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Young Rural Consumers' Behaviour : Demographics and Purchase Pattern Towards Smartphones

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Abstract

The objective of the present study is to understand the purchase intention and consumer behaviour of young, educated rural consumers towards smartphones. Data was collected from 800 young and educated rural consumers. The relevant responses were analysed using descriptive statistics, correlation, and Chi-square via the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Marketers must focus on the need of female consumers and consumers who are living in the less developed cities of India. The coverage area of the study is too small and needs to be expanded to generalise the findings. Respondents were selected from educational institutions of two cities, Gurgaon and Faridabad, the developed cities of Delhi, NCR, India. Consequently, there is a limitation to representing the entire population of India. The findings of the paper indicate the purchase behaviour and buying habits of young and educated rural consumers, which resulted in some important findings. Background of the literature indicates a lot of studies related to young consumers, but a limited number of studies are conducted with educated young rural consumers. The current findings are helpful for marketers to target their market and to frame marketing strategies related to smartphones. The results of analysis and discussion helped to know the effects of age, gender and location on various attributes consumers consider while purchasing smart phones. Further, the empirical findings contribute to the field of academics by adding to the existing body of knowledge of purchase pattern and consumer behaviour.

Key Words

Consumer Behaviour, Purchase Pattern, Smartphones, Demographics, India

INTRODUCTION

It has become a trend, among the rural youth, to commute to nearby cities for work and education, in more and more numbers. Consequently, it has led to a greater exposure to them. Now, they aspire to acquire the latest range of products and services available in urban areas, be it automobile, telecom, insurance, retail or banking. Lifestyle products like cosmetics, beverages and smart phones, etc. have become integral part of their lifestyle. The smartphone is a new-age product which has touched almost every aspect of their life. It fulfils every digital need of the youth, be it email, social networking, photography, messaging, or gaming, etc. According to Prabhudesai (2010), 90 per cent of cell phone users want to switch over to smartphones. Smartphones give rural youth status, power and freedom to connect, share and exchange information across the globe for their personal and professional needs (Kuate, 2008).

Smartphones help young consumers in completing educational and working assignments. They don't require personal computers for the same. That is why portable, applications-based smartphones have become a necessity for everyone. A significant number of students use smartphone applications to access academic information. Search engines, online encyclopedias and libraries are used by students through smartphones (Catharine, 2013). Smartphones are all in one device which help students to receive / access information, communicate with ease to one and all. Social needs and social influences have also affected the rural youth's, especially students', purchase-decision about smartphones (Suki, 2013).

India is expected to become the fifth largest economy in the world by 2025. Consumers are buying goods and services on a large scale. They spend 2 per cent of their total expenditure on communication. It is showing a 13 per cent growth rate, which is one of the fastest expanding categories. Liberalization of laws and policies, related to telecommunication has contributed to the growth of this category. Moreover, even now India is a massive smartphone market, which is fast expanding. According to Strategy Analytics (2013), an analytic firm, India is the third largest global smartphone market in the first quarter of 2013 and is growing four times faster than the global average. And this market is getting more and more competitive, as there is a multitude of players coming up with their products.

Based on these statistics, we can say that rural youth as a market and smart mobile phone as a product is a potent combination. A number of international, national, local and spurious brands are making their way into these markets. This study attempts to access the brand consciousness and the factors affecting brand preference among the rural youth of India. The study will be beneficial to various international companies to formulate their branding/marketing strategies. This will be helpful for companies to effectively understand consumer buying pattern. It is important to understand the meaning of some important terms before going to further discussion.

Smartphone

"Smartphone" is a mobile phone, powerful enough with various functions that make it comparable to a computer. It offers more advanced computing power and connectivity (Kavitha & Yogeshwari, 2011). Smartphones are used more frequently than feature phones, owing to the applications' help in payment of bills, shopping online, email and online banking facilities (Barot, Amdawadkar, Singh & Panchal, 2014). Smartphones work both as cell phones and computers, therefore, they are more in demand (Barot, Amdawadkar, Singh & Panchal, 2014). Smartphones have replaced feature mobile phones because of the latest applications. Many devices like music players, computers, digital cameras, video CD players, etc. have become obsolete. Smartphones, an all-in-one device. are easy to carry. The smartphone is a device with the latest user-friendly applications It is connected to the internet and provides various features and functionality to the consumers (Cromar, 2010). That is why these are popular among common consumers as well as business users (Techterms.com, 2010). In 1993, Smartphones made their market presence. Earlier, they were used only by corporate users since they were far too expensive (Reed, 2010).

Rural Market

One needs to understand the basic nature of the rural consumer which is significantly different from his urban counterpart. Development of distribution network, poor infrastructures like roads, telecommunication, and lower levels of literacy are a few issues that come in the way of marketers to reach the rural market. The majority of the rural population is still not connected to banking network, therefore, non-cash collection becomes difficult. Moreover, cash collections are messy and difficult to monitor, especially when cash cards or technology-enabled centralized point of sales (like Suvidha or ItzWorld) have still not reached rural markets. Demand for goods in rural markets depends upon the agricultural situation, as agriculture is the main source of income there. But now, things have dramatically changed. In current situation, rural consumers are connected with their counterparts because of expansion and introduction of faster communication networks. Now, rural consumers have more purchasing power. This is the reason international companies are taking initiatives to tap the Indian rural markets. The rural market has turned out to be a great business opportunity for the companies. There are various factors involved here, like an increase of purchasing power, brand consciousness and expanding communication network, all of which have contributed to the potential of the rural market (Verma & Giri, 2012). This is one of the reasons for conducting this study.

Purchase Intention

Brand consciousness has positively affected the purchase intention of the consumer for buying smartphone (Petruzzellis, 2010). The brand consciousness is the result of product evaluation by the consumers. It is dynamic, predisposition to action and prediction of the behavior (Coelho, Meneses, & Moreira, 2013). For taking purchasing decision for smartphones, there is also a need to understand factors affecting buying pattern like user friendliness and availability of latest applications in Smartphones. (Charlesworth, 2009).

Smartphones not only provide an opportunity to manufacturers to develop newer applications, but also encourage third parties to develop applications. Third party's applications can be delivered to customers on the purchased device (Jing *et al.*, 2012). These applications provide a variety of information services (Coelho, Meneses, & Moreira, 2013).

The second factor is the inclusion of new features in the smartphones. These new features influence the intention to purchase new smartphones. Consumers purchase new phones due to their existing one being unable to fulfill their demands and limit their capacity. New features like built-in cameras, large memory, developed message services, big servers, etc. influence consumer's purchasing intention for a smartphone (Arpit & Anand, 2013).

The third factor is digital literacy which is fast catching up in the current socio-economic environment. Digital literacy and social structures were earlier considered as constraints in the adoption of smartphones. But smartphone-enabled applications and services provided new possibilities to consumers for fulfilling their requirements. Moreover, these devices promoted the production of new programming and innovations (Watkins, Hjorth, Koskinen, 2012).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

When rural consumers buy any new category of product, their decision is strongly influenced by opinion leaders, who are seen as credible people in an entire region. Well-educated users of new products act as opinion leaders. Previous researches indicated that the main sources of information for a rural consumer are friends, radio, television, newspapers, cinema, retailers, etc. Torlak *et al.* (2014) also found that there is a significant positive relationship between the electronic word of mouth on brand image and purchase intention.

Indians living in rural areas are as gadget-savvy as those residing in cities (Torlak *et al.*, 2014). They also found that half of all the mobile phones sold in rural areas were Internet-enabled. Rural India has ample appetite for high-tech features, including smartphones, touch-screen phones and GPRS-enabled handsets.

In developing countries, the adoption of technologies such as cellphones and internet services holds a promise for better education, healthcare and quality of life for the masses. Adedokun *et al.* (2006), Verma & Giri (2012) found that villagers are very well aware of the leading brands in all the segments. Mobiles are the pride possessions of rural people, but to buy them they have to go to nearby cities. As Indian economy is in the stage of transformation and is showing a drastic change in its rural economy, marketers need to focus their attention primarily on the major sources of information for its rural consumers (Srinivas, 2002). According to Misra & Chadah (2009) the rural consumer was generally seen as the less affluent as compared to his urban counterparts but things have been changing in rural India since the last ten years. Changes in consumption patterns and access to communication media have made the rural market a vital clog in the sales-growth wheel. According to Sandy (2010), the dynamics of rural marketing has changed over the years and so has the perception about brands in rural India. This is the consequence of media exposure, increased literacy level and connectivity of rural youth with their urban counterparts.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The key objective of the present study is to understand the purchase intention and consumer behaviour of young, educated rural consumers towards smartphones. To achieve the main objective, the researcher has focused on understanding the main reason for purchase or non-purchase of smartphone, checking whether reasons for purchase are significantly different between two or more than two demographic variables and finding out overall satisfaction level.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research design of the present study is exploratory cum descriptive in nature. The sample design of the present study comprises the educated rural youth (pursuing post-graduation and graduation) of Delhi NCR in the age group of 18 to 23 years who are aware and/or prefer and/or purchase smartphone brands is the area of study. Two cities (Faridabad and Gurgaon) of Delhi NCR have been selected for choosing samples because these two cities are having large number of educated rural youth. The sample size of the present study was 960 respondents in total, out of which 800 responded seriously.

The research was conducted in two stages. In the first stage, a qualitative study was conducted, and the existing literature in the form of research papers, reports and articles was studied and analyzed carefully. This was helpful in gaining insights about the current scenario of purchase intention of the educated rural youth of both the districts. On the basis of the qualitative study, in the second stage, the quantitative study was done to quantify and statistically analyze the reasons and relationships, and test the pre-defined hypotheses. A survey method was used to collect the primary information with the help of a structured questionnaire. We targeted the educated rural youth consumers, i.e., college students as the sample of the study. The questionnaire included questions on demographic factors such as age, gender, stream of education. In addition to that, some open-ended and close-ended questions were designed to capture the respondents' level of satisfaction with their existing phones and their plans and reasons to buy a new one. Some statements were also designed on 5-point Likert scale, ranging from strongly disagree to strongly agree to measure purchase intention and level of satisfaction. The statistical tool like Descriptive Analysis, Chi-Square, ANOVA through SPSS Statistical Software are used to analyze the data.

ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

Reasons for Purchase / Non-purchase of Smartphone

Phones are a very important part of everyone's life these days. Satisfaction of the customer is a very important aspect. It is observed 37% of the total sample is very satisfied with their existing phone. 25% of respondents are satisfied while 15% are neutral and 5%, 7% are dissatisfied and very dissatisfied respectively (Table 1).

Table 1

Satisfaction Level of Existing Phone

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Very Satisfied	298	37.2	41.7	41.7
	Satisfied	199	24.8	27.8	69.5
	Neutral	119	14.8	16.6	86.2
	Dissatisfied	44	5.5	6.2	92.3
	Very Dissatisfied	55	6.9	7.7	100.0
	Total	715	89.2	100.0	
Missing	System	87	10.8		
Total		802	100.0		

Plan to Buy a New Phone in the Near Future

Some people are very curious to try the latest technology and new phones as it shows their status. Out of the total sample size, it is observed that 86%respondents are planning to buy new phones while 14% of respondents don't have any plan to replace their existing one. It is interpreted that the majority of respondents are keen on trying the latest phones (Table 2).

Table 2
Plan to Buy New Phone in Near Future

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Yes	692	86.3	86.5	86.5
	No	108	13.5	13.5	100.0
	Total	800	99.8	100.0	
Missing	System	2	.2		
Total		802	100.0		

Time to Purchase a New Mobile Phone

Phones are considered a necessity not as a luxury. People who consider them as luxury will buy new phones more often. There are 37% respondents who don't wish to buy a new phone in the next six months. Only 18% of respondents are planning to buy in next one month and 15% respondents wish to buy in the next three months. It can be interpreted that respondents take the decision to buy a new phone, but the majority of them take time to make a purchase-decision (Table 3).

Table 3
Time to Purchase New Mobile Phone

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	In the next one month	150	18.7	20.3	20.3
	In the next three months	124	15.5	16.8	37.0
	In the next 6 months	171	21.3	23.1	60.1
	Not planning to buy in next 6 months	295	36.8	39.9	100.0
	Total	740	92.3	100.0	
Missing	System	62	7.7		
Total		802	100.0		

Kind of Mobile Phone Purchase in Future

When respondents are making a purchase-decision, the majority of them (72%) are inclined to buy a smartphone, only 6% are more inclined to buy a simple mobile phone, while 14% respondents are undecided between smartphone and feature mobile phone (Table 4).

Table 4
Kind of Mobile Phone Purchase n Future

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Most inclined to buy a smart phone	581	72.4	78.5	78.5
	Undecided between smart phone and simple mobile phone	109	13.6	14.7	93.2
	More inclined to buy a simple mobile phone	50	6.2	6.8	100.0
	Total	740	92.3	100.0	
Missing	System	62	7.7		
Total		802	100.0		

Satisfaction Level with Existing Mobile Phone Users City-wise

After knowing the satisfaction level of all the consumers, it is important to know satisfaction of users city-wise. It will help to know the purchasing pattern of consumers at various locations. The marketer must use this result for framing their marketing strategy. As it can be seen the satisfaction level with the existing phone is higher for people in Gurgaon vis a vie people in Faridabad. This difference is significant. Independent sample t-test has been used to test the following hypothesis. As the p-value is less than 0.05, we reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate that means consumers have a different level of satisfaction in both the cities (Table 5).

Plan to Buy a Mobile Phone

Gender, age group and cities do not play any significant role when it comes to plan to buy a mobile phone. Around 80% of the respondents intend to buy a mobile phone in the future.

Time to Purchase a Mobile Phone in Cities

It is extremely important to know the time taken by consumers while making a purchasing decision regarding mobile phones. The demand for mobile

Table 5
Group Statistics

	City	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Satisfaction level of existing phone	Faridabad	286	2.28	1.378	.081
	Gurgaon	429	1.99	1.107	.053

Independent Samples Test

		F	Sig.	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	Std. Error Difference
Satisfaction level of existing phone	Equal Variances Assumed	30.575	.000	3.084	713	.002	.288	.093

phones varies from location to location. Indeed it reflects the buying pattern of consumers. If they are changing their phones frequently, then they might be seeking new applications, varieties and features in the phones.

Hypothesis

H0 : There is no relation between time purchase and cities

From the Chi-square p-value which is less than 0.05, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative that there is a relationship between time purchase and cities. Further, from the bar chart, we can infer that people from Faridabad are keener to buy a phone in the next one month or three months while people from Gurgaon are keener to buy in the next six months or even later. (Table 6).

Time to Purchase a Mobile Phone for Different Age Groups

The relation between different age groups and purchase-decision of mobile phones contributes to targeting the right market segment.

Hypothesis

H0 : There is no relation between time purchase and age groups

From the Chi-square p-value which is less than 0.05, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative that there is a relationship between time purchase and different age groups. Further, from the bar chart, we can infer that people from an age group in 21-30 are keener to buy a phone in the next six months while people from an age group in 18-20 are not keen to buy in the next six months or even later. (Table 7).

Table 6
Time to Purchase Mobile Phone in Cities

			City		Total
			Faridabad	**Gurgaon**	
Time to purchase new mobile phone	In the next one month	Count	80	70	150
		% within City	24.5%	16.9%	20.3%
	In the next three months	Count	68	56	124
		% within City	20.9%	13.5%	16.8%
	In the next 6 months	Count	65	106	171
		% within City	19.9%	25.6%	23.1%
	Not planning to buy in next 6 months	Count	113	182	295
		% within City	34.7%	44.0%	39.9%
Total		Count	326	414	740
		% within City	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	17.581(a)	3	.001
Likelihood Ratio	17.557	3	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	13.759	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	740		

a 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 54.63.

Time to Purchase a Mobile Phone for Different Gender

Knowing the relation between different gender and purchase-decision of mobile phones helps in framing the right kind of marketing strategy.

Hypothesis

H0 : There is no relation between time purchase and gender.

From the Chi-square p-value which is less than 0.05, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative that there is a relationship between time purchase and gender. Further, from the bar chart, we can infer that males are keener to buy a phone in the next one month or three months or six months while females are not planning to buy in the next six months or even later. (Table 8).

Table 7
Time to Purchase Mobile Phone for Different Age Groups

			Age Between		Total
			18-20	21-30	
Time to purchase new mobile phone	In the next one month	Count	123	27	150
		% within Age Between	20.2%	20.5%	20.3%
	In the next three months	Count	91	33	124
		% within Age Between	15.0%	25.0%	16.8%
	In the next 6 months	Count	133	38	171
		% within Age Between	21.9%	28.8%	23.1%
	Not planning to buy in next 6 months	Count	261	34	295
		% within Age Between	42.9%	25.8%	39.9%
Total		Count	608	132	740
		% within Age Between	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	16.781(a)	3	.001
Likelihood Ratio	16.905	3	.001
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.150	1	.013
N of Valid Cases	740		

a 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 22.12.

Agreement Level on Various Parameters in Cities

Consumers select smartphones on various parameters like price, status, features and new applications. Their agreement on different parameters varies as per different locations.

Hypothesis

H0 : Agreement level is the same in Faridabad and Gurgaon

For p-value less than 0.05 we can reject the null hypothesis. As per the output, we can see that for two of the parameters which are smartphones enhance the status and simple phones are user-friendly the two cities differ in their opinion. For the remaining statements, the agreement level is the same. People in Faridabad are more inclined to agree that smartphones enhance status. They also agree that

Table 8
Time to Purchase Mobile Phone for Different Gender

			Gender		Total
			Male	Female	
Time to purchase new mobile phone	In the next one month	Count	61	89	150
		% within Gender	21.9%	19.3%	20.3%
	In the next three months	Count	60	64	124
		% within Gender	21.5%	13.9%	16.8%
	In the next 6 months	Count	76	95	171
		% within Gender	27.2%	20.6%	23.1%
	Not planning to buy in next 6 months	Count	82	213	295
		% within Gender	29.4%	46.2%	39.9%
Total		Count	279	461	740
		% within Gender	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Chi-Square Tests

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	22.222(a)	3	.000
Likelihood Ratio	22.531	3	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	11.256	1	.001
N of Valid Cases	740		

a 0 cells (.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 46.75.

simple phones are easy to use. No significant difference was found across age groups and gender (Table 9).

Importance Level of Brand Image in Cities

Various features are given different importance by different consumers. The facilities available, education level and the infrastructure development of the cities affect the priority level of the consumers for various parameters.

Hypothesis

H0 : Importance level is the same in Faridabad and Gurgaon

For p-value less than 0.05 we can reject the null hypothesis. The only parameter where a difference was observed was for the brand image. People from Faridabad gave it more importance than people from Gurgaon. (Table 10).

Table 9

Agreement Level on Various Parameters in Cities

	City	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. Diff
Agree, Availability at Economic Price	Faridabad	349	2.27	1.088	0.085
	Gurgaon	450	2.13	1.112	
Agree, Enhance Status	Faridabad	349	1.77	.770	0.035
	Gurgaon	450	1.90	.951	
Agree, Easy Downloading	Faridabad	348	1.64	.793	0.266
	Gurgaon	449	1.71	.887	
Agree, Economical	Faridabad	349	2.05	.983	0.547
	Gurgaon	450	2.10	1.117	
Agree, An Innovative Product	Faridabad	349	1.93	.843	0.331
	Gurgaon	450	1.99	1.002	
Agree, Accessability of Internet Anytime, Anywhere	Faridabad	349	1.61	.779	0.108
	Gurgaon	450	1.71	.959	
Agree, Simple Phones : User Friendly	Faridabad	349	2.27	.998	0.004
	Gurgaon	450	2.50	1.205	
Agree, Relevance of Mobile Phones with Limited Usage	Faridabad	349	2.94	1.212	0.697
	Gurgaon	450	2.98	1.304	

An independent sample t-test was conducted to see whether level of agreement on various parameters differed by cities

Importance Level as per Gender

Various features are given different importance by different consumers. The education level, profession and buying habits of males and females affect the priority level of the consumers for various parameters.

Hypothesis

H0 : Importance level is the same for male and female

For p-value less than 0.05 we can reject the null hypothesis. The only parameter where a difference was observed was for Ease of use. Females gave it more importance than males (Table 11).

Table 10

Importance Level of Brand Image in Cities

	City	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. Diff
Imp Brand Image	Faridabad	349	1.36	.671	.023
	Gurgaon	447	1.49	.825	

An independent sample t-test was conducted to see whether level of agreement on various parameters differed by cities

Table 11

Importance Level of Ease of Use as per Gender

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. Diff
Imp Use of Ease	Male	300	1.79	1.068	.002
	Female	496	1.63	.850	

Importance Level as per Age Group

Price is an attribute which may increase or decrease the demand of a product. Consumers in various age group may have different response toward it.

Hypothesis

H0 : Importance level is the same for different age groups

For p-value less than 0.05 we can reject the null hypothesis. The only parameter where a difference was observed was for price. As expected, the younger age group has given it more importance than, the older age group (Table 12).

Table 12

Importance Level of Price as per Age Group

	Age Between	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Sig. Diff
Imp. Price	18-20	662	1.55	.870	.04
	21-30	136	1.71	.894	

It is inferred that smartphone must be user-friendly and easy to use because females gave these features more importance than males while buying a smartphone in both the districts. There is huge potential for the market of smartphone in both districts as educated rural young consumers are inclined to buy smartphone only. And since they are satisfied with it, so they are keener on recommending them to others as well. People in Gurgaon associate smartphone more with social connectivity, stylishness, trendiness, good display and design than people in Faridabad do. That is why they give more importance to features rather than brand image. Therefore, marketers must highlight the features of smartphone while selling them in Gurgaon District. Prices, deals and discounts are considered as important determinants in Faridabad District as compared to Gurgaon District. Therefore, these offers must be introduced in that area to increase purchase by consumers.

MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The findings of the paper indicate the purchase-behaviour and buying-habits of young and educated rural consumers, which resulted in some important findings. Background of the literature indicates a lot of studies related to young consumers, but a limited number of studies are conducted with educated young rural consumers. The current findings are helpful for marketers to target their market and frame marketing strategies related to smartphones. The results of analysis and discussion helped to know the effects of age, gender and location on various attributes consumers consider while purchasing smartphones. Empirically, marketers should focus on young consumers in the age group of 18 to 20, males and the developed cities. The development of cities affects their decision because they have more variety of smartphones. The results can be used for dividing the market and segmenting it effectively. Hence, age, gender and location are the factors to be considered by the marketers and practitioners while making their product strategy, promotion strategy for young rural consumers. However, this study has some limitations. The area chosen for the study is limited which makes difficult to generalize the results. However, findings are based on honest responses. These results build a strong foundation for the future.

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