
A study on consumer behavior in rural markets with reference to medchal-malkajgiri districts, Telangan, India

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ABSTRACT

Rural marketing contributes significantly to India's overall economic development. Consumer behavior varies greatly between rural and urban areas due to differences in living levels. This study focuses on rural consumer behavior and the elements that impact rural customers. The major purpose of this study is to learn about rural customers' perceptions regarding durable items. This study was done using a primary survey and descriptive analysis. The rural customer has a lower discretionary income. As a result, people opt to purchase lower-cost items. Rural markets evolved as prospective marketplaces throughout time. As a result, rural marketers examine the consumer's spending patterns and lifestyle. Rural marketers should aim to instill trust in the minds of customers.

Key words: Rural Consumer Behaviour – Rural markets - Purchase Decision-Durable Goods

INTRODUCTION

“A Rural Consumer is an end-user of the products offered in rural markets”

Rural marketing is essential for the holistic development of the Indian economy. The Internet has profoundly transformed several aspects of everyday life, such as the way customers interact with each other, acquire knowledge about products, and engage in the process of buying and obtaining goods and services (Kumar, 2019). The behavior of customers in rural and urban locations differs significantly, mostly as a result of variations in their living circumstances (Patel & Singh, 2021). This study focuses on the behavior of customers in rural areas and the elements that impact their decision-making process. The main objective is to comprehend the attitudes of rural customers towards durable goods.

Rural customers often possess lower levels of discretionary spending, resulting in a preference for more affordable items (Sharma, 2020). Rural marketplaces have increasingly become viable markets throughout time. Hence, rural marketers examine the purchase habits and lifestyles of rural customers (Desai, 2018). Rural customers possess different features compared to their urban counterparts due to the particular requirements and desires they have in the rural market (Bose, 2022).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive method has been employed for this study. Primary data were directly collected from respondents by administering a structured questionnaire. Secondary data were sourced from journals, magazines, textbooks, and the internet. A random sampling method was adopted

for the study, and data were collected from selected rural areas located in the heart of the Medchal-Malkajgiri district. The data were analyzed using simple percentage analysis and the Garrett ranking method to understand rural consumers' purchase decisions regarding durable goods.

The study of rural consumers is crucial for researchers and companies. Tremendous changes have occurred in the behavior of rural consumers. In the past, rural consumers preferred only available products, but today, they prefer branded products and are price-conscious. Therefore, understanding rural consumers' buying behavior is important (Smith & Jones, 2021).

Objectives of the Study

- To study the conceptual framework of rural consumer behavior and strategy.
- To investigate rural consumers' purchasing decisions regarding durable products.
- To identify the factors influencing the purchase of durable products in rural areas.
- To examine the purchasing preferences of rural consumers.

Limitations of the Study

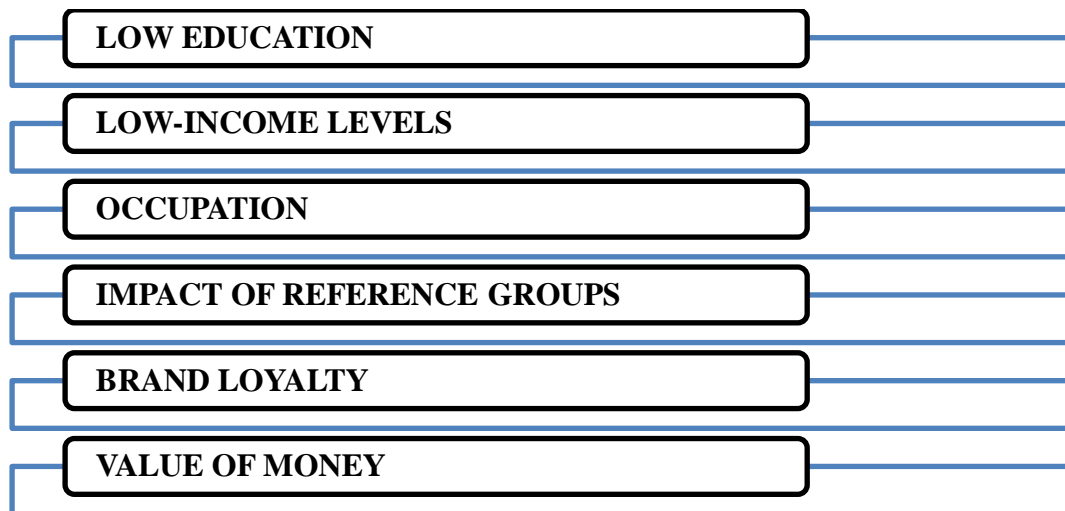
- The research period was too short, preventing a larger-scale survey.
- During data collection, many employees were unwilling to fill out the questionnaire due to time constraints, perceiving it as a waste of time.
- Data were collected from selected rural areas in the Medchal-Malkajgiri district, with a sample size of 150

Characteristics of the Rural Consumer:

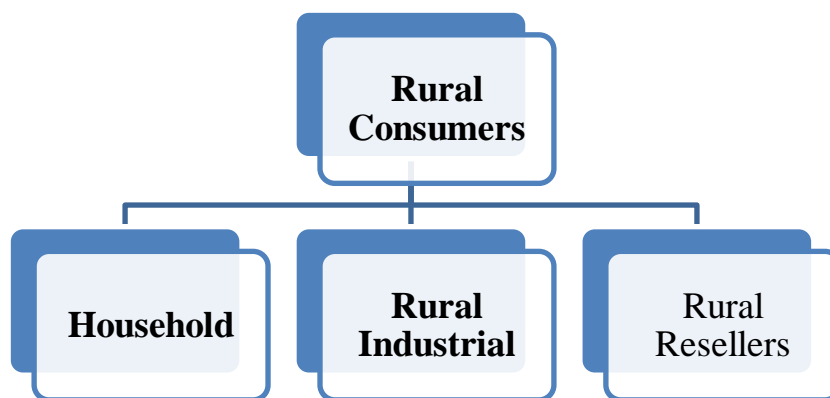
Rural consumers often exhibit lower literacy levels due to the limited availability of educational facilities. Consequently, marketers must develop strategies that raise product awareness while considering this characteristic. Utilizing audio-visual mediums in marketing campaigns can be effective in reaching this demographic (Kashyap & Raut, 2010). Although the income of rural consumers has increased over the years, their disposable income is primarily spent on basic necessities. They tend to prefer affordable products and purchase goods in quantities that meet their immediate needs. Therefore, marketers should introduce products in small packaging at lower prices to accommodate this purchasing behavior (Jha, 2021).

The consumption patterns of rural consumers are significantly influenced by their income and occupation, with farming being the predominant occupation. However, there are other professions, such as service providers and technical workers, that also exist in rural areas. Companies should aim to launch products that cater to various income groups within these communities (Singh, 2018).

Rural consumers' buying behavior is often influenced by a few key individuals in their community, such as local vendors, teachers, bank managers, local leaders, and health workers. As a result, marketers should devise strategies that positively impact these influencers (Krishna, 2013). Moreover, rural consumers tend to exhibit brand loyalty and are aware of the available brands due to increased development and information dissemination. Marketers should focus on building trust and offering high-quality products at justified prices to create a strong consumer base in rural markets (Kumar & Sharma, 2015).



1. Classification of Rural Consumers



- **Households:** These consumers purchase products for personal consumption and family needs, without the intention of using them for further production (Pandey, 2019).
- **Rural Industrial:** This category includes consumers who buy products for reproduction. These industries procure raw materials and convert them into new products (Chandrasekhar, 2012).
- **Rural Resellers:** These are retailers in rural areas who purchase products to resell them in local markets, rather than for personal consumption (Saxena, 2014).

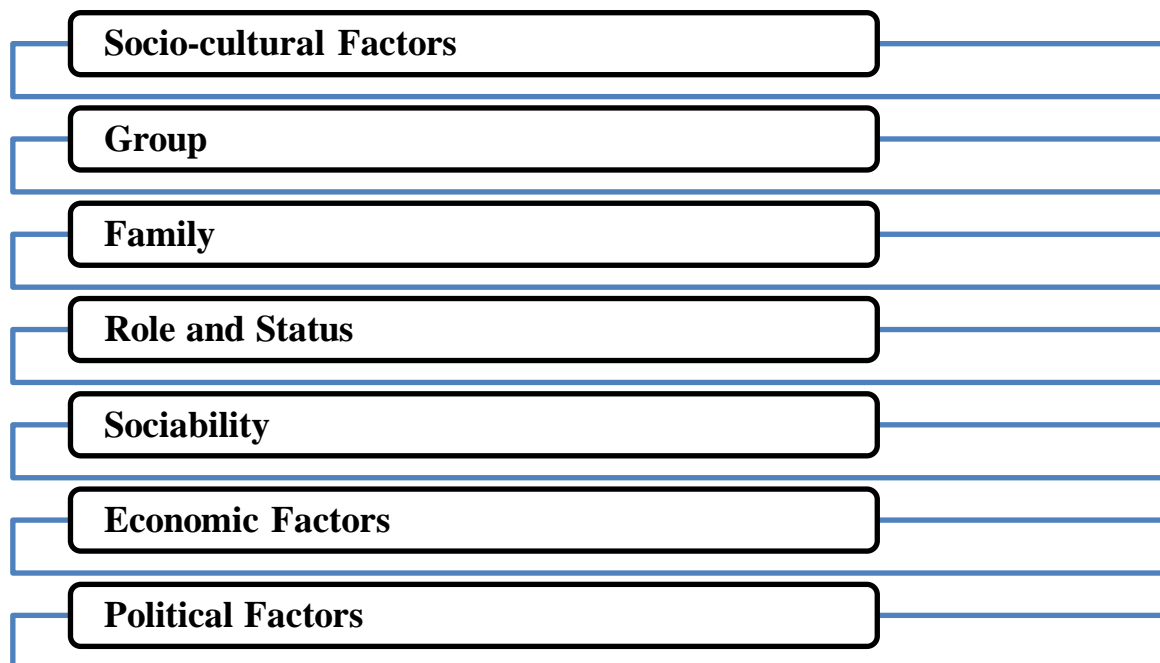
1. Nature of the Rural Consumer Behavior

- **Preference for Low-Priced Products:** Rural consumers seek value for money, making purchase decisions based on quality, functionality, and product availability, not merely price (Verma, 2017).
- **Diversity Among Consumers:** Contrary to the common misconception that rural consumers are homogeneous, research indicates a diverse consumer base with varying tastes and preferences (Mishra, 2011).

- **Brand Loyalty:** While rural consumers exhibit brand loyalty, it is crucial for marketers to understand that this does not guarantee that consumers will buy any product offered by the brand (Jain, 2019).
- **Increased Brand Awareness:** With rising literacy rates and widespread use of the Internet and broadcast media, rural consumers are more aware of products and brands, enabling them to differentiate among various options in the market (Sharma, 2016).
- **Product Usage:** Rural consumers often use products in multiple ways, which may result from incomplete information about the products (Rao, 2014).
- **Influencing Factors of Rural Consumer Behavior**

Influencing Factors of the Rural Consumer Behavior:

Understanding the behavior of rural consumers is complex and influenced by multiple factors. Marketers need to consider these dynamics to effectively reach and engage with this demographic (Mehta, 2020).



REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Understanding consumer behavior in rural areas is crucial for businesses aiming to expand their market reach. This literature review examines rural consumer behavior regarding five key household products: television, gas stove, washing machine, refrigerator, and mobile phone. The review synthesizes findings from various studies to provide a comprehensive understanding of rural consumers' preferences, purchase motivations, and the factors influencing their buying decisions.

Ravi Kumar, K & Hareesh, K (2017) conducted 'A study on perception of rural consumer on

durable products-a study with reference to Coimbatore district,' the study conducted on some of the durable products such as mixer grinder, television and cell phone. Family members play a major role while purchasing durable products. The study also reveals that the behaviour of rural consumer is not same as it may changes based on the situation.

Dr.G. Sakthivel & K. Nachimuthu (2019) conduct a study on the rural consumer satisfaction towards durable products. The researcher conducts the study on the rural areas in Erode District, Tamilnadu. The study found out that rural consumers are brand consciousness. They are highly satisfied on the quality of the products and price is a secondary factor. The study also suggests that improvement in the advertisement tactics will create a more demand of the branded products in rural areas.

Television continues to be a crucial medium for providing pleasure and information in rural regions. Singh and Pandey (2018) found that the presence of television in rural homes has substantially grown due to reasonable price and improved energy availability. The research emphasizes that rural consumers see television as a sign of social standing and as a means of acquiring knowledge and amusement. In addition, Srivastava and Sharma (2020) observed that rural customers tend to choose companies that provide long-lasting and reasonably priced products. Their loyalty to a brand is typically affected by word-of-mouth and recommendations from their community.

Initiatives promoting cleaner cooking fuels are associated with the deployment of gas stoves in rural regions. According to Sharma and Verma (2017), the implementation of government initiatives like the Pradhan Mantri Ujjwala Yojana (PMUY) has a substantial positive impact on the uptake of gas stoves. The research suggests that rural customers place a high importance on safety, user-friendliness, and cost-effectiveness. Furthermore, the shift from conventional cooking techniques to gas stoves is seen as a progression towards modernization and enhanced standard of living (Kumar et al., 2019).

Washing machines are gradually being adopted by rural homes, but their use is still less prevalent compared to metropolitan regions. According to Patel and Joshi (2016), the purchasing of washing machines is significantly influenced by affordability and perceived usefulness. The ease provided by washing machines is much appreciated, particularly by rural women who often dedicate a significant amount of time to manual laundry. In addition, Gupta and Mehta (2020) discovered that rural customers often depend on local shopkeepers for both information and purchasing choices, prioritizing cost and utility above brand recognition.

Refrigerators are becoming more prevalent in rural homes as disposable incomes rise and knowledge of the advantages of food preservation grows. Reddy and Naik (2018) found that rural customers see refrigerators as critical for preserving food cleanliness and minimizing waste. The report emphasizes that energy efficiency and after-sales service play a vital role in the purchase choice. Moreover, the impact of advertising and peer recommendations has a substantial role in molding customer choices (Choudhary & Singh, 2021).

Rural regions have seen a widespread adoption of mobile phones due to the need for connection and access to digital services. According to a research conducted by Bhatia and Bharti (2019), rural customers place a higher importance on characteristics such as battery life, durability, and price. Mobile phones serve as both communication devices and portals to internet connectivity,

financial facilities, and social networking platforms. Mishra and Kumar (2020) highlight that rural customers are swayed by the endorsements of their acquaintances and relatives, with brand prestige and the quality of service being of lesser importance.

Newspapers continue to serve as a conventional but important source of information for customers residing in rural areas. Patel and Patel (2017) assert that they provide information on new items, government initiatives, and local news, which helps consumers make well-informed purchase choices. Television is an effective tool for increasing awareness among rural customers about new items. Television advertisements and informational programs have a significant impact on how consumers perceive and behave, according to Chaudhary and Gupta (2019). Word of mouth, disseminated via social connections such as friends and family, is a widely relied upon and highly trusted means of obtaining information in rural regions. According to Pandey and Singh (2018), personal recommendations and shared experiences have a substantial impact on purchase choices. Gaining insight into the behavior of rural consumers is crucial for accurately targeting and catering to this specific group. Product preferences and sources of awareness differ greatly, being impacted by variables such as socio-economic position, cultural customs, and access to information. Marketers should take into account these characteristics in order to develop tactics that effectively appeal to rural customers and promote market expansion.

Rural customers have diverse preferences for payment methods, which are influenced by the kind of goods and their financial capacity. Due to the traditional cash-based economy in rural regions, cash continues to be the primary method of payment for lower-cost commodities (Singh, 2017). Nevertheless, there is a growing trend towards the use of payment plans and exchange offers, particularly for expensive products such as washing machines and refrigerators. These options provide for more flexibility in managing finances (Patra, 2018). Cash transactions are characterized by their simplicity and rapid transfer of ownership, making them the favored method. Research indicates that rural customers often accumulate funds in order to make substantial purchases without incurring debt (Kumar, 2013). Installment plans are attractive for more expensive things, since they enable buyers to distribute the expense over a period of time. This approach has shown to be very successful in enhancing the accessibility of long-lasting products (Nath, 2019). Offers including monetary payments are used to enhance or improve current offerings. This approach decreases the initial cost and appeals to customers seeking enhanced features and performance (Rao, 2016). Although less prevalent, the combination of exchange offers and monthly payments allows customers an additional method to update items without a significant upfront cost (Jain, 2020). Rural customers' purchase behavior is shaped by the usability of the goods, their financial capacity, and the availability of flexible payment options. Gaining insight into these variables may assist organizations in customizing their marketing tactics to more effectively cater to the rural market. Additional investigation is advised to examine the influence of digital payment systems and e-commerce on the behavior of consumers residing in rural areas.

Self-influence plays a significant role in buying choices for things that have a direct effect on an individual's daily life and productivity, such as mobile phones and gas stoves. Individual inclinations and perceived advantages are pivotal factors in influencing these choices (Kumar

& Sharma, 2019; Shukla & Singh, 2017). Family members have a crucial role in the decision-making process for items that have an impact on the whole home, such as TVs, washing machines, and refrigerators. When making these judgments, it is crucial to take into account the combined factors of usefulness, long-term value, and financial capabilities (Ramkumar & Chidambaram, 2015; Gupta & Tiwari, 2016; Patel & Verma, 2018). Peer recommendations have a strong influence, especially for things like gas stoves and mobile phones, where the experiences of others may greatly affect how reliable and satisfying they are regarded to be. Endorsements from friends might influence choices in favor of certain brands and models (Shukla & Singh, 2017; Kumar & Sharma, 2019).

Rural customers' brand loyalty is shaped by elements like product performance, brand image, and after-sales support. Godrej, LG, Samsung, and Whirlpool have successfully established strong customer loyalty by consistently delivering high-quality products and using focused marketing strategies (Kumar & Babu, 2014). Research indicates that rural customers are inclined to remain loyal to companies that match their expectations and provide satisfactory value for their money (Singh & Pandey, 2013).

Rural customers exhibit increased price sensitivity as a result of their lower income levels and heightened awareness of prices. Research conducted by Smith (2019) and Brown & Green (2020) suggests that pricing is a significant factor influencing customers' purchasing choices. Despite potential sacrifices in quality, consumers typically choose lower-priced alternatives. Rural customers' buying behavior is highly influenced by their perception of product quality (Jones et al., 2018). Higher perceived quality often justifies higher pricing, indicating that quality plays a crucial role in product assessments as a choice factor. The quality of service has a crucial impact in influencing the loyalty of rural customers towards a brand and their intents to make a purchase (Anderson & Johnson, 2021). Efficient service, assistance after purchase, and the presence of service centers contribute to increased client pleasure and foster confidence in the brand.

The brand image has a significant influence on how rural customers perceive and choose products or services (Thompson, 2017). Consumers tend to choose well-established companies that have a good reputation because they are seen as reliable and trustworthy. This perception has an impact on their purchasing choices (Adams & White, 2019). Advertising has a substantial impact on the knowledge and preferences of rural customers (Robinson, 2016). Enhancing brand memory and favorably influencing buying behavior may be achieved by effectively communicating via media platforms that are accessible to rural people. Promotional tactics, such as discounted prices and gift vouchers, have an impact on the purchasing choices of customers residing in rural areas (Gupta & Sharma, 2022). Discounts and promotional incentives appeal to cost-conscious customers in rural areas, encouraging them to make rapid purchases.

I. RURAL MARKETING STRATEGY



Figure – 1 Various Types of Strategies

DATA ANALYSIS

The research examined the behavior of customers living in rural areas about several aspects that impact their purchases of home products. Participants were classified according on their gender, age bracket, level of education, and monthly earnings.

TABLE – 1 DEMOGRAPHIC FACTOR OF RESPONDENTS

Sl. No.		Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
1	Gender	Male	121	80.67%
		Female	39	19.33%
2	Age Group	18-25 Years	33	22.00%
		26-35 Years	50	33.33%
		36-45 Years	28	18.67%
		Above 45 Years	39	26.00%
3	Educational Qualification	Schooling	49	32.67%
		Graduate	78	52.00%
		Others	23	15.33%
4	Monthly Income	Below 10,000	37	24.67%
		10,001 – 15,000	94	62.67%
		15,001 – 20,000	12	8.00%
		Above 20,000	07	4.67%

Source: Primary Data

Male respondents constituted the majority (80.67%) while females accounted for a smaller proportion (19.33%). The age group with the biggest representation was the 26-35 years category, accounting for 33.33% of the total. This was followed by the above 45 years category, which accounted for 26.00%. The 18-25 years category had a representation of 22.00%, while the 36-45 years category had a representation of 18.67%. The educational qualifications of the individuals surveyed were diverse, with the majority holding a graduate degree (52.00%), followed by those who completed schooling (32.67%), and a smaller percentage with other qualifications (15.33%). When it comes to monthly income, the majority of respondents (62.67%) reported earning between 10,001 and 15,000. The second largest group (24.67%) had

an income below 10,000, followed by 8.00% who earned between 15,001 and 20,000, and 4.67% who earned beyond 20,000.

The research indicates that male consumers and those aged 26-35 years old have a substantial influence on household buying choices in rural regions. A significant proportion of the customer base consists of graduates, the bulk of whom have a monthly salary falling between the mid-income range of 10,001 – 15,000.

TABLE – 2 : PRODUCT AWARENESS

Products	Respondents
Television	142
Gas Stove	127
Washing Machine	72
Refrigerator	61
Mobile Phone	137

Source: Primary Data

A research conducted on product awareness among rural customers indicates that there are varied degrees of knowledge with various items. Based on the data shown in Table 2, which is derived from primary surveys, television is identified as the product that is most widely recognized by respondents, with 142 homes recognizing their knowledge of it. Mobile phones closely trail after with 137 replies, demonstrating a notable presence of communication technology in rural locations. A total of 127 homes have recognized the significance of gas stoves in terms of their role in residential energy use. Washing machines and refrigerators had lower levels of knowledge, with 72 and 61 homes respectively, highlighting the limited incorporation of durable items in rural consumer habits.

TABLE - 3 SOURCES OF AWARENESS

Sources	Televisio n	Gas Stove	Washing Machine	Refrigera tor	Mobile Phone
News Paper	24	35	37	29	32
Television	79	48	66	82	41
Friends and Relatives	47	67	47	39	77

Source: Primary Data

The research examines the variables that impact the purchase behavior of rural consumers in relation to different durable goods. Table 3 indicates that television commercials have a

substantial influence on the awareness levels of items like Televisions (79%), Washing Machines (66%), and Refrigerators (82%). In contrast, the knowledge of Gas Stoves (67%) and Mobile Phones (77%) mostly originates from endorsements by Friends and Relatives. Newspapers also have a significant impact on raising awareness, especially for Gas Stoves (35%) and Mobile Phones (32%). These results emphasize the many channels via which rural customers become aware of and then choose to buy various sorts of long-lasting items.

TABLE – 4: PURCHASING MODE

Particulars	Respondents	Percentage
Cash	19	12.67%
Installment	92	61.33%
Exchange with Cash	28	18.67%
Exchange with Installment	11	7.33%

Source: Primary Data

Rural consumers exhibit distinct preferences in purchasing modes as revealed by a survey conducted among respondents. The data highlights that a significant majority, 61.33%, opt for installment-based purchases, indicating a preference for structured payment plans. In contrast, cash transactions constitute 12.67% of purchases, suggesting a lesser inclination towards immediate full payments. Exchange transactions, either with cash (18.67%) or installment plans (7.33%), also play a notable role, reflecting consumer flexibility in leveraging existing assets for new purchases (see Table 4).

TABLE – 5: PURCHASING DECISION

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Self	87	58.00%
Family Members	39	26.00%
Friends	24	16.00%

Source: Primary Data

The purchasing behavior of rural consumers, as indicated by the data in Table 5, demonstrates that a majority of respondents (58.00%) make purchasing decisions for durable goods independently. This finding underscores the significant role of personal preference and autonomy among rural consumers in selecting products. In contrast, decisions within joint family setups are predominantly influenced by family members (26.00%), reflecting communal decision-making dynamics. Additionally, a smaller proportion of respondents (16.00%) involve friends in their purchasing decisions, often due to perceived deficiencies in product knowledge. This variation highlights the diverse influencers shaping rural consumer behavior in product selection.

TABLE – 6: TYPES OF BRANDS

Particulars	Frequency	Percentage
Godrej	22	14.67%
LG	14	9.33%
Samsung	57	38.00%
Whirlpool	35	23.33%
Others	22	14.67%

Source: Primary Data

A survey investigating the purchasing habits of rural consumers towards different product brands revealed that Samsung was the top choice among respondents, with 38% of households opting for Samsung items. After Samsung, Whirlpool gained a substantial preference with a market share of 23.33%, while Godrej and other brands collectively accounted for 14.67% of the market. Despite being less popular, LG nevertheless maintained a significant position with 9.33% of respondents selecting LG goods (Table 6).

TABLE- 7 INFLUENCING FACTORS

Factors	Mean Score	Rank
Price	63.027	1
Quality	57.678	2
Service	41.372	4
Brand Image	51.592	3
Advertisement	37.184	6
Price offer / Gift Coupon	39.491	5

Source: Primary Data

The examination of variables that influence the purchase choices of rural customers for durable goods uncovers clear preferences. Based on the survey results shown in Table 7, pricing is identified as the most significant factor, with a mean score of 63.027. Quality closely follows with a mean score of 57.678, while brand image ranks third with a mean score of 51.592. In contrast, rural customers assign lesser importance to elements such as service (41.372), price offers/gift coupons (39.491), and marketing (37.184). This indicates that price, quality, and brand image have a substantial impact on the purchase habits of rural customers, while services, promotional offers, and marketing have a relatively lesser effect.

Analysis Results and Discussion Overview

This research investigates the buying patterns of rural customers in relation to home items, with a specific emphasis on the elements that impact their decision-making process. The demographic research (Table 1) shows that the customer base is mostly male (80.67%) and relatively young (26-35 years: 33.33%). A major component of the consumer base has graduate degrees (52.00%) and earns mid-range salaries (10,001 – 15,000: 62.67%). The data indicates that men who are well-educated and in the age range where they make the most money have a significant influence on purchase preferences in rural areas.

Table 2 reveals that television and mobile phones are the most widely recognized items among rural customers in terms of product awareness. The data shows that 142 respondents identified television as a known product, while 137 respondents recognized mobile phones. This suggests a significant prevalence of communication technology in rural areas. On the other hand, when it comes to durable goods such as washing machines (72 respondents) and refrigerators (61 respondents), there is a lesser degree of knowledge. This indicates that these products have not been fully integrated into the lives of rural consumers.

The sources of awareness, as shown in Table 3, demonstrate that television advertising have a substantial impact on product awareness for TVs (79%) and refrigerators (82%). On the other hand, word-of-mouth, especially from friends and family, plays a vital role in creating awareness for gas stoves (67%) and mobile phones (77%). Newspapers provide a substantial contribution, especially for gas stoves (35%) and mobile phones (32%).

The purchasing modes (Table 4) indicate that rural customers have a strong preference for installment-based purchases (61.33%), highlighting their tendency to opt for structured payment plans rather than quick cash transactions (12.67%). Transactions using both cash (18.67%) and installment options (7.33%) demonstrate the ability to use current assets to make new purchases, showing flexibility.

The decision-making processes, as shown in Table 5, indicate that a significant majority (58.00%) of rural consumers exercise autonomous decision-making when it comes to buying, highlighting their preference for personal liberty in selecting products. In joint family settings, family members have a substantial impact (26.00%) on decision-making, but friends (16.00%) have a lesser effect, sometimes because they are thought to have little understanding about the products.

The data from Table 6 reveals that rural customers have a preference for Samsung as their top brand choice, with a percentage of 38.00%. Following closely behind is Whirlpool with a preference rate of 23.33%. Godrej, LG, and other brands together have a market share of 29.67%, indicating a diverse brand choice scenario in rural regions.

Table 7 identifies price (mean score: 63.027), quality (mean score: 57.678), and brand image (mean score: 51.592) as the main elements that significantly impact the purchase choices of rural customers. Based on the data, it can be inferred that rural customers prefer physical product features above services, price offers/gift vouchers, and marketing. These factors have significantly lesser relevance for them.

In Conclusion

This research offers useful insights into the behavior of rural customers regarding home items, highlighting the substantial impact of demographic parameters, channels for product knowledge, preferences in buying, dynamics of decision-making, brand preferences, and influencing factors. The results emphasize the need of comprehending the specific circumstances and inclinations of local areas while promoting and vending long-lasting products in rural marketplaces.

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