A USAGE AND ATTITUDES STUDY INTO THE DRIVERS AND HURDLES IN THE CONTINUED ACCEPTANCE OF LOW COST SANITARY NAPKINS IN SLUMS OF GOVANDI-MUMBAI

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ABSTRACT

Increasing numbers of research studies and publication on menstrual hygiene globally have led to support of the beneficiaries via national government, NGOs, UN agencies etc. This research study was undertaken to understand the key factors affecting the penetration, use and continued acceptance of low cost sanitary napkin by target consumers at the bottom of the pyramid. For the initial study, an exploratory research was done to understand through qualitative research findings, nuances and challenges of similar sanitary hygiene projects undertaken elsewhere in India. An intense understanding of the ill effects of not-so-safe product usage (cloth, etc) during menstrual cycle is critical for the acceptance and continued usage of low cost sanitary napkins. Initiation into the safe and hygienic factors needs to be done at a very young age. The best way to drive home awareness and knowledge of menstrual hygiene is through schools, the mother herself, local clinics and self help groups. This would enhance the self esteem, prevent diseases and ultimately lead to women empowerment.

KEYWORDS: Bottom of the Pyramid, Menstrual Hygiene, Usage and Attitude, Social Entrepreneurship

INTRODUCTION

This research study was undertaken to understand the key factors affecting the penetration, use and continued acceptance of low cost sanitary napkin by target consumers at the bottom of the pyramid. This would help understand the factors, conditions, triggers and detractors affecting the use of sanitary napkins thereby disseminating personal hygiene practices amongst the least privileged sections of the society. This in due course would help create a better world through the positive power of social entrepreneurial action and thus would improve the quality of life and standard of living conditions of people living at the bottom of the pyramid

Global Scenario

Increasing numbers of research studies and publication on menstrual hygiene globally have led to increase in menstrual activities via national government, NGOs, UN agencies etc. Numerous sanitary pad production projects have been started in various countries across the world. UNICEF works in more than 100 countries around the world to improve water supplies and sanitation facilities in schools and communities, and to promote safe hygiene practices.

National Scenario (India)

Though India is now considered to be a developing economy, there are many social taboos which surround the otherwise culturally “rich” country. Ignorance towards female hygiene is one of them. The other problem is affordability
A survey by the NGO Plan India found that 81 per cent rural women still use unsterilized cloths since they are cheaper as compared to the branded sanitary napkins. This unhygienic yet prevalent practice has rendered over 70% Indian women prone to reproductive tract infections. The survey also mentions that 88% women in India use alternatives unсанitisated cloth, sand and even ashes during their measures (BubbalMakker, 2012). Swayam Shikshan Prayog (SSP), an organization that trains 1,000 rural women entrepreneurs to create grassroots business models to address basic needs of consumers at the Base of Pyramid.

Local Scenario (Maharashtra)

The state government carries out activities like promoting hygiene practices among adolescent girls in school through “Meena Manch”, Social Marketing of Sanitary Napkins by Girls’ Group, and theatre for Development on Adolescent Hygiene, Counselling and support for girls on menstrual hygiene etc. It is estimated that one in every ten deaths in India is linked to poor sanitation and hygiene. Sanitation in India continues to be inadequate, despite longstanding efforts by various levels of government and communities at improving coverage.

Women menstrual hygiene has become a matter of concern for the Indian government due to poor sanitation. Poor menstrual hygiene in developing countries has been an insufficiently acknowledged problem. In several cultures there are (cultural and/or religious) taboos concerning blood, menstruating girls and women and menstrual hygiene. Isolation of the menstruating girls and restrictions being imposed on them in the family, have reinforced a negative attitude towards this phenomenon.

The research was mainly divided into two parts

- **Secondary Research**: Peer-reviewed published research papers in journals, blogs, government websites, e paper articles etc were used as a source to understand similar business model implemented in different parts of the world and analysing the opportunities and challenges faced.

- **Primary Research**: Questionnaire based face-to-face interviews was used to capture the responses of women living in slum areas of Govandi [Baiganwadi]-Mumbai

**Purpose of the Study**

This study was conducted with a view to analyse, understand and surmount the gaps in the existing target market and provide recommendations on proactive basis to make low cost sanitary napkins affordable and accessible to the women at the bottom of pyramid.

**Objective of Study**

- To find an alternative and cheaper source of sanitary napkins and make it available to the masses.
- To understand the factors affecting the effective production & distribution of low cost sanitary napkins.
- To understand if appropriate pricing will result in a switch to the continued usage of sanitary pads.
- To understand if easy accessibility influences buying behaviour.
- To understand if a low cost product is perceived to provide the same comfort level.
A Usage and Attitudes Study into the Drivers and Hurdles in the Continued Acceptance of Low Cost Sanitary Napkins in Slums of Govandi-Mumbai

- To provide recommendations/suggestions on the basis of Research and Analysis from this study to implement a project for manufacturing and distributing low cost sanitary napkins.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

For the initial study, an exploratory research was done to understand through qualitative research findings, nuances and challenges of similar sanitary hygiene projects undertaken elsewhere in India. A primary research was conducted to understand the consumer behaviour patterns as also consumer scepticism towards the continued usage of sanitary napkins. The target group is the bottom of pyramid group of women of the Bainganwadi slums of Govandi, Mumbai which has a total population of 30,000 spread across 30 blocks. The second aspect was a Descriptive Research to collect quantitative data to understand the existing requirement in the type of sanitary hygiene products that women from slums would accept and use on a continued basis.

Sample Size

50 respondents were considered as sample size for initial analysis and sample considered were the women & girls from the slum area of Govandi. The primary questionnaire was administered face-to-face, using the right hand rule and sampling alternative house method to adequately randomize the sample and to avoid any researcher bias.

Instruments used for Secondary Research

EBSCO and PROQUEST sources of research papers were analysed for the exploratory research. Questionnaire method of collection of quantitative data was used. Tools like SPSS and Excel were used to carry out the analysis.

Questionnaire

A structured Questionnaire was formulated on the basis of the Qualitative Research done and was administered on a face-to-face basis amongst targeted respondents.

MAJOR RESULTS

Following are the results of the analysis conducted on 50 respondents

Sanitary Napkins v/s Cloth

The primary survey on the female slum dwellers revealed that majority (62%) used sanitary napkins as compared to using Cloth (38%)

Sanitary Napkins Brand Preference

The most preferred brand among the women maximum preferred Whisper (55%) to Stayfree (45%)

Factors for Brand Selection of Sanitary Napkins

Contrary to the expectation the responses collected showed that Quality (87%) is the most influencing factor and not so much of price factor (only 13%) when selecting brands for sanitary napkins
Price Factor for Sanitary Napkins

The purchase price of pack sanitary napkins that the women usually purchase lies in the Rs. 30 to Rs.35 bracket (48%) and followed by the price range of Rs.28 to Rs.29 bracket (32%)

Packaging Size and Sanitary Napkins Usage

100% of the respondents using sanitary napkins purchase a pack size of 8 pads per pack.

Usage Habits in sanitary Napkins

Maximum women (71%) use anywhere between 5 to 10 napkins per menstrual cycle

USAGE PREFERENCES IN SANITARY NAPKINS

Product Variant- Thickness

Maximum women (74%) preferred thin sanitary napkins while the minority went with Thick sanitary napkins

Product Variant- Length

It was seen that 90% of women using sanitary napkins preferred longer sanitary napkins

Product Variant- Wings

Majority of the women 71% are willing to accept sanitary napkins without wings

Behavior- Shyness

Majority with 74% women felt shy and reluctant in buying sanitary napkins from local stores themselves.

Product Satisfaction w. r. t Specific Brand in Sanitary Napkins

A further analysis using the SPSS Software for the analysis of the 2 questions: satisfaction and the choice of brand among the 31 respondents who use sanitary napkins showed that 1 person was “not satisfied” using Whisper as compared to none being “not satisfied” while using Stayfree

Cross Tabulation

(Which brand of napkins do you use * Are you satisfied with the brand you use)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Which Brand of Napkins Do You Use * Are You Satisfied with the Brand You Use</th>
<th>Are you Satisfied with the Brand You Use</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Satisfied</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Which brand of napkins do you use</td>
<td>Whisper</td>
<td>Count</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>51.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Stayfree</td>
</tr>
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<td>% of Total</td>
<td>45.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>Count</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Total</td>
<td>96.8%</td>
<td>3.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Usage Habits in Cloth

Usage

Amongst women who used Cloth (i.e frequency 19 of sample size 50), majority with 53% respondents who change their cloth twice in a day

Disposal

Majority women (63%) Re-used Cloth while only 37% disposed it off after use.

Switching Ability- Apprehension

However 68% majority women were apprehensive to switch to sanitary napkins

Switching Ability- Price Factor

Majority 53% of total women currently using Cloth responded that they would switch to sanitary napkins if provided at a reasonable rate

Disadvantage in Cloth Usage

Majority with 63% faced problem of Rashes while using Cloth

Total Satisfied Women- Composition

Further analysis of the Total composition of satisfied women showed that majority of satisfied women were using sanitary napkins (65%) than minority using Cloth (35%)

Perception Study of Proposed Price

Analysis of the willingness of women showed that 82% of women would accept a pack of sanitary napkins priced at Rs.20

IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Awareness of sanitary napkins and the advertised brand are significantly prevalent amongst target consumers.
- An intense understanding of the ill effects of not-so-safe product usage (cloth, etc) during menstrual cycle is critical for the acceptance and continued usage of low cost sanitary napkins.
- Initiation into the safe and hygienic use of sanitary napkins need to be done at a very young age
- The best way to drive home awareness and knowledge of the use of sanitary napkins is through schools, the mother herself, local clinics, SHGs.
- A campaign “Chai pe charcha” can be organized by the local NGO where SHGs and other female volunteers can discuss in a particular home the pros and cons of good hygiene conditions amongst adolescent girls in the presence of their mothers. Visual and communication aids can be used to scientifically drive the knowledge in the minds and hearts of the target audience. Rational selling of the concept is critical. Testimonies (video recorded) both the positive and negatives can be communicated to build credibility in the continued usage of sanitary napkins.
• Direct contact selling and distribution will circumvent the problem of ‘shyness’ and also provide in some measure to the economic status of the SHGs.

• Social entrepreneurship perhaps is the best solution to this very real problem at the bottom of the pyramid. An existing social entrepreneurship project in the southern part of India has demonstrated that the project is viable at a low cost and this can be replicated in other parts of the country.

• The fallout can be quite substantial A) Girls falling out of school can perhaps be motivated to go back to school. B) The well being of women at the bottom of the pyramid can be improved. C) Gender equality in the household can be better balanced between the male and female child. D) Better education can bring about better economic and social status for women amongst the least privileged of the society.

• Government should shoulder responsibility of making sanitary napkins accessible to the bottom of the pyramid similar to family planning devices that are provided free of cost.

REFERENCES


