

A study on Rural-Urban Purchase Motivators for Air Conditioners in Punjab : Implications for Marketers

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ABSTRACT

Indian rural market is emerging stronger with a gradual increase in disposable income of the rural folk. The structure of the Indian economy indicates that a significant portion of the total income is derived from agriculture income. In addition, better procurement prices fixed for various crops and better yields due to many research programmes have also contributed to the strengthening of the rural markets. 'Go rural' is the slogan of marketers after analyzing the socio-economic changes in villages. The Rural consumers have become the prime target market for consumer durable and non-durable products, food, construction, electrical, electronics, automobiles, banks, insurance companies and other sector. The Present study explores the significant motivators for Air-conditioner purchase in economically significant rural and urban areas of Prosperous State of Punjab. A survey of 596 rural & urban respondents (with use of Z test) brings out significant findings regarding ACs purchase. Finally, some useful implications for marketers have been offered at the end.

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Introduction

The rural market of India offers huge potential and is viewed as scattered in the sense that it consists of over 6.27 lacs villages spread over 3.2 million square kilometers. About 750 million Indians live in rural areas and finding and delivering them the products is a tough task (Assocham, 2006).

With 128 million households, the rural population is nearly three times the urban. As a result of the growing affluence, fuelled by good monsoons and the increase in agricultural output, Rural India has a large consuming middle class with 58 per cent of the total disposable income. The importance of the rural market for FMCG and consumer durable marketers is underlined by the fact that the rural market accounts for close to 70 per cent of toilet-soap users and 38 per cent of all two-wheeler purchased. The rural market accounts for half the total market for TV sets, fans, pressure cookers, bicycles, washing soaps, blades, tea, salt and toothpowder. The rural market for FMCG products is growing much faster than the urban counterpart. Over the years, India's largest MNC, Hindustan Lever, a subsidiary of Unilever, has built a strong distribution system which helps its brands reach the interiors of the rural market. To service remote village, stockists use auto rickshaws, bullock-carts and even boats in the backwaters of Kerala. Coca-Cola, which considers rural India as a future growth driver, has evolved a hub and spoke distribution

model to reach the villages. To ensure full loads, the company depot supplies, twice a week, large distributors who act as hubs. These distributors appoint and supply, once a week, smaller distributors in adjoining areas. LG Electronics defines all cities and towns other than the seven metro cities as rural and semi-urban market. To tap these unexplored country markets, LG has set up 45 area offices and 59 rural remote area offices (Balakrishna & Sidharth, 2005).

Considering the recent growth in rural durable (G-III expensive items) market, big MNCs have started focussing on penetration in these markets. Further, LG and Samsung are likely to sweep the entire refrigeration & AC segment in the coming years as per the turnover shown by them in the past few years. Hence, rural markets provide immense opportunities for these capable market leaders who can capitalize these opportunities to the best of their potential (CMIE, 2005).

Need & Objectives of the Study

As discussed above, the present need is to focus on the rural markets. This is of paramount importance in the Indian marketing environment as rural and urban markets in our country are so diverse in nature that urban marketing programme just cannot be successfully extended to the rural markets. A comparative study is needed to assess the similarities and differences among buying

behaviour (regarding AC Purchase Motivators) displayed by urban and rural consumers with regard to durables. It will guide various durables manufacturing companies about modifications required in present marketing strategies applied for tapping urban markets and to decide, if possible and to what extent, these strategies can be molded and applied successfully to the rural markets.

Various Studies conducted in the past at an aggregate level have demonstrated that purchase behaviour in durable sector is the most worthwhile to study (Kapoor, 1976; Saini, 1986; Gupta, 1987; Ahmed, 1991; Herbig, 1997; Hundal, 2001; Narang, 2001; Trehan and Singh, 2002; Shivakumar and Arun, 2002; Arora, 2002; Gupta and Chundawat, 2002; Bansal and Easwaran, 2004; Reddy, 2004; Mason & Himes, 2005;).

Review of Related Studies

Gupta (1987) examined the factors motivating consumer to buy durables, factors considered by them in making brand choice, source of information considered, role of family members in influencing brand choice and to examine consumer satisfaction. 'Source of entertainment' and 'educative and informative' were the major motivating factor for television purchase. For refrigerator, 'helpful in protection from food perishing', 'necessity' and 'bulk purchase

economy' had been considered as major motivational factors. For moped, 'an economical mode of transport', 'saving of time' and 'necessity' had been considered as major motivational factors. Durability, good operation, brand image, and better guarantee were the factors considered significant. A moderate brand loyalty has been found for television, refrigerator and moped. Advertising had been emerged as major source of information, followed by 'recommendation by others' and 'print advertisement'. Majority of respondents were satisfied with after sales service. He suggested awareness on the part of the marketers about the preferences, motivations, expectations, attitudes and opinions of consumers.

Kashyap (2000) speaks of the different attitudes and beliefs influencing rural and urban purchase behaviour. He opines that urban purchase behaviour is individual-driven whereas in rural areas, decision-making is a collective process. He projected that the first five years of the new millennium will belong neither to the urban markets which have reached saturation and where margins are under pressure nor to the export markets which suffer from inadequate infrastructure back home and uncompetitive prices overseas. It will belong to rural marketing. Corporate India still has to wake up fully to this reality.

Hundal (2001) attempted to study the rural buying behaviour in Ludhiana, Jalandhar and Amritsar

districts of the Punjab region. The main objectives of the study were to assess the general attitude of rural consumers for consumer durables, to find out the durable brand ownership of rural consumers, to examine factors considered by them in making product, brand choice, to investigate the role of the family members, different groups, media in influencing purchase decision of rural consumers, to analyze the post purchase behaviour and satisfaction, to ascertain intensity of brand loyalty and the appeal of promotional schemes. A sample of 325 respondents (households) was selected on the basis of stratified sampling, random sampling and judgement sampling. After sales service, model availability and better guarantee/warranty were factors considered for product choice. Product attributes were: provision of remote control, picture quality, number of channels. For washing machines, capacity, noise level, 1-2-1 action; for refrigerator, automatic defrosting, natural food preservation and 'Noise level'; For cooler, pump quality, durability of care and noise level. 'Own Final Decision' followed by 'Wife/Husband Together', friends had influence on purchase decision in that order. The prominent channels of information were; television advertisements, word of mouth and newspapers, followed by magazines, ads displayed inside shops. He revealed that in case of non-availability of a particular brand, a consumer was more inclined to look for them in other market or area to have the brand he had decided, followed by wait for

stock to come. Majority of rural consumers were found satisfied with brand choice. Analysis revealed a good brand loyalty to television, washing machine and refrigerator and not towards air cooler brand. Finally, he concluded that rural consumer considers consumer durables as a necessity as he perceives them to be a source of entertainment, education, information and comfort. He suggested increase in number of distribution channels; introducing lower costs products with more focus on quality and brand image and family liking and after-sales services.

Arora (2002) observed a change in the pattern of buying behaviour of rural families of Uttar Pradesh and Haryana. The role of male rural youth in the purchase decisions of the family had been becoming more and more significant. A survey was done to understand the media habits of the rural youth, aspirations of rural youth, role and influence of the youth in buying decisions of the family for various categories of product and the stage in their life after which the opinion of the youth was considered significant. The results indicated that the most important age group of male rural youth that had a major influence in family buying decisions and were also concerned about latest brands and products was the age group of 20 to 22 years. The study revealed that for family durables, like television, audio system and refrigerator, youth could be an important influencer though not the ultimate decision-maker.

Trehan and Singh (2002) in a comparative study on urban and rural consumer behaviour, observed that urban consumer behaviour is significantly different from rural counterpart in considering brand image, guarantee, warranty, credit availability, foreign collaboration, latest technology and after sales service but found similarity in their behaviour in considering durability and price while making purchase decision for colour television.

Bansal and Easwaran (2004) explained some factors that need to be kept in mind so as to influence the buying behaviour of the people of Punjab. The characteristics that a marketer needs to highlight in this product are modern way of cooking, a premium product, imported technology, control panel in Punjabi language, smart looks, international styling, faster cooking, heat controls and offers variety in terms of dishes that can be cooked, payment in easy instalments.

Mason and Himes (2005) gained an insight into characteristics of consumers experiencing dissatisfaction with some household appliances as well as a profile of those consumers who expressed their dissatisfactions and those who didn't and the places turned to by those consumers who used to complain. The extent of dissatisfaction was slightly more than 44 percent. Respondents were asked about the nature of their dissatisfaction concerning the appliances they owned. More than

89 percent related to performance and were sufficiently great to affect usability, while slightly less than six percent concerned the service life of the appliance. Study showed that out of 26% respondents owning central air conditioners, near about 12.1% expressed dissatisfaction while out of 43% respondents owning window air conditioners, only 2% expressed same. For 88% respondents owning refrigerator, about 6.3% lodged complaints. For clothes-washer (73% respondents), about 3.3 % were the complaint reports and for colour TV (43.6% respondents), about 13% lodged the complaints. These variables namely; number of people in household, educational level of household head, annual household income, age of household, marital status, whether the house hold owns or rents its home, were the prime reasons for the differences in the socio-economic characteristics of households experiencing or not experiencing dissatisfaction with consumer appliances in the preceding 12 month period.

Shirodkar (2005) presents insights in to Chinese consumer behaviour by highlighting the importance given by them to various attributes such as price, quality, etc. and also factors considered while shopping and the changing importance to each of these individual factors leading to buying decision-making. He states that Chinese consumers today are looking for aesthetic and social value instead of just focusing on the basic

needs of warmth and the protective function of products. 'Keep-up-with-the-neighbours' effect: an aspect of Chinese culture that influence buyers' behaviour is the reluctance to pioneer. The typical Chinese consumer does not want to be among the first to try a new product, but the discomfort of being 'behind the times' may make them think that if the neighbours have tried it, they had better follow suit soon. Such a strong collective characteristic also imply that informal channels of communication are important in Chinese society. Chinese consumers tend to rely more on word-of-mouth communication. Brand loyalty in the big three cities is especially high, He finished with a suggestion that to ensure success, products must be adjusted to the peculiarities of Chinese tastes and habits.

CMIE (2005) states that production index of consumer goods continued to display impressive year on year growth in April 2004. During the month, index was up by 17.7 percent as compared with a negligible 0.4 percent growth in April 2003. This was also the eighth consecutive month of double-digit growth. This impressive production growth of consumer durables in the past several months has been due to increased demand from rural sector on account of higher growth in income.

The Hindu (2008) speaks of the attempts made by Industrial and automotive battery major, Amara Raja Batteries (ARBL) with new retail concept —

Powerzone — for the rural market. The idea is to cater to the growing need for better technology, at affordable price, in the rural market. The efforts are to take on the unorganised sector in the rural market. The new Powerzone range of batteries is designed to offer 'value for money' in the low-end segment, through which it hopes to garner an increased share of 15 per cent in next three years.

Kaur (2008) states that the Indian mobile handset market is witnessing adoption from both ends of the customer spectrum—from a value conscious mass market user to a customer demanding the best features and innovative products. With most urban areas already covered by mobile operators, 40% of new subscribers are coming from rural areas. By 2010, the rural population is likely to touch 800 mn. According to V&D estimates, of the next 250 mn users as many as 100 mn will be from the rural parts of the country.

According to the **Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (2008)**, the number of rural households using consumer products has grown from 136 million in 2004 to 143 million in 2007. A pointer to the fact that rural consumers are moving to branded products. In a report by market research firm AC Nielsen, in April-May 2008, it was seen for the first time that the rural market has outpaced urban India in certain key product categories.

Babu P George, Manoj Edward (2009) examine that how the degree of personal involvement in a purchase decision affects the information needed to reduce cognitive dissonance associated with that purchase. The authors argue that, highly involved individuals, because of their high involvement in purchase decisions, are rigid in their preconceived cognitions that led to the purchase. Consequently, they tend to downplay the new cognition and actively look out for purchase supportive information, rather than changing the old cognition that led to the purchase decision. Also, it is proposed that, to overcome the cognitive dissonance associated with a high involvement purchase, more supportive information is needed to overcome the cognitive dissonance associated with a low involvement purchase. Yet another finding of the study is that the willingness of a dissonant individual to accept the new cognition increases with the elapse of time from the time of occurrence of the cognitive dissonance. The study also unveils that, for a typical purchase, the degree of cognitive dissonance felt by more involved purchasers is less than that felt by less involved purchasers. Thus, interestingly, even though the degree of cognitive dissonance felt by highly involved purchasers is lower, the difficulty for them to grapple with it is higher. An associated finding is that more planned and less spontaneous buying behaviour is associated with a higher degree of cognitive dissonance.

Database & Methodology

The present study is mainly based on primary data collected from around 600 households (owning four durables selected for study), 300 each from rural and urban areas of Punjab. In order to make an in-depth study of the factors associated with durables purchase decisions, respondents were interviewed with the help of a pretested undisguised questionnaire. The questionnaire was tested by means of a pilot survey carried out among 30 consumers from the region. The respondents were widely distributed across socio-economic classes. Due to incomplete responses, the effective sample was 596 i.e. 299 from rural respondents (Group I) and 297 from urban ones (Group II). Only those families were selected whose monthly earnings exceeded Rs. 10,000. The survey unit was taken to be the family unit as represented by the respondent who answered questions affecting the family as a whole. This choice of survey respondents was restricted to persons responsible for purchases of all durable products of the family, including these four products selected for the study.

Group I (Rural) About 58% rural respondents were males and 42% were females. Age wise respondents below 20 years were 14%, between 20-30 years were 26%, between 30-40 years were 35.80 %, between 40-50 years were 15.05% and above 50 years were 9.03%.

Group II (Urban) About 52% urban respondents were males and 48% were females. Age wise

respondents below 20 years were 6%, between 20-30 years were 16%, between 30-40 years were 38%, between 40-50 years were 24% and above 50 years were 16%.

Methodology

Commensurate with the objectives of the study, a number of tools of analysis have been used. The various tools used were:

- **Z Test (Independent Samples):** Z test was applied to test the significance of difference in the means between the two independent samples of urban and rural populations.
- **F Test:** F test was used to test whether the two populations have equal variances or not.

Sample Area & Sampling Techniques

A sample of around 600 households, 300 each from rural and urban areas of Punjab was selected. Three economically significant districts of the Punjab viz. Ludhiana, Jalandhar and Amritsar were selected for the survey. A Hundred families each had been covered from both urban and rural areas of these districts. Five blocks from each district were considered on random basis and from each block; four villages were taken on judgement basis covering five families per village on convenience cum judgement basis. While the sample in urban areas were considered on judgement cum convenience basis keeping in view their socio-

economic characteristics. The families residing in the posh and planned colonies were selected for the survey.

Motivational Factors for Air Conditioner Purchase

Data Analysis

For the purpose of study, both the rural and urban samples were asked to rate the five factors that motivate purchase of air-conditioners (viz; item of necessity, symbol of social status, marketing influence, brand reputation, a luxurious item) on five-point Likert (Importance) scale. These factors were adapted from the study of various scholars like Gupta (1987), Hundal (2001), Narang (2001), Donthu and Gilliland (2002), Gupta and Chundawat (2002), and after a long consultation with the various experts on the topic of consumer behaviour. Five sets of hypotheses were framed to test the significance of difference of means between rural and urban respondents (see Table 1):

Table 1 : Statements Showing Hypotheses

S.No	Null Hypothesis	Statements
HI	$H_0 : \mu^1_1 = \mu^1_2$	There is no significant difference between rural and urban consumers regarding air-conditioner as 'an item of necessity'.
III	$H_0 : \mu^2_1 = \mu^2_2$	There is no significant difference between rural and urban consumers regarding air-conditioner as 'a symbol of social status'.
IIII	$H_0 : \mu^3_1 = \mu^3_2$	There is no significant difference between rural and urban consumers regarding 'marketing influence' on air- conditioner purchase.
HIV	$H_0 : \mu^4_1 = \mu^4_2$	There is no significant difference between the perceptions of rural and urban consumers about 'brand reputation' for air- conditioner.
HV	$H_0 : \mu^5_1 = \mu^5_2$	There is no significant difference between rural and urban consumers with regard to air-conditioner as 'a luxurious item'.

F test was applied to test whether two populations have same variances or not and result show that for all the five variables, null hypothesis of equal variances has been accepted. F values for variables are 9.354, 46.338, 4.637, 0.066 and 2.304 respectively (See table 2). While p (significance) values are 0.002, 0.000, 0.032 and 0.797, 0.130 and hence, p values for variables (04) and (05) exceed 0.05 level of significance. As a result, Z values based on equal variances will be considered for analysis for last two (04) and (05) variables only i.e., brand reputation and a luxurious item. While for rest of the variables Z value based on unequal variances will be considered for analysis. These variables are: Item of necessity, symbol of social status, marketing influence. (Z values for 5 variables under study are shown in table 4)

Table 2 : Test For Equality of Variances

Variable	F Value	Two-Tail Probability
VAR (01)	9.354	.002
VAR (02)	46.338	0.000
VAR (03)	4.637	0.032
VAR (04)	.066	0.797
VAR (05)	2.304	0.130

(At .05 Level of Significance)

**Table 3 : Z Test for Two-Independent Samples
 Summary Statistics**

GROUP	NUMBER OF CASES	MEAN	STANDARD ERROR MEAN
Variable 01:Rural (G1)Urban (G2)	299297	2.8723.013	9.658E8.872E
Variable 02:Rural (G1)Urban (G2)	299297	3.7963.902	7.832E6.454E
Variable 03:Rural (G1)Urban (G2)	299297	3.6283.481	7.983E8.547E
Variable 04:Rural (G1)Urban (G2)	299297	3.7323.804	6.854E6.632E
Variable 05:Rural (G1)Urban (G2)	299297	4.3344.239	4.056E4.424E

(At .005 Level of Significance)

Table 4 : Z Test With Two-Tail Probability

Equal Variances Assumed				Equal VariancesNot Assumed		
Variable	Z Value	Degrees of Freedom	Two-Tail Probability	Z Value	Degrees of Freedom	Two-Tail Probability
VAR (01)	-1.071	594	0.284	-1.072*	590.093	0.284
VAR (02)	-1.047	594	0.295	-1.048*	573.764	0.295
VAR (03)	1.260	594	0.208	1.259*	590.977	0.208
VAR (04)	-0.758*	594	0.449	-0.758	593.481	0.449
VAR (05)	1.590*	594	0.112	1.589	589.228	0.112

NOTE: * indicates z values selected for analysis.

Interpretation of Data

Variable (01) - 'Item of Necessity'

Sample mean of G1 = 2.872

Sample mean of G2 = 3.013

Z value is -1.072 with 590.09 (with equal variances not assumed) degrees of freedom. Two-tailed p value is 0.284 signifying the acceptance of null hypothesis at 5 % level of significance. Hence, the difference between both groups about their perception regarding air conditioner as an item of necessity is insignificant.

Variable (02) - 'Symbol of Social Status'

Sample mean of G1 = 3.796

Sample mean of G2 = 3.902

Z value is -1.048 with 573.76 degrees of freedom and assumption of unequal variances. p value is 0.295, highlighting a clear acceptance for null hypothesis at 5% level of significance. We can say that both the groups hold similar opinion about role of air-conditioners in social status.

Variable (03) - 'Marketing Influence'

Sample mean of G1 = 3.628

Sample mean of G2 = 3.481

Z value is 1.259 at 590.97 degrees of freedom and unequal variances assumed. p value is 0.208. Null

hypothesis is accepted at 5 % level of significance. Rural mean responses are slightly higher claiming comparative high impact of marketing influence on their purchase decision. Difference is insignificant in their perceptions about marketing influence.

Variable (04) - 'Brand Reputation'

Sample mean of G1 = 3.732

Sample mean of G2 = 3.804

Z value with assumption of unequal variances at 594 degrees of freedom is -0.758, p value 0.449. Null hypothesis is accepted i.e. difference in their perceptions is insignificant. Both groups are similar in their opinion about the role of brand reputation in air conditioner purchase decision.

Variable (05) - 'A Luxurious Item'

Sample mean of G1 = 4.334

Sample mean of G2 = 4.239

Z value is 1.59 at 594 degrees of freedom and assumption of equal variances. p value is 0.112 implying acceptance of null hypothesis at 5 % level of significance i.e. difference is insignificant regarding air-conditioner as a luxurious item.

Major Findings & Implications

- Results say that both the groups have assigned very low importance (rural mean=2.872, urban mean =3.013) for item of necessity. Null hypothesis was accepted at 5 percent level of significance.

- Urban people have shown a great concern for social status and assign high importance to the variable as a result. On the other hand, rural respondents too, are seemed to be socially aware of the status importance in social life. Their differences in perceptions are found to be statistically insignificant.
- Marketing tactics continue to dominate rural mind and hence, were assigned a high rate by rural respondents as compared to those of urban counterparts, though difference is found to be statistically insignificant.
- For an expensive item like air-conditioner, brand reputation is assumed to have an everlasting impact on consumers' thinking. This is what has happened in this case as well. Both groups have rated brand reputation as a great motivator behind air conditioner purchase.
- Both the groups undoubtedly, are unhesitant in regarding air conditioner as a luxurious item. The difference is found to be statistically insignificant.

Conclusion

Major electronic companies have observed a vast scope for air conditioner product in unexplored rural markets of India. Modern marketing calls for maximising consumer satisfaction. Air conditioner

like products are always to make human life comfortable and luxurious and hence, more and more advanced features you offer in your products, more consumers will be attracted towards your product. Globally reputed companies always have an edge over the newly established companies dealing in air conditioner, as both the groups have assigned high rating to brand reputation. With the rising rural prosperity on one side and unexplored rural durable market on the other, a prosperous future can safely be predicted for air conditioner manufacturing companies.

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