

VARYING PERSPECTIVES ON THE INDIAN RURAL MARKET AND IMPACT OF SELECT PSYCHOGRAPHIC AND SOCIOGRAPHIC FACTORS ON BRAND LOYALTY

ABSTRACT

In the era of globalization, markets are becoming extremely competitive with business organizations fighting hard to sustain profitability. Whether representing big multinational companies and brands or local small businesses and lesser known brands, marketers dream of having a sound base of loyal customers. Given the scenario, it is natural that marketers would want to explore new and virgin markets, which are not fully tapped, and which hold ample opportunities for growth. The Indian rural market accounts for roughly 12% global population, and offers plethora of business opportunities with challenges. However, in spite of the huge opportunity that the rural market affords, it has not been decoded in the true sense, and has not been explored to its potential. Further, rural markets and rural marketing as a subject of study among researchers, academicians and practitioners, is at a nascent stage. Rural markets are unique and not like urban markets, wherein the rural customer appears to be much different from their urban counterparts. Their cognitive processes, the behavioural patterns, and the socio-economic, as well as the socio-cultural conditions, are different, and dynamic in nature. An understanding of the impact of the key psychographic and sociographic factors influencing the brand loyalty of rural customers is the key to gaining insights into the decision making and buying behaviour of rural customers. This study has been conducted with this objective, and has been carried out in two phases. The first phase of research is performed mainly through a qualitative methodology where aspirations of rural customers and views of practicing managers and customers on rural markets and rural marketing are delineated. The second phase of the study is performed predominantly through quantitative methodology. Three independent scales for psychographics, sociographics and brand loyalty have been developed through a systematic scale development process. The key psychographic and sociographic factors have been identified, and their impact on brand loyalty has been explored. The impact of select psychographic and sociographic factors has also been explored both individually and cumulatively. The findings of the study have managerial and academic implications, and contribute significantly to the body research.

Key Words: Rural Market, Psychographics, Sociographics, Brand Loyalty.