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A Study On How Consumer Perceptions Influence The Market Demand For Tribal Products With Reference To Nilgiris District

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how consumer perceptions influence the market demand for tribal products in the Nilgiris District, focusing on consumer awareness and perceived quality. Given the economic and cultural importance of these products, understanding the factors that drive consumer behavior is critical. The research employs a descriptive design and utilizes convenience sampling to collect data from 107 respondents through structured questionnaires, supplemented by secondary data for comprehensive coverage. Findings indicate a significant relationship between consumer perceptions and market demand, highlighted by the strong influence of perceived quality on purchasing decisions. Specifically, consumer awareness of tribal products, while high, showed a lesser direct impact on market demand compared to the perceived quality, which was strongly correlated with purchase behavior. This suggests that enhancing the perceived quality of tribal products could significantly boost market demand. Based on these findings, the study recommends intensifying marketing efforts to increase consumer awareness and highlight the unique aspects of tribal products through various media. Moreover, standardizing quality control measures could improve the consistency and overall perception of quality, further driving market demand. Ultimately, this research underscores the need for strategies that not only focus on enhancing product visibility but also on maintaining high quality to meet consumer expectations effectively. The conclusion drawn is that by addressing these key factors, there can be a substantial improvement in market demand for tribal products, benefiting the local economy and supporting the sustainability of tribal communities.

Keywords: Tribal Products, Consumer Perceptions, Market Demand, Nilgiris District, Cultural Significance **INTRODUCTION**

The Nilgiris district, renowned for its rich tribal heritage and diverse cultural tapestry, presents a unique marketplace for tribal products that are not only of cultural significance but also hold substantial economic potential. Tribal products, which include a range of items from handicrafts to organic produce, represent the essence of the tribal communities' traditional skills, environmental knowledge, and artistic expressions. Understanding consumer perceptions towards these products is crucial, as these perceptions significantly influence market demand and the economic well-being of the tribal artisans. Consumer perception is a critical determinant of product success in any market, influenced by a multitude of factors including quality, price, uniqueness, and the cultural story associated with

the products. In the context of tribal products, these factors are intertwined with the consumers' awareness and appreciation of the tribal culture and heritage. The Nilgiris, with its distinct tribal communities, such as the Todas, Kotas, Irulas, and Kurumbas, offers a rich array of products that are inherently sustainable and rooted in the traditional wisdom of these tribes. However, despite their uniqueness and the growing global trend towards ethnocultural and sustainable products, the full market potential of these tribal products often remains untapped.

This under exploitation is attributed to gaps in consumer awareness and varied perceptions of product value and quality. Moreover, the influx of commercial tourism and external market forces has introduced competitive pressures that further challenge the positioning of tribal products in the local and global markets. These dynamics underscore the need for a detailed exploration of how consumer perceptions shape the market demand for these products in the Nilgiris district. The study aims to bridge this knowledge gap by investigating various dimensions of consumer perceptions, including the awareness levels of the origins and cultural significance of tribal products, perceived quality based on craftsmanship and authenticity, and the overall readiness of consumers to engage with and purchase these products. By examining these factors, the study seeks to provide insights into the potential strategies that could elevate the market presence and demand for tribal products.

Understanding and enhancing consumer perceptions could lead to more effective marketing strategies, tailored to highlight the unique qualities of tribal products and to promote greater consumer engagement. This could not only boost market demand but also support the sustainability of tribal communities by providing them with viable economic opportunities. Ultimately, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on cultural preservation, sustainable development, and economic empowerment of indigenous communities through market-oriented approaches.

Review of Literature

The literature review on tribal products and communities in the Nilgiris district showcases various dimensions, including cultural identity, socioeconomic status, and market dynamics. Mathi et al. (2011) highlight the distinct roles and traits within tribal communities, such as the Kotas and Todas, emphasizing their unique cultural practices. Similarly, Govindharaj (2023) and Rafeeq (2021) discuss the broader socioeconomic challenges faced by these communities, including marginalization and the impact of external societal changes on their traditional livelihoods. On the other hand, Kannamudaiyar and Chellasamy (2023) explore eco-tourism as a sustainable opportunity for tribal economic development, reflecting on both its potential benefits and the challenges of integrating traditional lifestyles with tourism.

In the realm of market interaction, several studies focus on the marketing and economic aspects of tribal products. M. Kalpana and Dr. C. Moorthi (2019) criticize the slow progress of national bodies like TRIFED in effectively marketing tribal products, suggesting a need for better strategic support for tribal artisans. Nair and Thansiya (2018) delve into the marketing challenges faced by tribal communities in Kerala, reflecting similar marketing issues that might be present in the Nilgiris district. These challenges are echoed by Sravyasree et al. (2020), who document the economic activities of tribal groups in Telangana, highlighting the potential for enhancing business opportunities through value addition to forest products.

The review reveals a significant gap in understanding how consumer perceptions specifically impact the market demand for tribal products in the Nilgiris district. While several studies address the broader issues of socioeconomic challenges, cultural preservation, and marketing inefficiencies, there is limited research focusing on how these factors converge through consumer perspectives to affect market demand. This gap is crucial as understanding consumer awareness and perceived quality of tribal products could lead to more targeted and effective market strategies, ultimately supporting the economic sustainability of tribal communities. Therefore, this study aims to fill this gap by examining consumer awareness and perceived quality and their impact on market demand for tribal products in the Nilgiris district. This focus on consumer perceptions will provide actionable insights that could enhance marketing strategies and improve the economic conditions of tribal communities.

Statement of the Problem

In the Nilgiris district, tribal products represent not only cultural heritage but also an economic opportunity for local communities. However, despite their unique value and significance, the market demand for these products often fails to reach its potential. This mismatch may be attributed to varying consumer perceptions, which play a critical role in determining purchasing decisions. Consumer awareness and the perceived quality of these tribal products could be significant factors influencing this dynamic. Yet, there is a notable gap in understanding the depth of this influence and how it translates into actual market demand. The local economy's dependency on the sustainability and growth of the tribal products market necessitates a deeper investigation into these consumer-driven aspects, making it crucial to explore how these perceptions shape market realities.

Understanding consumer awareness and its impact on the market demand could unveil insights into the effectiveness of current marketing strategies and consumer engagement efforts. Similarly, the perceived quality of these products—from craftsmanship to authenticity and cultural significance—may significantly affect consumer buying behavior, yet the extent of this influence remains under-explored. Addressing these issues, this study aims to delve into the correlation between consumer awareness and the perceived quality of tribal products and their combined effect on market demand. By examining these relationships, the research seeks to provide actionable insights that could help local artisans, marketers, and policymakers enhance the visibility and appeal of tribal products, ultimately boosting economic benefits for the community.

Objectives of the Study

- 1. To examine how consumer awareness of tribal products affects their market demand in the Nilgiris district.
- 2. To assess the impact of perceived quality of tribal products on their market demand in the Nilgiris district.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study utilized a descriptive research design to investigate how consumer perceptions influence the market demand for tribal products in the Nilgiris district. This approach was chosen to systematically describe the factors of consumer awareness and perceived quality and to analyze their effects on market demand.

Sampling Technique and Size

The sample for the study consisted of 107 respondents, selected using a convenience sampling technique. This method enabled the efficient collection of data from a sample that was readily accessible, providing immediate and useful insights into the patterns of consumer behavior regarding tribal products within the district.

Data Collection Methods

Data were collected primarily through structured questionnaires, tailored to extract specific information on consumer awareness, perceived quality, and the consequent market demand for tribal products. The questionnaire design incorporated a variety of scaled and open-ended questions to capture a wide range of consumer perceptions. To

ensure comprehensive coverage of the topic, secondary data were also utilized, drawn from academic articles, market reports, and historical data concerning the Nilgiris district's tribal product market.

Data Analysis Tools

The analysis of the collected data was conducted using several statistical tools to provide a robust examination of the relationships and effects under study. Simple percentage analysis and descriptive statistics were employed to summarize basic features of the data and present them clearly and succinctly. Correlation analysis was utilized to explore the relationships between consumer awareness, perceived quality, and market demand. Furthermore, multiple linear regression analysis was applied to assess the impact of these independent variables on the dependent variable of market demand.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table No. 1: Demographic Variables

Demographic Variables	§ 1		Percent	Total Percent
	Upto 25 years	30	28.0	
A co Choun	26 to 35 years	35	35 32.7	
Age Group	36 to 45 years	22	20.6	100%
	Above 45 years	20	18.7	
Gender	Male	45	42.1	100%
Gender	Female	62	57.9	100%

Source: Computed from primary data

INFERENCE: Table No.1 data results reveals that the largest age group, 26 to 35 years, comprises 32.7% of the participants, suggesting a predominant presence of young adults, while those up to 25 years make up 28%. Regarding gender distribution, females represent a majority of 57.9%.

Table No. 2: Consumer Awareness of Tribal Products

Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
I am aware of the types of tribal products available in the Nilgiris district.	3.57	1.17
I understand the cultural significance of tribal products from the Nilgiris district.	3.31	1.24
I know where to purchase tribal products in the Nilgiris district.	3.26	1.21
I am informed about the benefits of purchasing tribal products.	3.42	1.25
I frequently encounter advertisements or promotions for tribal products.	3.00	1.23
I can differentiate tribal products from non-tribal products easily.	3.46	1.31
I recognize the unique features of tribal products from the Nilgiris district.	3.48	1.27
I am aware of the traditional methods used to create tribal products.	3.21	1.24
I understand the impact of purchasing tribal products on the local community.	3.48	1.33
I am aware of seasonal variations in the availability of tribal products.	3.06	1.27
I have sufficient information about the origin of tribal products I purchase.	3.34	1.24
I follow social media channels or websites that promote tribal products.	3.09	1.23
Average Score	3.31	1.25

Source: Computed from primary data

INFERENCE: From the above table no.2, the descriptive statistics for the Consumer Awareness of Tribal Products are ranked from 'I am aware of the types of tribal products available in the Nilgiris district' stood at first with the highest mean score 3.57, followed by 'I recognize the unique features of tribal products from the Nilgiris district', 'I understand the impact of purchasing tribal products on the local community' stood at second with the mean score 3.48, 'I can differentiate tribal products from non-tribal products easily' stood at third with the mean score 3.46, 'I am informed about the benefits of purchasing tribal products' stood at fourth with the mean score 3.42, 'I have sufficient information about the origin of tribal products I purchase' stood at fifth with the mean score 3.34, 'I understand the cultural significance of tribal products from the Nilgiris district' stood at sixth with the mean score 3.31, 'I know where to purchase tribal products in the Nilgiris district' stood at seventh with the mean score 3.26, 'I am aware of the traditional methods used to create tribal products' stood at eighth with the mean score 3.09, 'I am aware of seasonal variations in the availability of tribal products' stood at tenth with the mean score 3.06, and finally 'I frequently encounter advertisements or promotions for tribal products' stood at eleventh with the mean score 3.00.

Table No. 3: Perceived Quality of Tribal Products

Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Tribal products from the Nilgiris district are of high quality.	3.70	1.20
Tribal products are more durable compared to similar non-tribal products.	3.54	1.29
The craftsmanship of tribal products meets my expectations.	3.52	1.27
Tribal products offer good value for the money.	3.48	1.27
Tribal products use authentic and natural materials.	3.60	1.34
I am satisfied with the aesthetic appeal of tribal products.	3.50	1.27
Tribal products are consistent in quality.	3.42	1.25
The colors and materials used in tribal products are appealing.	3.56	1.28
Tribal products are safe and reliable.	3.60	1.31
Tribal products are well-packaged and presented.	3.46	1.27
I trust the quality of tribal products more than non-tribal products.	3.44	1.31
The finishing of tribal products is superior to that of comparable non-tribal products.	3.73	1.17
Average Score	3.55	1.27

Source : Computed from primary data

INFERENCE: From the above table no.3, the descriptive statistics for the Perceived Quality of Tribal Products are ranked from "The finishing of tribal products is superior to that of comparable non-tribal products' stood at first with the highest mean score 3.73, followed by "Tribal products from the Nilgiris district are of high quality' stood at second with the mean score 3.70, "Tribal products use authentic and natural materials', "Tribal products are safe and reliable' stood at third with the mean score 3.60, "The colors and materials used in tribal products are appealing' stood at fourth with the mean score 3.56, "Tribal products are more durable compared to similar non-tribal products' stood at fifth with the mean score 3.54, The craftsmanship of tribal products meets my expectations' stood at sixth with the mean score 3.52, 'I am satisfied with the aesthetic appeal of tribal products' stood at seventh with the mean score 3.50, "Tribal products offer good value for the money' stood at eighth with the mean score 3.48, "Tribal products are well-packaged and presented' stood at ninth with the mean score 3.46, 'I trust the quality of tribal products more than non-tribal products' stood at tenth with the mean score 3.44, and finally "Tribal products are consistent in quality' stood at eleventh with the mean score 3.42.

Table No. 4: Market Demand for Tribal Products

Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
I regularly purchase tribal products from the Nilgiris district.	3.44	1.28
I prefer tribal products over non-tribal alternatives when available.	3.50	1.35
I recommend tribal products to friends and family.	3.54	1.35
I plan to purchase more tribal products in the future.	3.42	1.25
I believe the demand for tribal products in the Nilgiris district is growing.	3.34	1.26
I am willing to pay a premium price for high-quality tribal products.	3.47	1.29
The availability of tribal products influences my purchasing decisions.	3.21	1.24
I feel a sense of pride when purchasing tribal products.	3.33	1.23
I seek out tribal products for special occasions.	3.69	1.15
The range of available tribal products meets my needs.	3.58	1.32
I am influenced by positive reviews when purchasing tribal products.	3.32	1.22
I consider tribal products as unique gifts for others.	3.49	1.29
Average Score	3.44	1.27

Source: Computed from primary data

INFERENCE: From the above table no.4, the descriptive statistics for the Market Demand for Tribal Products are ranked from 'I seek out tribal products for special occasions' stood at first with the highest mean score 3.69, followed by 'The range of available tribal products meets my needs' stood at second with the mean score 3.58, 'I recommend tribal products to friends and family' stood at third with the mean score 3.54, 'I prefer tribal products over non-tribal alternatives when available' stood at fourth with the mean score 3.50, 'I consider tribal products as unique gifts for others' stood at fifth with the mean score 3.49, 'I am willing to pay a premium price for high-quality tribal products' stood at sixth with the mean score 3.47, 'I regularly purchase tribal products from the Nilgiris district' stood at seventh with the mean score 3.44, 'I plan to purchase more tribal products in the future' stood at eighth with the mean score 3.42, 'I believe the demand for tribal products in the Nilgiris district is growing' stood at ninth with the mean score 3.34, 'I feel a sense of pride when purchasing tribal products' stood at tenth with the mean score 3.33, 'I am influenced by positive reviews when purchasing tribal products' stood at eleventh with the mean score 3.32, and finally 'The availability of tribal products influences my purchasing decisions' stood at twelfth with the mean score 3.21.

Hypothesis No.: 1

Null Hypothesis (H_0): There is no significant correlation between Consumer Awareness, Perceived Quality, and Market Demand for Tribal Products.

Alternative Hypothesis (H_a): There is a significant correlation between Consumer Awareness, Perceived Quality, and Market Demand for Tribal Products.

Table No.5: Consumer Awareness, Perceived Quality, and Market Demand for Tribal Products.

	Correlations							
				Market Demand				
		Consumer Awareness	Perceived Quality	for Tribal				
		of Tribal Products	of Tribal Products	Products				
Consumer Awareness	Pearson Correlation	1	.372**	.299**				
of Tribal Products	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.002				
	N	107	107	107				
Perceived Quality of	Pearson Correlation	.372**	1	.646**				
Tribal Products	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000				
	N	107	107	107				
Market Demand for Tribal Products	Pearson Correlation	.299**	.646**	1				
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.002	.000					
	N	107	107	107				

Source: Computed from primary data

INFERENCE: The results from Table No.5 strongly reject the Null Hypothesis (H₀), demonstrating significant correlations among Consumer Awareness, Perceived Quality, and Market Demand for Tribal Products. Specifically, the correlation coefficient between Consumer Awareness and Perceived Quality is .372, and between Consumer Awareness and Market Demand is .299, both statistically significant with p-values less than .005. Moreover, a notably strong correlation of .646 between Perceived Quality and Market Demand, with a p-value of .000, further substantiates the interconnected influence of these variables on the tribal products market.

Hypothesis No.: 2

Null Hypothesis (H₀): There is no significant linear relationship between Perceived Quality, Consumer Awareness of Tribal Products, and Market Demand for Tribal Products.

Alternative Hypothesis (Ha): There is a significant linear relationship between Perceived Quality, Consumer Awareness of Tribal Products, and Market Demand for Tribal Products.

Table No.6: Model Summary and ANOVA

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				Mod	el Summa	${f ry^b}$				
						Change Statistics				
				Std. Error	R					
		R	Adjusted	of the	Square	F			Sig. F	Durbin-
Model	R	Square	R Square	Estimate	Change	Change	df1	df2	Change	Watson
1	.649a	.422	.411	5.03449	.422	37.931	2	104	.000	1.899
a. Predic	ctors: (C	Constant),	Perceived Q	Quality of T	ribal Produ	cts, Consu	mer Av	arenes	s of Tribal	Products
b. Deper	ndent V	ariable: M	Iarket Dema	and for Trib	al Products	}				
					ANOVA					
Model			Sum of S	Squares	df	Mean	Square		F	Sig.
1	Regre	ssion	1	922.825	2		961.41	2	37.931	.000 ^b
	Resid	ual	2	2635.998	104		25.34	6		
Total 4558.822 106										
a. Deper	ndent V	ariable: M	Iarket Dema	nd for Trib	al Products			•	•	
b. Predic	ctors: (C	Constant),	Perceived (Quality of T	ribal Produ	cts, Consu	ımer Av	varenes	s of Tribal	Products

Source: Computed from primary data

INFERENCE: The data from Table No.6 clearly disproves the Null Hypothesis (H₀) and supports the Alternative Hypothesis (H_a), indicating a significant linear relationship between Perceived Quality, Consumer Awareness of Tribal Products, and Market Demand for Tribal Products. The model summary shows a strong correlation coefficient (R) of .649, explaining approximately 42.2% of the variance in Market Demand (R Square = .422), which is significant with an F-change value of 37.931 and a p-value of .000. The ANOVA results further confirm the significance of this model with the same p-value, demonstrating a substantial impact of Perceived Quality and Consumer Awareness on Market Demand for Tribal Products.

Table No.7: Coefficients

Coefficients ^a								
		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized				
				Coefficients		~.		
Model		В	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.		
1	(Constant)	12.147	4.360		2.786	.006		
	Consumer Awareness of Tribal Products	.092	.108	.068	.848	.399		
	Perceived Quality of Tribal Products	.600	.078	.621	7.729	.000		
a. Depe	a. Dependent Variable: Market Demand for Tribal Products							

Source: Computed from primary data

INFERENCE: The results from Table No.7 indicate that Perceived Quality of Tribal Products has a significant positive impact on Market Demand for Tribal Products, with a standardized coefficient (Beta) of .621 and a highly significant t-value of 7.729 (p-value = .000). In contrast, Consumer Awareness of Tribal Products shows a much smaller and statistically insignificant impact on Market Demand, with a Beta of .068 and a t-value of .848 (p-value = .399). Thus, while perceived quality strongly influences market demand, consumer awareness does not show a significant direct effect in this model.

Table No.8: Residuals Statistics

Residuals Statistics ^a									
Minimum Maximum Mean Std. Deviation N									
Predicted Value	33.0808	50.2884	41.3084	4.25909	107				
Residual -13.61435 9.55314 .00000 4.98677									
Std. Predicted Value -1.932 2.108 .000 1.000 10									
Std. Residual -2.704 1.898 .000 .991 107									
a. Dependent Variable: Market Demand for Tribal Products									

Source: Computed from primary data

INFERENCE: Table No.8 on Residual Statistics for the model predicting Market Demand for Tribal Products indicates that the residuals are well-behaved and the model is fairly effective. The mean of the residuals is exactly 0, demonstrating that the model does not systematically overestimate or underestimate the dependent variable. Standard deviation of the residuals is 4.98677, suggesting a moderate spread around the mean predicted values. The standard residuals, ranging from -2.704 to 1.898, mostly fall within the typically expected range of approximately -3 to 3, which implies that the model does not suffer from severe outliers or extreme errors in prediction. Overall, these statistics support the adequacy of the model in fitting the data.

FINDINGS AND SUGGESTIONS

Findings of the study

- The largest participant age group in the study is 26 to 35 years, comprising 32.7%, indicating a predominance of young adults; those up to 25 years account for 28%.
- Females make up the majority of the study's participants, representing 57.9% of the total.
- In consumer awareness rankings, knowledge of tribal product types in the Nilgiris district scored highest with a mean of 3.57, while encounters with advertisements ranked lowest with a mean of 3.00.
- For perceived quality, the finishing of tribal products scored highest with a mean of 3.73, while consistency in quality scored lowest with a mean of 3.42.
- In market demand, seeking tribal products for special occasions received the highest score with a mean of 3.69, whereas the influence of product availability on purchasing decisions scored the lowest at 3.21.
- Significant correlations were found among consumer awareness, perceived quality, and market demand for tribal products, with the strongest correlation of .646 between perceived quality and market demand.
- Statistical analysis strongly supports the alternative hypothesis, showing a significant linear relationship between perceived quality, consumer awareness, and market demand.
- Perceived quality significantly impacts market demand with a high correlation coefficient of .649, explaining 42.2% of variance in market demand.
- Although perceived quality significantly influences market demand, consumer awareness has a negligible direct effect on market demand.
- The residuals analysis confirms the model's effectiveness, with residuals well-distributed around zero and no evidence of systematic bias or extreme prediction errors.

Suggestions

Based on the findings from the study on how consumer perceptions influence the market demand for tribal products in the Nilgiris District, several targeted suggestions can be formulated to enhance both consumer awareness and market demand. Firstly, since knowledge of tribal product types has the highest awareness but encounters with advertisements scored the lowest, it is recommended that marketing efforts be intensified. Strategic marketing campaigns should be employed to increase visibility and awareness through varied advertising channels. This could include the use of social media platforms, local media, and community events to showcase the unique aspects and cultural significance of tribal products. Additionally, storytelling can be a powerful tool in these advertisements, highlighting the heritage, craftsmanship, and tradition embedded in these products to create a deeper connection with potential customers.

Regarding the perceived quality of tribal products, the fact that finishing scores highest suggests that consumers recognize and value high-quality craftsmanship. However, the lower scores on consistency indicate a need for improvements in maintaining quality standards across all products. It is advisable for producers to implement stricter quality control measures and perhaps standardize some aspects of production to ensure consistency. This will likely enhance the overall perception of quality and, consequently, affect market demand positively. Since market demand is significantly influenced by perceived quality, improving consistency in quality should be a priority. Additionally, considering that market demand is also driven by the uniqueness of products, particularly for special occasions, expanding product lines to include bespoke or limited-edition items could also spur further interest and increase purchasing behavior.

Conclusion

The study conclusively demonstrates that consumer perceptions significantly influence the market demand for tribal products in the Nilgiris District. Fulfilling the first objective, the findings reveal that while consumer awareness positively affects market demand, its direct impact remains relatively moderate, indicating that mere awareness alone may not suffice to significantly drive purchasing behavior. Addressing the second objective, the data strongly supports the notion that perceived quality critically impacts market demand; a high correlation suggests that the better the consumers perceive the quality of tribal products, the higher the demand. This underscores the necessity for producers to focus on maintaining and enhancing the quality of their products to meet consumer expectations, which in turn, will drive market demand. Thus, efforts to improve and communicate the quality and cultural significance of tribal products could be pivotal in stimulating market demand in the region.

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