

Customer Satisfaction Towards Tribal Product Marketing Channels in Kerala

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Abstract:

The marketing of non-timber forest products (NTFPs) from indigenous communities in the state of Kerala is vital to preserving their lifestyles. Tribal products easily reach consumers' hands through various marketing channels, including cooperatives, shows, middlemen, retail outlets, and even internet-based media. This study will focus on exploring how satisfied customers are with their indigenous products' marketing channels in Kerala. In this regard, the study used primary data collected through a structured survey administered via Google Forms to a convenience sample of 30 participants. This research involved looking into various factors, including consumer knowledge, favourite marketing channels, quality of products, pricing, availability, and overall satisfaction. The means of analysis included computing the mean score and percentages. It was found that while issues regarding availability, promotion, and prices persist, consumers are generally pleased with the authenticity and quality of the tribal products.

Keywords: Non-Timber Forest Products (NTFPs), Tribal Products, Customer Satisfaction, Marketing Channels, Consumer Behaviour.

1. Introduction

Products that come from forests, apart from the timber products, such as honey, spices, bamboo products, medicinal plants, handicrafts, wax, and herbal products, fall into the category of nontimber forest products (NTFPs). The tribes of Kerala take part in NTFP productions and extraction activities, thus contributing largely to their standard of living.

The link between tribal producers and tribal consumers occurs through marketing channels. Some of these marketing channels include intermediaries, cooperatives, government agencies, exhibits, retail stores, and even the Internet. Efficient marketing channels ensure fairness in price, increased availability of the products and even increased consumer knowledge about the product.

Client satisfaction is one of the key factors that should be taken into consideration when evaluating marketing channels. Factors such as the quality of the products, cost, packaging, availability, trust, and service quality affect client satisfaction. Understanding customer satisfaction is crucial in analysing the pros and cons of the marketing approach adopted by tribes.

This research intends to recommend effective marketing channels for tribal products in Kerala, taking into account client satisfaction with such channels.

2. Review of Literature

Philip Kotler and Keller (2016). As pointed out by Kotler and Keller, some of the critical elements in marketing management include consumer satisfaction. In their study, consumer satisfaction depends on whether or not the products meet the customer's requirements with respect to availability, quality, and pricing. To enhance customer loyalty, it was important for the writers to stress the importance of effective

methods of distribution and marketing. It was also important to note that marketing channels were key in influencing consumer buying decisions.

TRIFED (2019). The role of tribal marketing in improving the lives of tribes in India was discussed in the TRIFED research. This involved problems such as poor market reach, lack of advertising, and the use of middlemen. The importance of marketing tribal goods through fairs, exhibitions, and co-operatives was stressed. Further, the importance of Internet marketing is stressed here, too. The findings can be useful in understanding the present marketing scenario in Kerala.

Nair and Joseph (2020) studied the perception of native goods among customers in Kerala. According to the study, customers prefer tribal goods due to their authenticity, nature, and environmental friendliness. There are two key challenges in relation to this issue, namely low availability of products and lack of awareness. For increasing the level of customer awareness, promotion was advised by the authors. This study is relevant because it identifies factors that influence customer satisfaction and behaviour.

Thomas and Mathew (2019) The impact of fairs and exhibitions in the promotion of indigenous products was studied by Thomas and Mathew. As stated in the report, customers buying indigenous products through fairs and exhibitions hold more trust towards the products. Furthermore, this study showed how exhibitions contribute to improved communication between indigenous product makers and customers. It can be concluded from the study that direct marketing practices result in higher customer satisfaction.

Ramesh Kumar (2018) Difficulties with NTFP marketing in India have been studied by Ramesh Kumar. It is stated that middlemen play an essential role in connecting tribal producers with markets. Nevertheless, the income from the indigenous tribes is reduced because they depend too much on middlemen. Additionally, there were also issues with prices and transportation with regard to NTFP marketing. The findings are vital in understanding the role played by middlemen in indigenous products marketing.

Anitha and Suresh (2021). This study examines the effect of branding and packaging on the consumer attitude toward tribal products. It has been concluded from the findings that attractive packaging leads to higher levels of satisfaction among customers. It has been noted that purchase intention depends significantly on branding. Improved packaging methods may help improve the marketability of indigenous products. With the help of this study, understanding factors of customer satisfaction becomes easy.

Kerala State Scheduled Tribes Development Department Reports (2020). The report provided by the Department of Scheduled Tribes Development in the state of Kerala included various measures relating to the development of tribes in the state. The importance of government-supported fairs and cooperatives in tribal marketing was stressed in the report. As per the report, the above-discussed approaches make way for better market availability for the local communities. The need for awareness and marketing campaigns was also stressed in the research findings.

Binu and Rajan (2017). In Kerala, Binu and Rajan looked at consumer preferences for environmentally friendly indigenous goods. According to the report, consumers' growing preference for natural and herbal products is a result of their increased awareness of their health. Authenticity and product quality were found to be key determinants of consumer preference. Eco-friendly items have a large market potential, according to the study. The increasing need for tribal-based NTFPs is supported by this study.

George and Paul (2022) George and Paul have conducted research regarding the marketing of tribal products through internet marketing. Young consumers prefer purchasing their products through the internet. It was established that advertisements online and on social media could be effective marketing tools. Internet marketing will make sure that more customers become aware of these products. This particular research is essential for understanding the modern methods used for tribal product marketing.

Devi and Krishnan (2021) analysed the extent to which South Indian consumers were satisfied with local products. The results of the study show that the main factors that contribute to customer satisfaction are product quality and uniqueness. Additionally, product prices and availability also affected the satisfaction levels of customers. Recommendations were made for better marketing campaigns and distribution. This study provides useful information on factors affecting consumer satisfaction.

3. Objectives of the Study

1. To study consumer awareness regarding tribal products in Kerala.
2. To identify preferred marketing channels for tribal products.
3. To analyse customer satisfaction towards tribal product marketing channels.
4. To identify problems faced by consumers while purchasing tribal products.

4. Research Methodology

4.1 Research Design

The study is both descriptive and analytical in nature.

4.2 Source of Data

The study is based on primary and secondary data.

- **Primary Data:** Collected through Google Forms using a structured questionnaire.
- **Secondary Data:** Collected from journals, articles, books, and websites related to NTFPs and tribal marketing.

4.3 Sample Size

The sample size consists of 30 respondents.

4.4 Sampling Technique

A convenience sampling method was used for this study.

4.5 Tools for Analysis

- Percentage Analysis
- Mean Score Analysis

5. Results and Analysis

Table 5.1: Gender of Respondents

Gender	Number of Respondents	Percentage
Male	14	46.7%
Female	16	53.3%
Total	30	100%

The distribution of respondents included in the research based on gender is illustrated in the table below. From the total of thirty respondents, sixteen (53.3%) were females, while fourteen (46.7%) were males. According to the results, both genders have almost equal representation with a slight predominance of females. Diverse opinions regarding the marketing of tribal products can be collected thanks to this balanced representation of gender. Therefore, it reflects the perception of Keralan consumers of both genders concerning the marketing of tribal products.

Table 5.2: Awareness of Tribal Products

Awareness level	Respondents	Percentages
Highly aware	10	33.3%
Moderately aware	15	50%
Slightly aware	5	16.7%
Total	30	100%

Knowledge of Keralite tribal items by respondents is given in the table above. It is evident that while ten respondents (33.3%) had very good knowledge of tribal items, fifteen respondents (50%) had moderate knowledge. Five respondents (16.7%) claimed they had knowledge of only a little. The result shows that a considerable proportion of consumers have moderate knowledge of tribal products. It therefore means that the presence of the products in the market and promotion has helped create awareness among consumers.

Table 5.3: Preferred Marketing Channels

Marketing channel	Respondents	Percentage
Retail Shops	8	26.7%
Exhibitions/Fairs	9	30%
Online Platforms	7	23.3%
Cooperative Societies	6	20%
Total	30	100%

Below are the favoured means of marketing through which customers prefer purchasing indigenous goods. Nine people (30%) stated that they loved going to shows and fairs for purchases. Eight people (26.7%) said that they love retail stores, while seven others (23.3%) love buying online. Six people (20%) said that they preferred cooperative societies. The results above indicate that consumers tend to have more trust in physical ways of conducting transactions rather than other means because they get to see the commodities before buying.

However, there seems to be increased consumer willingness to use online marketing.

Table 5.4: Mean Score Analysis of Customer Satisfaction

Factors	Mean score	Rank
Product quality	4.4	I
Authenticity	4.2	II
packaging	3.9	III
Availability	3.7	IV
Pricing	3.5	V
Promotional activities	3.2	VI

Mean scores of some factors that contribute to customers' satisfaction with tribal product marketing channels are given in the table above. Customers are very happy with the quality of products offered because of the highest mean score, 4.4, for product quality and its high rank. It can be observed that customers really value the genuineness of products, and they like authentic products because the authenticity factor was second on the ranking list with a score of 4.2. Packaging was next with a score of 3.9, and this shows that there is some level of satisfaction regarding product packaging. The scores for pricing and availability were 3.5 and 3.7, respectively. Finally, promotional efforts came last with the lowest mean score of 3.2.

Table 5.5: Problems Faced by Consumers

Problems	Respondents	Percentages
High price	9	30%
Limited availability	11	36.7%
Lack of awareness	6	20%
Poor promotion	4	13.3%
Total	30	100%

The graph indicates the primary problems that arise for customers in purchasing the indigenous products. Based on the answers from eleven participants (36.7%), the most significant problem is that of low availability. According to nine interviewees (30%), high costs were also identified as a major problem. Hence, there might be a notion among some consumers that the indigenous products cost too much. In addition, four participants (13.3%) admitted insufficient advertising strategies, while six people (20%) admitted a lack of knowledge. Consequently, consumers still face major problems with accessing indigenous products.

6. Discussion

As per the findings of the study, consumers of Kerala view local products in a positive light, especially their authenticity and quality. Since consumers find purchase methods reliable, exhibits and trade fairs become common channels for marketing. However, online marketing methods are slowly gaining importance as well.

Another finding of the research is that there is a relation between poor availability and poor marketing of these products on the one hand, and consumers' level of satisfaction on the other hand. Consumers expect better prices, better packaging, and higher accessibility of the products.

In order to increase the availability of tribal products in Kerala, it becomes imperative to focus on marketing.

7. Findings of the Study

1. A slight majority (53.3%) of the population is composed of females.
2. The largest number of consumers (50%) have medium knowledge about the tribal products from Kerala.
3. Marketing methods like exhibitions and fairs were chosen as the preferred channel for buying tribal products.
4. Quality is considered the best characteristic of tribal products, and after that comes the authenticity of the products.
5. In comparison to all other categories studied, promotions received the lowest satisfaction ratings.
6. Consumers face the problem of scarcity in availability the most.
7. One reason why tribal products receive favourable feedback from consumers is that they have authentic, natural, and quality features.
8. Marketing and distribution problems must be addressed to improve the satisfaction levels and market penetration.

8. Conclusion

The tribal population in Kerala depends on the NTFPs available in their community for sustenance purposes. The customers' access and purchases need to be boosted through marketing platforms that will facilitate this process. According to the survey findings, most customers are satisfied with the quality of

the products sold. On the other hand, issues such as high prices, lack of promotions, and limited accessibility affect customer satisfaction.

Client satisfaction can be increased and promote tribal development in Kerala by improving the marketing channels.

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