

Women's Product Preference with Reference to Sanitary Napkins

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Abstract: Product preference indicates a desire to seek out a specific product, even when it requires paying more or expending more efforts to obtain it. Customer preferences are based on the customer's expectations, likes and dislikes and their inclinations towards a purchase of a particular product. Appealing to the preferences of customers is a basic marketing technique that is useful for branding, product development, distribution and customer experience. The following are common types of customer preference. There are various factors like brand image, price, quality etc, that can change one's taste or preference which in turn cause people to buy more or less of a product. This paper is focusing on Product Features, Personal and social factors, brand knowledge and advertisement and loyalty.

Keywords: Product, preferences, customer, features, techniques.

Date of Submission: 13-02-2019

Date of acceptance:28-02-2019

I. Introduction

"If People believe they share value with a company they will stay loyal to the brand"

-Howard Schultz-

Product preference reflects a desire to use a particular company's product, even when there are equally priced and equally available alternatives. In fact more often than not, product preference indicates a desire to seek out a specific product, even when it requires paying more or expending more efforts to obtain it. There are various factors like brand image, price, quality etc that can change one's taste or preference which in turn cause people to buy more or less of a product. For example, if a new health study comes out saying that a product is not good for our health; the demand of that product may decrease. On the other hand if a celebrity endorses a new product, it may increase the demand of the product. Preference of a customer is a less tangible item that has a big impact on demand of a product.

II. Review Of Literature

The consumers mind is different from one another it differs according to the human psychology, demographical differences, age & sex and to understand people needs and to assess the influences of every consumer approach is different, in theory explained that consumer is treated as decider of the company, whatever the product comes to the market, the consumer is the ultimate purchaser for every product, sometimes the consumers are choosing, selecting and going for family decision making to choose differently, in one point of time the consumers differentiated and explained that they are going for personal and some of the them are using products for profit. (Kotler, 2004).When consumers have had no experiences with a product; they tend to trust a favoured as well known brand name. Consumers often think well known brands are better and are worth buying for the implied assurance of quality dependability, performance and services. (Schiff man, Kanuk, 2009)

A widely accepted definition of 'satisfaction' is 'satisfaction is the consumer's fulfilment response. It is a judgment that a product or service feature, or the product of service itself provided a pleasurable level of consumption-related fulfilment, including levels of under-or-over fulfilment (Oliver, 1997). In general, it is the satisfaction about the product/ service as a whole that merits attention, since this satisfaction influence the consumers' future buying and consuming behaviour. Yet it is also important to understand the factors that contribute to satisfaction. Often, dissatisfaction about one particular feature of a service leads to dissatisfaction about the service as a whole, even if the satisfaction about the other features is high. (Ikilem Gocek et al , 2002)

In recent years initiatives like workshops and Seminars conducted by various NGO's Government and Manufacturers to impart knowledge regarding the feminine hygiene and its benefits has led the Indian Sanitary Napkin market to witness a positive growth. The increasing awareness among females about personal hygiene is one of the primary factors facilitating the growth of the sanitary napkin market. In addition the elevating income and the availability of sanitary napkins at an affordable price is another factor. In order to increase their consumer-base, manufacturers are also focusing on unique strategies.

According to the latest report by The International Market Analysis Research and Consulting Group (IMARC), titled "Indian Sanitary Napkin Market: Industry Trends, Shares, Size, Growth, opportunity and Forecasting 2018-2023", the Indian sanitary napkin market has reached a value of nearly US\$441 Million in

2017. Further, the market is expected to touch the value of around US\$ 631 Million by 2023, growing at a CAGR of more than 12% during 2018-2023.

III. Evolution Of Sanitary Napkins Is As Follows

The 1800's-1920's:Hoosier Sanitary belts:

It was an odd contraption worn under a women's garment. They were washable pads that were attached to a belt around the waist.

1888: Lister's towels:

The first commercially available disposable menstrual pads appeared. It was developed by Johnson & Johnson and was known as the Lister's towels.

Around the same time wood pulp bandages were used in hospitals for dressing wounds. Nurses began using these wood pulp bandages as disposable pads. Wood pulp bandages were highly absorbent material, cheap and disposable; it worked well in soaking up menstrual blood. This same material was later used by Kotex for its Pads.

1980's :By this time Hoosier sanitary belt had completely faded, Pads by now had adhesive strip placed on the bottom for attachment to saddle of the panties, becoming the far more favoured method with women's.

Today sanitary napkins are extensively the most widely used method of managing menstrual blood flow. It is pretty straightforward, easy to use and easily accessible. Sanitary napkins today consist of Rayon-a synthetic fiber, bleach material- dioxin, cellulose gel and odour neutralizers.

After commencement of Globalization an endless range of sanitary napkin brands have entered the market, thus giving the consumer an abundant number of choices. Consumer perceptions influence the consumer's product preference, which in turn plays a vital role in accepting or rejecting a product. It is the consumer's choice which establishes a product in the market. With the scads of variety available in sanitary napkins, several factors persuade the buying behaviour. Product preference of a consumer on sanitary napkins can be persuaded by factors such as Product features, reference groups, family, personal factors, lifestyle, price, availability, comfort, odour, advertising execution, customer loyalty, materials, awareness, brand knowledge and brand image/identity.

The menstruation cycle is an automatic and self-regulating process during which the female body undergoes physiological and hormonal changes over the course of 24-42 days. This process plays an integral role in to the overall health and function of the female reproductive system. The menstrual cycle begins in a female at puberty at the onset of menarche; the first menstrual period is between the ages of 9-16. Female typically continue to have menstrual cycle throughout the lives until menopause, which occurs between the ages of 40-60.

Menstruation can be uncomfortable and painful, so it can be confusing and frustrating. Almost every woman gets affected during her menstruation physically and emotionally. This discomfort is called PMS- Premenstrual syndrome. Some women experience PMS every time they have their period, others are affected by it once a while. Regardless to all this a women deserves to have a sanitary napkin that is comfortable to her.

IV. Major Factors That Affect Consumers Preference Are:

1. Product Features

A product feature is a slice of business functionality that has a corresponding benefit for the consumer. Product features are attributes of your product that describe its components, appearance, capabilities, dimensions etc. In sanitary napkins the features that a consumer looks for are: Product variant – Thickness, length, wings.

According to a research conducted in 2014 it was found that Maximum women preferred thin sanitary napkins while minimum went for thick sanitary napkins. It was also discovered that majority of women around 70% were willing to accept sanitary napkins without wings. 90% of women using sanitary napkins preferred long sanitary napkins. As a matter of fact not many women are pleased with the new sanitary napkins with odour.

2. Personal and Social Factors:

- **Personal Factors include:**

- **Occupation and Economic Circumstances:** Occupation of a person also influences the product preference in sanitary napkins. A blue-collar worker will prefer to buy a sanitary napkin which is long in length, has wings and has a good soak-up capacity. Along with occupation, economic circumstances like spendable income, attitude towards spending and saving also impacts product preference.
- **Lifestyle:** Lifestyle is a person's pattern of living in the world. Lifestyles are shaped partly by whether the consumer is money oriented or quality oriented. A person who is money oriented May or may not be

willing to spend a fortune to buy a quality sanitary napkin where as a person who is quality oriented may not put quality over price.

- **Social Factors include:**

- **Family:** Family members constitute to the most influential personal factor. From parents a person acquires an orientation towards religion, politics, economic, buying behaviour etc. Even if the buyer no longer interacts much with her parents, their influence on behaviour can be significant. The first napkin used by a girl is bought by her mother – which makes their behaviour alike. For example, According to the P&G-IPSOS survey, a shocking 50 per cent of urban Indian women still behave in ways prescribed by age-old beliefs. Many a time the daughter sticks to the same brand that her mother first gave her. This could be because of the trust she has on her mother or because a certain amount of comfort level developed over time with the particular brand. Some change their choices over time to better brands or better design.
- **Reference Group:** A persons Reference group are the entire group that have a direct (face-to-face) or indirect influence on their attitude or behaviour. Reference group influence members in at least three ways.
 1. They expose an individual to new behaviours and lifestyles.
 2. They influence attitude and self-concept.
 3. They create pressure for conformity that may affect product and brand choices.

3. Brand Knowledge:

If you are asked “which sanitary napkin you would prefer?” unless your answer is the cheapest napkin available you will have a specified brand name. This is because you have knowledge about the product and have experienced its service. Brand identity and brand image also play a major role in product preference. Consumers usually go for brands they can identify over an unknown brand. Similarly impression of different brands on the minds of the consumers determines their product preference.

4. Advertising Execution:

Advertisement is a powerful tool to influence buying behaviour of a consumer. In a research study on influence of advertisement Research participants were divided into two groups and were shown the advertisement video of two company's [A&B] that are into Poultry farming. The advertisement video of company A portrayed a nice looking, plump chicken. While the advertisement video of company B portrayed a chicken that looked thin and sickly. The researchers informed the participants of group one that the chickens of company A were natural chickens and are healthy (but less tasty) and the chickens of company B were genetically engineered chickens and were tasty (but less healthy). The second group was not given any additional information about the chicken.

Overwhelmingly, participants preferred the nice plump chicken of company A, but their reasoning was different. Group one claimed it was because they valued health above taste and group two group said it was because the chicken of company A looked better. The reasoning of the two groups may be different but the advertisement of company A was executed well enough to make the consumers prefer his product over the competitors.

5. Loyalty:

When customers feel negative or neutral about your product that is if they had a bad past experience with your product or was not very comfortable with your product they won't be loyal to you. Sure, they might buy your products occasionally but they won't hesitate to switch to a competitor when they see better product features or better comfort in their product. On the other hand if they are more than satisfied with your product they'll stay loyal to your brand even when others try to tempt them away, and they're more likely to recommend your products and services to others.

V. Conclusion

While it may seem uncomfortable and painful, Menstruation is a natural and healthy part of a women's life. The opinion of every woman will be different from the other because each woman has a different body: short, tall, big pelvis, small pelvis, age, puberty, mother of three or progressing to menopause, on birth control and... a different period! Preference on a sanitary napkin is based on how comfortable you are with it. Some may be willing to experiment with new products and find out which suits them best where as some may not want to leave their comfort zone. The product features and advertisement, personal and social factors will attract the crowd that is willing to experiment, while women who are loyalty and brand knowledge focused may change the type of sanitary napkin but not the brand. Having a sanitary napkin that fits you properly provides you with the protection and freedom you need. No matter what factor decides your sanitary napkin preference your priority should be to forbid your natural and healthy cycle from getting in the way of your exercising, having fun, and enjoying life.

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IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM) is UGC approved Journal with SI. No. 4481, Journal no. 46879.

Dr. J.Krithika " Women's Product Preference with Reference to Sanitary Napkins". IOSR Journal of Business and Management (IOSR-JBM), Vol. 21, No. 2, 2019, pp. -.01-04