge the rural market. Many brands, which should have been successful, have failed miserably. More often that not, people attribute rural market success to luck. Therefore, marketers need to understand the social dynamics and attitude variations within each village, though nationally, it follows a consistent pattern.

The Economic Times (2003), "The rural market likes it strong" the strength of rural markets for Indian companies. Financial express, June 19, 2000 has published the strategy about FMCG majors, HLL, Marico Industries, Colgate Palmolive have formula had for rural markets.

Nature has been a source of medicinal agents for thousands of years and an impressive number of modern drugs have been isolated from natural sources. Many of these isolations were based on the uses of the agents in traditional medicine. The plant-based, traditional medicine systems continue to play an essential role in health care, with about 80% of the world's inhabitants relying mainly on traditional medicines for their primary health care. India has several traditional medical systems, such as Ayurveda and Unani, which has survived through more than 3000 years, mainly using plant-based drugs. The material medical of these systems contains a rich heritage of indigenous herbal practices that have helped to sustain the health of most rural people of India Owolabi et al (2007).

Determining quality of public health care services in rural India: The survey instrument had an overall Cronbach's alpha value of 0.96 and was able to discern differences across various socio-demographic characteristics of the respondents. The opinions of the respondents towards health care quality were not very favourable. Negative scores were obtained on items, "availability of adequate medical equipments" and "availability of doctors for women". Education, gender and income were found to be significantly associated with user perception. Clinical Governance An International Journal (2003).

METHOD & DATA ANALYSIS

The study was undertaken in the rural market in and around Indore. Questionnaire was administered on 200 adult respondents (119 Males and 81 females), of which 193 valid responses were obtained (107 Males and 86 Females). Thus the data analysis was considered on these limited set of responses. Some of the responses had missing values and on analysis it was found that these were Missing at Random (MAR) and thus the response sheets were eliminated from further analysis. The final data has 61% male respondents and 59% female respondents.

Also the respondents were categorized on the basis of Income. Out of the total 193 valid responses 43% were having the income below Rs 5000, 28% were having the income between 5-10 thousand and the remaining 29% had income above Rs10, 000.

Normal Probability Plot showed that the data is normally distributed and requires no transformation. The Box Whisker Plot demonstrated the presence of 2 Outliers which were not significant enough to affect result and thus there was no point in eliminating them for data analysis.

Research finding about the consumers' perception regarding the ayurvedic products in rural areas in and around Indore indicated that 68% people use Ayurvedic products and 32% of the people use Homoeopathic and Allopathic products. Findings further showed that the percentage of people using ayurvedic medicine is very less and restricted to only 25% of the whole population (Population which is considered for research study).

Analysis revealed that there is no significant difference between Male and Female consumers on their experience in using Ayurvedic product (ρ >.05). The same data when analysed with respect to the income showed that the experience in the use of ayurvedic product is independent of income effect (ρ =.073). Preference for type of therapy showed no effect of Gender or Income (all ρ >.05). Yates correction had to be taken while carrying out the Income effect as some of the cell had values less than 5.

The research study shows that 52% of people see the most popular brand advertisement like Dabur, Navratna and Borolin and all these advertisements were rated with almost same points. Himani ayurvedic product advertisements were ranked second after the above mentioned products. Maximum people were in favour of Ayurvedic products as according to them they are aware that Ayurvedic products do not have any side effects.

Research finding regarding the impact of advertisements on consumer's mind, that is, do they buy the Ayurvedic products after seeing the advertisements, identified that 64% people purchase and are immediately influenced by the advertisements which shows them quality and various features of the product, whereas 36% people denied with the immediate effect or influence of ads on them.

On the availability of ayurvedic products on the shops in villages, research identified that 91% of the village shops keep the ayurvedic products and 9% do not keep. The availability factor widely depends on the content of ayurvedic medicines like they are made with tree leaves, flowers, jadi-butees etc which are basically found in the forest areas and as many big industries are set nearby villages and therefore it's convenient for the companies to approach villages and make the product available on all the shops.

Branding is about getting your prospects to see you as the only one that provides a solution to their problem. Brand play a vital role in sell of product the research finding on the percentage of people who prefer branded ayurvedic products and the percentage that do not go for brand suggested that 64% people preferred to buy branded ayurvedic product and remaining do not go for purchase of branded product.

Availability of ayurvedic medicine is a major concern and in the research 82% people agreed that the ayurvedic products are very much available in their nearby areas and at the same time remaining 18% people denied the availability of products in nearby areas and they have to purchase the product from far areas.

There are so many determinants which affect the selection of a product, but when we tried to identify the selection of product on the basis of different determinants like Price, Quality, Effectiveness, Availability, we found that 48% people select the ayurvedic product on the basis of product Quality, 42% people select the product on the basis of Effectiveness and the remaining percentage select on the basis of price and availability.

On the basis of research, Dabur, Navratna & Borolin, some of the very common brands which were easily available in or nearby area of village and the percentage of brand available are in ration of, Borolin: 26%, Navratna: 18%, Dabur: 56%.

The consumers' perception regarding the impact of ayurvedic products including medicines, is comparitively less then the Other Alopethic or English medicines.49% people agreed that ayurvedic products helps in curing diseases much more faster than the other alopethic or such medicines. Whereas according to 51% people the case is just opposite, they belive that alopethic, homopethic etc medicine are faster in curing the deseases. When asked whether the ayurvedic products help in curing the diseases faster than the common western medicine, there was no significant difference between the male and females response (p=.064). The common diseases, for which people purchase the ayurvedic products were namely, cough and throat infection, etc.

The research identifies that people are not consuming ayurvedic products just because of non availability of ayurvedic products in their town, village or the nearby areas. 75% people were found to agree that if the ayurvedic products are in vicinity they will definitely prefer for those products and at the same time they said, they also know that ayurvedic products are available at cheap prices compared to urban areas. Whereas at the other hand there are 25% people who deny that even after the vicinity of products they won't prefer buying those products, may be just because they feel other products better than ayurvedic products.

Packaging is a very important marketing strategy to glamorize the product in order to attract the consumer's attention. As most consumers judge a product by its packaging before buying, therefore it is logical to say attractive packaging is crucial in order to get the first time buyers to buy the products and at the same time it is very necessary that product is available in different sizes. The current trend of market is that, people prefer small sachets, use and throw packaging. The demand of handy products is increasing therefore in this research we tried to find out the link between sell of ayurvedic products with the size of package. As per the research 80% people were in favour that sale increases when product comes in small packets and 20% people were against this statement. When asked if the small packing of ayurvedic product will help in increasing the sale of the medicine the gender effect showed significant difference (ρ =.042) implying that males and females think differently. But the question had no income effect thus implying that rural mass think (irrespective of their income) that sale of ayurvedic medicine will increase if the products come in small packing (ρ =.057).

CONCLUSION

Rural markets are for marketers with perseverance and creativity. The market is extremely attractive with its vast potential but also provides challenges. It is a classic case of risk return situation. It is a high risk area but with the promise of a large customer following as the prize for those who succeed. The key to reducing the risk is to understand the market, the consumer need and behaviours. A marketer needs to understand that rural consumers are not a homogeneous lot. The rural market is not synonymous with the farmer. The consumer groups here differs by occupation, income, social and cultural grouping. The rural marketer will find it useful to identify consumer groups who require products purchased in the urban market. "Therefore the time for preparing tomorrow is today".

The present study contributes to both theory and practice. At the conceptual level, our findings provide support for the increasing utility of Traditional Therapy. Empirical studies on people of rural India are relatively dimensional. Our study found that consumer's perception towards traditional therapy is very positive. Whereas at the same time the consumer's perception towards Ayurvedic Medicine is negative, no doubt with modernisation people are inclining towards ayurvedic products, but still the confidence and trust viz-a-viz ayurvedic medicine found is very less. The study found a inverse relationship between the people and ayurvedic medicine. There is a positive impact of advertisements on consumers' mind and apart from this, availability of ayurvedic products; the size of packaging and awareness also plays a very important role in changing the consumer's perception towards traditional therapy. Study found that consumers are satisfied with the results of the traditional therapy.

In the present context of cut throat competition, tapping rural market is a critical challenge for marketers. Marketers need to critically evaluate the need and wants and together with this the perception of consumers and would work accordingly. By highlighting the important aspects of traditional therapy, this study focuses the consumer perception on the most important aspect of health and safety, namely, AYURVEDA (The Traditional Therapy).

LIMITATIONS

- > The Effect size of the data was relatively low (.023). Considering such low effect size the sample should be relatively larger to make the power of test (β) at least .08.
- > The current study was limited to measuring the perceived quality of health care services. Moreover, as the study was confined to rural areas of and nearby Indore city, so caution has to be exercised in making generalisations for the entire nation.
- > Respondents' lack of understanding of language stood in the way of providing correct response.
- Lack of awareness in people of rural areas about ayurvedic products.

Sample size is restricted to 200 people which will not provide results that can be generalized.

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