

CUSTOMER PERCEPTIONS AND PREFERENCES : A CASE STUDY

A. Vidyadhar Reddy and Mohd. Abdul Azeem*

Based on a sample study of customers of thermoware products, this paper (a) reviews the present brand ownership of these products with the respondents; (b) finds out the factors that influence the brand selection; (c) examines the brand preferences revealed through new purchases; and (d) studies the perceptions about the determinant attributes of these products.

I. INTRODUCTION

Of late, thermoware products have made an entry into every household as their growing importance is felt in day to day life. A number of companies have made entry into the thermoware market. In order to capture substantial market share as also have the competitive advantage, a number of companies have been coming out with products based on innovative designs and technology. Therefore, this study examines the perceptions of and preferences for thermoware products, through an analysis of the sample data collected by the authors.

The basic idea is to determine the position that Cello occupies in the perceptual space of the customers vis-a-vis other leading brands. For this, a stratified random sample of 100 respondents in the twin-city of Hyderabad was selected. The response rate was 100 per cent as each respondent was personally approached with a questionnaire which was presented using a consumer sample and refined suitably. Besides the questions directed to elicit the profile of the respondents, the question-

naire contained questions, designed to collect the necessary data. In what follows, we present the findings of our survey after which we propose certain suggestions which emerge out of our conclusions.

II. SURVEY FINDINGS

Table 1 : Ownership pattern of Thermoware

Brand	(%) of Respondents
Cello	30
Milton	40
Eagle	18
Asian	2
Unbranded	10

From Table 1 that gives ownership pattern, it is clear that Milton is the leading brand with 40 per cent of the market, followed closely by Cello with 30 per cent of the market. Eagle ranks a distant third while the unbranded market is only 10 per cent. However, these figures are of utmost importance from the Cello's viewpoint as it is lagging behind Milton, the market leader.

* Reader and Research Scholar respectively, Department of Business Management, Osmania University, Hyderabad.

Table 2 : Factors Influencing the Choice of Brand

Factor	(%) of Respondents
Advertisements	
Television Ads	45
Newspapers	15
Magazines	10
Total	70
Shop-keepers	20
Friends/Relatives	10

From Table 2, it is clear that television advertisements are the most credible source of information for the buyers, followed by the recommendations of the shop-keepers, which mostly help the unbranded market. Recommendations of friends/relatives rank the least.

Taking into account age and income factors influencing the purchase, Tables 3 and 4 reveal that advertisements followed by recommendations of shop-keepers play an important role in the purchase pattern of a consumer.

Table 3 : Age Factor as an Influence on Purchase

Age Group	Ads	Shop-keepers	Friends/Relatives
< 25 yrs.	20%	5%	2%
26 yrs. - 35 yrs.	23%	7%	1%
36 yrs. - 45 yrs.	7%	5%	2%
> 45 yrs.	20%	3%	5%

Table 4 : Income Factor as an Influence on Purchase

Income Group	Ads	Shop-keepers	Friends/Relatives
< Rs. 5000	13%	4%	5%
Rs. 5001-7500	29%	10%	3%
> Rs. 7500	28%	6%	2%

Table 5 : Preferred Brands in New Purchases

Brand	(%) of Respondents
Cello	20%
Milton	60%
Eagle	10%
Asian	—
Unbranded	10%

In the case of new purchases to be made as well, Milton is the most preferred of all the brands of thermoware mentioned in Table 5. The preferences for Eagle, Asian and the unbranded ones are not so significant.

Table 6 : Patterns of Preferences for Thermo-Products

Thermo-Product	(%) of Respondents
Casseroles	50%
Lunch Carriers	20%
Water Bottles	20%
Water Jugs	5%
Vaccum Flasks	5%

Of the various products that constitute the range of thermoware, as can be seen from Table 6, Casseroles are the most preferred product with 50 per cent of the respondents, followed distantly by Lunch Carriers and Water Bottles. Surprisingly, Vaccum Flasks and Water Jugs get insignificant ratings by the respondents.

Table 7 : Attribute Ratings of Thermoware

Attribute	Rank				
	1	2	3	4	5
Brand Image	37%	57%	3%	3%	—
Range	9%	14%	46%	20%	11%
Price	48%	20%	14%	14%	3%
Durability	6%	6%	20%	26%	43%
Design & Looks	—	3%	16%	37%	43%

From Table 7 it is observed that Brand Image and Price are the two important attributes while purchasing a thermoware,

followed by the Range. Durability and Design & Looks do not influence the purchase decision of a consumer.

Table 8 : Product Brand Matching

Product	Brand				
	Cello	Milton	Eagle	Asian	Unbranded
Casserole	10%	70%	5%	5%	10%
Lunch Carrier	30%	50%	5%	5%	10%
Water Bottles	35%	40%	15%	—	10%
Water Jugs	25%	40%	10%	10%	15%
Vaccum Flasks	10%	25%	50%	—	15%

While Milton is the most preferred brand in the case of casseroles, lunch carriers, water bottles and water jugs, Eagle is the most preferred brand in the case of vacuum flasks.

Cello is preferred next to Milton in all thermoware products except vacuum flasks. However, a close observation of the Cello and Milton figures indicate the wide gap in the case of casseroles which is about 60 per cent (see Table 8).

Table 9 : Rating of Brands in Terms of Design & Looks

Product	Brand				
	Cello	Milton	Eagle	Asian	Unbranded
Casserole	15%	65%	5%	—	15%
Lunch Carrier	25%	50%	10%	5%	10%
Water Bottles	30%	45%	15%	—	10%
Water Jugs	10%	60%	20%	5%	5%
Vacuum Flasks	25%	30%	35%	—	10%

Just as in the case of product range, so also in terms of Design & Looks, Milton is perceived to be a better performer than other brands. However, Eagle scores over Milton in the case of Vacuum Flasks. Cello

is again perceived to be an alternative to Milton. A wide gap is observed in the case of Casseroles between Cello and Milton which is about 50 per cent (Table 9).

Table 10 : Pricewise Rating of Brands

Product	Brand				
	Cello	Milton	Eagle	Asian	Unbranded
Casserole	10%	40%	10%	5%	35%
Lunch Carrier	15%	35%	10%	—	40%
Water Bottles	25%	25%	15%	—	35%
Water Jugs	15%	35%	10%	—	40%
Vacuum Flasks	10%	20%	25%	—	45%

In the branded category, on the dimension of Price also, Milton scores clearly over Cello and Eagle in the categories of Casseroles, Lunch Carriers, Water Bottles and Water Jugs. Eagle gets the best rating

in the case of Vacuum Flasks. However, most of the respondents felt that the unbranded thermoware is available at lower prices than that of the branded ones (Table 10).

Table 11 : Rating of Brands in terms of Durability

Product	Brand				
	Cello	Milton	Eagle	Asian	Unbranded
Casserole	25%	50%	15%	—	10%
Lunch Carrier	25%	50%	15%	5%	5%
Water Bottles	25%	40%	25%	—	10%
Water Jugs	15%	65%	10%	—	10%
Vacuum Flasks	10%	25%	45%	—	20%

The findings are no different even on the dimension of durability in that Milton enjoys a clear edge over Cello and Eagle in all the product categories except Vacuum Flasks. Eagle retains its edge in the product category of Vacuum Flasks over Milton and Cello. About 50 per cent of the respondents feel that Milton Water Jugs are more durable than the Cello ones.

Table 12 : Preferences between Branded and Un-branded Products

Product	Respondents
Branded	85%
Un-branded	15%

The majority of our respondents are more favourably disposed to the branded products as compared to the unbranded ones (Table 12). And in the light of the previous discussion, it is clear that the impact of unbranded thermoware is very low except in terms of price.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cello should concentrate more on the unbranded market so as to reduce the gap between Milton and itself. It should focus the advantages of a branded thermoware over an unbranded through its advertisements

aimed at the final consumer as well as the middlemen. To encourage this, the company may launch a campaign to exchange an unbranded thermoware with Cello at a reasonable price.

Blue, violet and brown are the most preferred colours in thermoware. However, as most of the new generation is preferring violet and brown colours, Cello should introduce a wider range with violet and brown colours in casseroles, water bottles, and lunch carriers which are preferred by the younger generation people.

Brand image, price and range come out to be the important attributes that a customer is looking for in the purchase of thermoware. With the advertising campaign of "Say Hello To Cello", the brand image of Cello is very good. However, Cello should focus more on convincing the customer about the long range economy of the Cello brand.

Even though Cello has a range of over 400 thermoware products which is more than that of the market leader Milton, many customers feel that Milton has a wider range than that of Cello. As range is the third most important attribute in the purchase of thermoware, Cello should focus more on educating the customer of the wider range of Cello through its advertisements and retailers. Cello should identify

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some of its prime located dealers and should exhibit its entire range in an exclusive cabinet, so that when a customer visits the retailer he should find the entire range of Cello. Also, Cello may encourage some retailers to have exclusive retail outlets of Cello.

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Cello should develop exclusive advertising campaigns for vacuum flasks where Milton is lagging behind Eagle, and should increase its vacuum flasks range so as to compete with Eagle.

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Cello water jugs are considered as having very low durability compared to Milton.

Cello should make efforts to improve the quality and durability of its water jugs.

In the case of brand ownership, Cello is behind Milton by about 10 per cent, and in the case of brand preference Cello is behind Milton by 40 per cent. This clearly indicates the necessity for aggressive marketing efforts on the part of Cello compared to Milton.

As most of the above 35 years age group respondents are preferring Cello to Milton, the company should position its products among this target group and should focus the same through its advertisements.