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**An Empirical Study of The Impact of Selected Distribution - Related Factors on Brand Loyalty of Women in Gujarat**

**Abstract ::** *One of the most important issues that businesses face today, is Brand Allegiance. Marketers of goods and services therefore, frantically search for strategies in order to have a set of brand loyal consumers. Whether, it is product, promotion, price or place related decisions, almost all decisions a company makes as regards its marketing mix are inextricably related with brand loyalty. For any marketer brand loyalty therefore, is a very important phenomenon. The present study has been directed towards exploring the brand loyalty behavioural pattern of the consumers, the main aim being to analyse the significance of the relationship between Selected Distribution Related Factors and Brand Loyalty of Women in the State of Gujarat. The findings indicate that Two out of the Three Distribution Related Factors studied viz. Easy to access and convenient brand store locations and Sufficient number of brand outlets Do Not Have a Significant Relationship with the Brand Loyalty of Women Skincare Cosmetics Consumers in the four Major Cities of Gujarat. Whereas, the remaining One viz. Wide availability of consumer's favorite brand in the stores, Has a Significant Relationship with the Brand Loyalty of Women Skincare Cosmetics Consumers in the State of Gujarat.*

**Key words::** - Brand Allegiance, Distribution, Store Location, Brand Outlets, Wide Availability, Skincare Cosmetics.

**INTRODUCTION AND PROBLEM IDENTIFICATION ::**

In the modern marketing environment consumers are becoming more and more demanding since the market is glutted with endless products and countless brands and offering them rich choices. In pursuit of achieving the best possible value for their money, modern day consumers are gradually becoming quite choosy about products/services on the basis of their intrinsic value. Gone are the days of the marketers with the placid assumption that a market once won is theirs'. In view of the same, marketers of today frantically search strategies to maintain a set of consumers who are loyal to the products/services that they are offering for sale. This phenomenon is particularly significant for the low priced, daily use, non durable products which are purchased repeatedly by the consumers at frequent intervals popularly termed as fast moving consumer goods (FMCGs). The purchase behaviour of the consumers for such products is of special interest to the marketer since these items are purchased repeatedly and it is this purchase that results in generating volumes and profits.

A number of research studies are, indicative to the fact consumers in general are found to be quite loyal to the brands of frequently purchased items. Brand loyal consumers as a matter of fact, provide the basis for a stable and growing market share of a company. Therefore, interest of marketers hover around the ways and means to develop and sustain brand allegiance for their products and services. However, retaining customers in a highly competitive and volatile market place is indeed a difficult proposition.

Till date, good amount of researches have been undertaken to study various aspects of Brand Loyalty at the International Level. However one is yet to come across researches in the field of Brand Loyalty at the National Level in India or within the State of Gujarat, since the concept of Branding is yet to pick up in a developing nation like ours as compared to western more developed nations.

Against such a backdrop, the researcher has tried to analyse the Impact of Selected Distribution Related Factors on the Brand Loyalty of the Women Skincare Cosmetics consumers/users in the state of Gujarat, titled – "An Empirical Study of The Impact of selected DISTRIBUTION- RELATED Factors ON BRAND LOYALTY of women in the state of Gujarat."

### **Factors explaining Brand Loyalty::**

Numerous studies attempting to explain brand loyalty have been largely inconclusive to this point the following results appear to be indicated.

1. Some economic demographic and psychological variables are related to brand loyalty but tend to be product specific rather than general across products.
2. Loyalty behaviour of an informal group leader influences the behaviour of other group members.
3. Some consumer characteristics are related to store loyalty, which in turn is related to brand loyalty.
4. Brand loyalty is positively related to perceived risk and market structure variables such as the extensiveness of distribution and market share of the dominant brand, but inversely related to the number of stores shopped.
5. Effect of out of stock conditions—A potentially important influence on brand loyalty is the possibility of brand substitution. It has been found that between 19 per cent and perhaps 33 per cent of shoppers presold by an advertisement campaign change their minds and switch to another brand when they get inside the super market.

### **OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY ::**

As mentioned earlier, there are numerous factors which determine the extent and pattern of consumer brand loyalty. These can be divided broadly into Consumer oriented and Product Oriented Factors. This paper examines the relative significance of Impact of Selected Product -Oriented Factors viz. Distribution of Branded Products that include (Good and Easy to Access Brand Store locations, Sufficient number of Brand Outlets and Wide availability of the Brand in Stores on Brand Loyalty of Women Skincare Cosmetics Consumers.

Thus, the broad objectives of the study are:

1. To analyze the Significance of Relationship between a Woman's Brand Loyalty for her Favourite Brand of Skincare Product and Good and Easy to Access Brand Store locations.
2. To analyze the Significance of Relationship between a Woman's Brand Loyalty for her Favourite Brand of Skincare Product and Sufficient number of Brand Outlets and
3. To analyze the Significance of Relationship between a Woman's Brand Loyalty for her Favourite Brand of Skincare Product and Wide availability of the Brand in Stores.

### **HYPOTHESES OF THE STUDY::**

1. There is no significant relationship between a Woman's Brand Loyalty for her favourite brand of Skincare Products and Good and Easy to Access Brand Store locations.
2. There is no significant relationship between a Woman's Brand Loyalty for her favourite brand of Skincare Products and Sufficient number of Brand Outlets and
3. There is no significant relationship between a Woman's Brand Loyalty for her favourite brand of Skincare Products and Wide availability of the Brand in Stores.

### **POPULATION AND NATURE OF THE STUDY ::**

The Population of the study consists of Women Skincare Cosmetics Consumers / Buyers across the state of Gujarat above 18 years of Age. Though the population of the study is finite but very large sized, the researcher considering her personal limitations has adopted sample method of study in place of census method. For the purpose of the Study, the researcher has collected 200 samples each from the four major cities of Gujarat viz. Ahmedabad, Surat, Vadodara and Rajkot spanning across different age groups, occupations, income groups, educational qualifications, etc. to make a total of 800 sample respondents in all. The Convenience Sampling Method of data collection has been used due to time constraints.

### **METHOD OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS ::**

The study is primarily based on Primary data collected through a well-structured closed-ended

questionnaire containing mainly dichotomous, scaling and multiple choice type questions. Secondary data too has been used by the researcher as per the requirement of the study. The secondary sources like Internet, Journals Periodicals, Magazines, Newspapers, etc. have been used for Literature Review, Conceptual Reference and analysis of the Beauty and Personal Care Industry.

Primary Data collected through the questionnaire has been classified, tabulated and analyzed with the help of SPSS. For the purpose of testing the hypotheses the researcher has used non-parametric tests like chi- square test at five percent level of significance.

### **ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION ::**

Through a dichotomous question the respondents were asked if they were especially Loyal to any particular Brand/s of skincare products.

Thus, the dependent variable brand loyalty along with each of the Product Related Variable (independent variable/s) have been identified and chi-square tests applied in appropriate cases to draw inferences.

### **Good and Easy to Access Brand Store locations and brand loyalty**

#### **CHI -SQUARE TEST**

**Table. 1.**

#### **Good and Easy to Access Brand Store locations and a Woman's Brand Loyalty for her Favorite Brand**

#### **Chi -Square Test**

Degree of Freedom (d.f.)	Level of Significance	Calculated Value of Chi -Square	Table Value of Chi -Square	Hypothesis Accepted
4	5%	4.509	9.488	Null Hypothesis Is Accepted

**[Source:Primary Data from Survey]**

Table 1. depicts the results of the Chi-square test. It is found that at 4 degrees of freedom (d.f.) and 5% level of significance, the calculated value of (4.509) of the chi-square is less than the table value (9.488). **Hence the Null hypothesis that There is no significant relationship between a Woman's Brand Loyalty for her favorite brand of Skincare Product/s and Good and Easy to Access Brand Store locations is Accepted.**

Sufficient number of Brand Outlets OF HER FAVOURITE BRAND AND A WOMAN'S and brand loyalty

**Table. 2.**

#### **Sufficient number of Brand Outlets of her Favorite brand and a Woman's Brand Loyalty**

#### **Chi-Square Test**

Degree of Freedom (d.f.)	Level of Significance	Calculated Value of Chi -Square	Table Value of Chi -Square	Hypothesis Accepted
4	5%	6.340	9.488	Null Hypothesis Is Accepted

**[Source: Primary Data from Survey]**

Table 3 depicts the results of the Chi-square test. It is found that at 4 degrees of freedom (d.f.) and 5% level of significance, the calculated value of (10.764) of the chi-square is more than the table value (9.488). **Hence the Null hypothesis that There is no significant relationship between a Woman's Brand Loyalty for her favorite brand of Skincare Product/s and Wide availability of the Brand in Stores stands Rejected.**

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY ::**

The researcher is very much aware of the following limitations of the study:

1. Sampling Approach has been used in this study. As such the study suffers from the Limitations of sampling in general. The specific Limitation of this study has been the non-inclusion of Rural Respondents and respondents of cities other than the four most populous ones, due to time constraints.
2. The present study being part of Behavioural Research as such suffers from the subjectivity biases of the respondents.
3. Again this study is limited to the State of Gujarat so the generalization of conclusions of the study may therefore not have universal applicability.
4. Admittedly, consumer behavior is product and very often situation specific. It may vary from one product to another or even differ for the same product from one user to another. Therefore, general applicability of the inferences and conclusions of a consumer behavior study like the present one cannot be claimed.
5. The time constraint has been a major limitation of this study.

**SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY ::**

All these Limitations notwithstanding, the findings and conclusions of a study of the kind without doubt provide an empirical basis to the studies of consumer behavior in a developing economy like ours. As a matter of fact consumer research studies throughout the globe provide a new dimension to the existing literature and throw new light on an unexplored aspect of consumer behavior. Therefore the importance of such studies can hardly be overemphasized.

**FINDINGS ::**

A careful analysis of the data collected from 800 Women Respondents across various geographical regions, ages, occupations, etc. have revealed the following findings:

- Out of the three Distribution Related Factors considered for the study, namely: Easy to access and convenient brand store locations, Sufficient number of brand outlets and Wide availability of consumer's favorite brand in the stores, only one of them namely Wide availability of consumer's favorite brand in the stores, was found to have a significant Relationship with the Brand Loyalty of Women Skincare Cosmetics Consumers in the four Major Cities of Gujarat.
- Whereas, the remaining Two viz. Easy to access and convenient brand store locations and Sufficient number of brand outlets Do Not Have a Significant Relationship with the Brand Loyalty of Women Skincare Cosmetics Consumers in the State of Gujarat.

**CONCLUSION ::**

Brand Loyalty is a cumulative result of a number of factors interacting together. They can broadly be divided into Consumer –Oriented and Product Oriented factors. An effort has been made by the researcher to analyse the significance of the relationship between Selected Product- Oriented (Distribution Related Factors) and Brand Loyalty of Women Skincare Cosmetics Consumers. The results of the study show that two of the Selected Distribution Related Factors including Easy to access and convenient brand store locations and Sufficient number of brand outlets Do Not have

a Significant Relationship with Brand Loyalty of Women Skincare Cosmetics Consumers, Whereas, The last of the Three Factors studied, namely: Wide availability of consumer's favorite brand in the stores was found to have a Significant Relationship with the Brand Loyalty of Women Skincare Cosmetics Consumers in the four Major Cities of Gujarat.

## **SUGGESTIONS ::**

Concerning Distribution related factors- In order to retain the existing loyalty of consumers, manufacturer should ensure a wide availability of their favorite brands in stores. Out of Stock Condition of the Consumers' favorite brand in the stores can lead to Brand Shifting by the Consumers and this could prove to be a possible threat to their Brand Loyalty for their favorite brand if two- three consecutive experiences of out of stock conditions occur one after another.

In order to maintain a regular supply of the consumers' favorite brands, manufacturers need to do sales forecasting based on which they should try replenish their stocks. In case a rise in demand is forecasted, and the firm has underutilized capacity, they should increase capacity utilization to match the forecasted demand. In case the firm is operating at full capacity, and a further rise in demand is expected, they should consider increasing their production capacity by expanding the scale of their operations. As far as Brand Switchers are concerned, out of- stock condition of their favorite brand in stores will not stop them from purchasing a different brand, so to avoid this situation, ensuring a regular supply of the consumers' favorite brand is a must on the part of the marketer.

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