Implementation of Cold Pressed Soap in e-Commerce as a Platform for Business Development with Special Reference to Chennai City

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Abstract

When a consumer is given multiple options of products to choose from, he has the freedom to choose the best among the alternatives. In the current e-Commerce era consumers are provided with multiple choice of products in their computer/smartphone screen and at the same time, sellers have the facility to showcase their products directly to the consumers, unlike the traditional model where there are a number of channels. Even to the extent of personalizing a product, and to offer products to the consumer directly, there are e-Commerce companies available. This study is based on a survey of asample of 75 from Chennai city to study the sale of cold pressed soap in e-Commerce platform.

The result of the study showed that there was awareness and acceptance of cold pressed soap among consumers, and at the same time consumers are to be educated about cold pressed soap, as most of them believe that cold pressed soaps are chemical free soaps which are not good as some chemicals are also added in the process. Clarity in the content and showcasing various certifications to consumers will increase trust and make e-Commerce as a platform for cold pressed soap. Online consultation on suitably flavoured soap can help to scale up the business.

Keywords: Cold pressed soap, e-Commerce

The world is changing; the consumer is transforming from fast food culture to healthy food habits. The same applies to soaps as well. With increasing pollution and thinning ozone layer, one has to take special care to make sure that people are not affected by skin related diseases. Skin-related effects can be sunburn, eye cancer, and skin cancer. So, the priority should also be to have balanced and effective skin care. Soap is a vital skin care product that we consume on a daily basis.

Recent news and reports suggest that many harmful chemicals are being used as ingredients in soaps that are used by us. Chemicals that are synthetic are basically skin irritants, penetrators, and have carcinogenic ingredients. One such globally acknowledged ingredient is Triclosan. Triclosan is commonly found in antibacterial soaps. It is a substance that can do more harm than good.

Cold Pressed Soap

Cold pressed soaps ingredients can be general household things. It may not be absolutely organic, but it does not have

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any harmful chemicals. However, there has been a perception that cold pressed soap has the potential of being only a boutique industry. Cold pressed soaps should not just be a luxurious product with presence only in luxury hotels and resorts. Availability of healthy products such as cold pressed soaps should be made easy. To increase the viability, there is no better medium than e-commerce in the current Smartphone era.

The production of cold pressed soap is not an easy task and it has its own set of challenges. Ensuring uniform quality in a large scale production is not possible, because unlike machine-made soaps, it has an error in the form of human factor. The soap making process is accident-prone and even more so at higher volumes. The key ingredient in producing a soap is called Lye (Sodium Hydroxide). The alchemy does consist of palm, coconut, and olive oil. Sometimes goat and cow milk with all kitchen ingredients can be added. These challenges exist but can be countered with effective and sustainable e-business model which would be elaborated in brief.

Objectives of the Study

❖ To understand respondents' opinion regarding organic products and cold pressed soap.

❖ To examine the expectations to make online as an acceptable platform for buying cold pressed soap.

❖ To understand the important influencers for buying soap.

Literature Review

Mak-Mensah and Firempong (2011) in their research on chemical characteristics of toilet soap prepared from Neem and their finding was that Neem soap was prepared from mechanically pressed kernel oil. Chemical analysis of the soap revealed that it has 63.7%, 0.24%, 0.06, 1.15%, 12.63%, and 10.40 total fatty matter, total alkali, free caustic alkali, percentage chloride (% CT), % moisture, and pH respectively.

Warra, Hassan, Gunu, and Jega (2010) conducted a study on cold process synthesis and properties of soaps prepared from different Triacylglycerol sources. The study was conducted to find out how different fats and oils produce soaps of different characteristics. It described cold process saponification using different fats and oils. It was found that ground oil soap had the most effective cleaning power. The soaps are also recommended for household use.

E - Business Model

The e-Commerce business model to be used and insights about implementation are to be discussed in brief. Since organic cold pressed soap is going to be sold to the individual end user, the B2C (Business 2 Customer) business model to be adapted in this segment and the product would be sold in e-trailer/ storefront. Implementing it by being a virtual merchant to provide the e-version of a retail outlet to help both business and end-user helps the business by creating an internet footprint to increase the business. The end user will be benefitted by organic soap and the prices would be low as compared to retail stores. The consumer would enjoy the shopping experience seamlessly and comfortably.

eMarketer (2016) estimated that online sales are expected to reach 23 trillion US dollars by 2020. As the volume of the market is growing steadily, attracting consumers is becoming increasingly difficult as there are many stores already. Retaining customers with some loyalty program which are already secured by potential buyers can help.

There are many retail sellers trying to penetrate the e-commerce market and with the technology boom, retailers can construct a portal easily. Kaplan and Haenlein (2010) believed that there were many e-commerce platforms trying to provide a variety of products to consumers to satisfy their consumer base. Small-scale business owners are restricted by their resources to handle the e-commerce platform. Understanding the requirements to satisfy consumer needs is also important. If not, there is a potential chance of failure.

King, Sen, and Xia (2004) believed that the problem was to sell through e-commerce as it would make the seller a direct seller. This, in turn, increased the selling cost of a product since they had been traditionally selling through retail stores. To eliminate this problem, the business plan is to implement an e-commerce platform where many retailers and individual soap makers can sell their products through a common platform so that sustainable profit model can be

created with less risk factor.

Campbell, Wells, and Valacich (2013) proposed an e-Commerce Attraction Model (eCAM). In this model, prior literature for attraction in e-commerce domain was adpated. The eCAM model suggested possible reasons for the attraction of a portal. The construct basically suggested that attraction had importance, which also gave a reason to use a website. Competent behaviour and relationship with the end user also played a major role in intention of using a website.

Figure 1. Research Model: E-Commerce Attraction Model (eCAM)

(Source: Campbell, Wells, & Valacich, 2013)
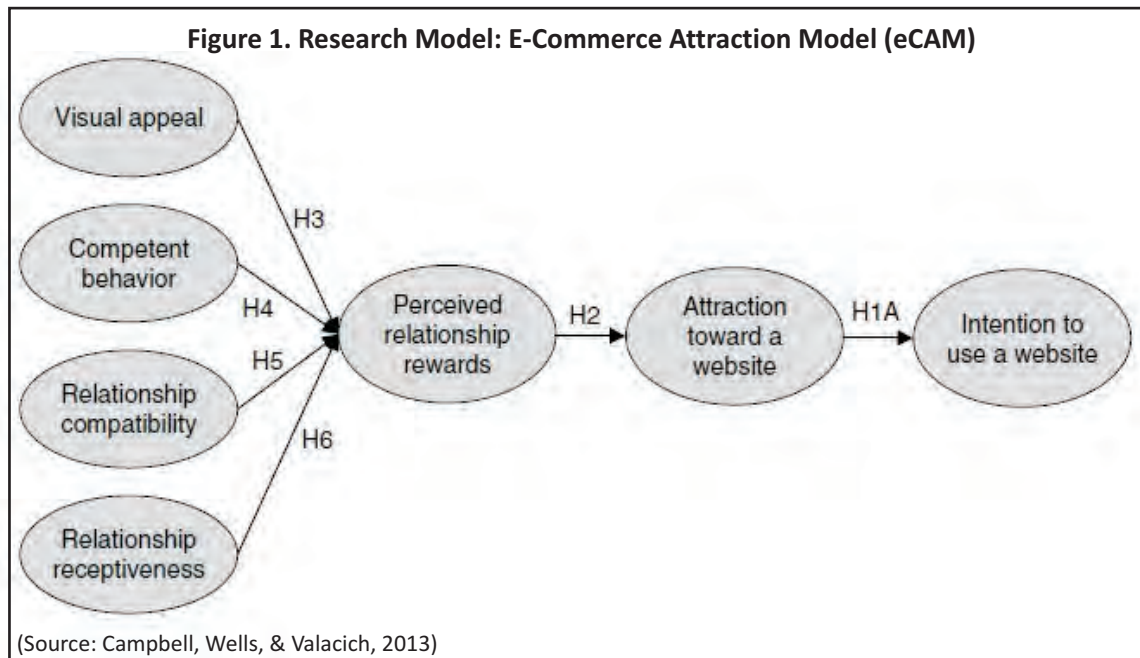
Value Chain

(1) Definition of Value chain

Porter (1985) reported that there were many parts and functionalities in an organization, and when combined, these ensured the effectiveness of the organization. Value chain revolved around critical evaluation to understand the individual aspects of the organization. The entire value chain foundation was built upon the common mission, vision, goals, and strategies rather than being an individual department. The value chain was built on the structured hierarchy with a systematic cycle. In value chain, broadly classified two types of activities, that is, primary and support activities.

Lin, Hu, Zhang, Qiao, and Xu (2014) stated that value chain comprised of multiple economic activities with similar sectors from production to end-user. The entire value chain structure was interrelated. The same value chain hierarchy could be applied in a different industry vertical with the same underlying principles. The impact of the same value chain model in e-commerce was effective considering strong intercommunication in the technology era. The effective communication between departments ensured the organizational structure of the enterprise in transforming into flat network architecture, which in turn increased productivity by reducing the time delay between communication and feedback from the end users. They can align into the same page by responding quickly to the end-user requirements.

(2) Implementation of value chain in cold pressed soaps

Porter value chain model is provided in this section to understand the implementation of this model effectively. The

same value chain model is going to be implemented in the cold pressed soaps with the following explanation.

Porter's value chain can be broadly classified into two sets of activities, that is, primary and support activities which are the two basic activities.

Figure 2. Porter value chain model

(Source: Singh, 1985)
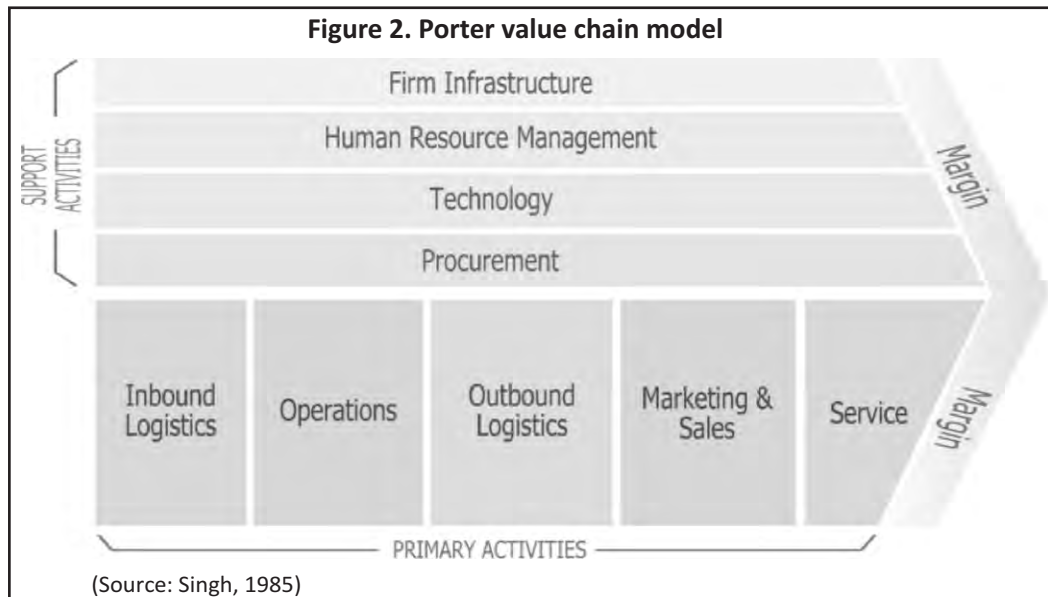
(3) Primary Activities

The primary activities include inbound logistics that happen from the retail outlets and small-time soap manufacturers. Sellers who want to promote the product have to package them to meet the requirements of consumers. The product is promoted on the internet with SEO Search engine optimization (SEO), Search Engine Marketing (SEM), Social Media Marketing (SMM) to increase traffic share, and to promote the portal. The clients are supported after sales to understand feedback about product, and to ensure that the products reach the end-user in the right shape.

(4) Support Activities

To support the existing primary activity, a series of support activities are undertaken to ensure that it is well supported. The support activities include the firm infrastructure to have a check on the right target being reached in the production stages. Human Resource Management ensures that the right number of people for the job are recruited to ensure the satisfaction of existing employees. Any e-Commerce needs to thrive with new technological developments. To ensure that the technology stays up-to-date and Research and Development (R&D) department has to be in-house to make sure the latest web technologies have been adopted. Inventory management is one of the important tasks in e-commerce. So, procurement, and management of stock are going to be crucial to support inbound and outbound logistics.

SWOT Analysis and Technology Behind E-commerce

The broad analysis on the strength, weakness, opportunity, and threat for e-commerce implementation is generally analysed with pricing, technology upgrade, and available infrastructure. Companies with better technology always

have a better edge compared to small-time players. Kashyap and Maurya (2013) believed that the general consumer sentiment was that the end consumer compared he store prices with e-commerce prices, so e-commerce portals which provided free shipping, better cataloguing, and intuitive technology with good ordering facilities offer quality products. Certain products with relatively unknown brand and products with a good brand name are also being sold through e-Commerce.

❖ Strengths, Weakness, Opportunities, and Threats

As discussed earlier, a company with just retail stores cannot survive in the current technical world. In such a scenario, e-commerce will provide a further edge in penetrating new markets, and exploring new demographies, and reaching new age customers.

The implementation of cold pressed soaps in the e-commerce market would provide rich dividends to existing retailers in the e-commerce market. Since e-commerce can cut through geographical barriers, it can identify new customers because of not being restricted by the geography. It can also help in focusing on certain geographies which have more number of consumers by tracing the demography based traffic via Google analytics.

The product can be aggressively promoted in those particular geographies. The potential threat of this implementation is that since the product will have a relatively small market in its nascent stages, the same can be overcome by effective marketing about awareness and health benefits of the product.

Dospinescu and Perca-Robu (2017) reported that eye-tracking technology could be used to investigate the interactivity dimensions of websites, and to understand user behaviour through a quantitative approach. The recent technological advancement identifies user activity in the web page tools. The visual process could identify the heat maps, scan paths, and percentage fixated etc. The same tool can be used for ontological findings.

Research Methodology

The primary objective of the study was to identify the implementation of cold pressed soap in e-Commerce platforms. The research design for this study was descriptive in nature. Data were collected based on convenience sampling. A sample of 75 respondents from various age groups and gender were collected. Data were collected during August 2018.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Table 1. Socio Economic Conditions of the Respondents

Categories	Factors	Frequency	%
Age of the respondents	20-25	9	12
	25-30	35	47
	30-35	10	13
	Above 35	21	28
Gender	Male	46	62
	Female	29	38
Qualification	Graduation	42	56
	Post Graduate	18	24
	Professional courses	6	8
	Others	9	12
Profession	Private employer	44	59
	Government employee	13	18
	Business	7	9

	Others	11	14
Income of the respondent	15,000-20,000	12	16
	20,001-25,000	39	52
	25,001-30,000	15	20
	Above 30,001	9	12

Table 1 reveals that most of the respondents (47%) were in the age group of 25-30, and the majority of the respondents were male (62%). It is also to be noted that majority of respondents had completed graduation (56%), and 59% of the respondents were employed in private organizations with majority of them (52%) having income level of ₹ 25,001-35,000. Table 2 shows profession versus preference of buying online materials.

Table 2. Relationship Between Profession and Preferred Category To Buy Online

Chi – Square Test

Profession * Preferred category to buy online cross tabulation

			Purchase Online					
			Garments	Mobile phone & accessories	Electronic gadgets	Personal care accessories	Groceries	Total
Profession	Private employee	Count	16	14	4	3	10	47
		% within profession	34.0%	29.8%	8.5%	6.4%	21.3%	100.0%
		% within purchase online	59.3%	73.7%	36.4%	75.0%	71.4%	62.7%
		% of total	21.3%	18.7%	5.3%	4.0%	13.3%	62.7%
	Government Employee	Count	1	2	4	0	2	9
		% within profession	11.1%	22.2%	44.4%	0.0%	22.2%	100.0%
		% within purchase online	3.7%	10.5%	36.4%	0.0%	14.3%	12.0%
		% of total	1.3%	2.7%	5.3%	0.0%	2.7%	12.0%
	Business	Count	4	0	1	1	1	7
		% within profession	57.1%	0.0%	14.3%	14.3%	14.3%	100.0%
		% within purchase online	14.8%	0.0%	9.1%	25.0%	7.1%	9.3%
		% of total	5.3%	0.0%	1.3%	1.3%	1.3%	9.3%
	Others	Count	6	3	2	0	1	12
		% within profession	50.0%	25.0%	16.7%	0.0%	8.3%	100.0%
		% within purchase online	22.2%	15.8%	18.2%	0.0%	7.1%	16.0%
		% of total	8.0%	4.0%	2.7%	0.0%	1.3%	16.0%
Total		Count	27	19	11	4	14	75
		% within profession	36.0%	25.3%	14.7%	5.3%	18.7%	100.0%
		% within purchase online	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of total	36.0%	25.3%	14.7%	5.3%	18.7%	100.0%

Table 3. Chi-square Tests

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	Df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	15.246[a]	12	0.228
Likelihood ratio	16.619	12	0.165
Linear-by-linear association	1.279	1	0.258
N of valid cases	75		

Table 3 exhibits the results of the "Pearson Chi-Square" row $\chi(1) = 0.65$, $p = 0.65$. This tells us that there is no statistically significant association between profession and preferred online purchase.

Table 4. Symmetric Measures

Symmetric Measures		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.451	0.228
	Cramer's V	0.260	0.228
N of Valid Cases		75	

Phi and Cramer's V are both tests of the strength of association. We can see that the strength of association between the variables is very weak (Table 4).

Table 5 shows that the coefficient of understanding of cold pressed soap increases for a single unit in each predictor. A one point increase in profession corresponds to 0.19 points increase in the understanding of cold pressed soap test. Given only the scores on our predictors, we can predict understanding of cold pressed soap by computing.

Understanding of cold pressed soap $= 2.20 + (0.19 * Profession) + (-0.23 * Qualification)$

❖ Importantly, note that all coefficients are positive numbers; higher understanding of cold pressed soap is associated with lower qualification and so on. Coefficients having the "wrong direction" often indicate a problem with the analysis known as multi-collinearity.

❖ Sig. is the significance level for our predictors. As a rule of thumb, we say that a *b* coefficient is statistically significant if its *p*-value is smaller than 0.05. All of our coefficients are statistically significant.

Table 5. Relationship Between Qualification of the Respondents and Understanding of Cold Pressed Soap

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients			95.0% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.	Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1 (Constant)	2.205	0.429		5.141	0.000	1.342	3.069
Profession	0.197	0.164	0.173	1.198	0.237	-0.134	0.527
Qualification	-0.230	0.174	-0.191	-1.318	0.194	-0.580	0.121

Linear Regression Model Coefficients[a]

a. Dependent Variable: Understanding of cold pressed soap

Table 6. Model Summary

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change	Durbin-Watson
					Change Statistics					
1	0.238[a]	0.057	0.016	1.248	0.057	1.382	2	46	0.261	1.724

a. Predictors: (Constant), Profession, Qualification

b. Dependent Variable: Understanding of Cold Pressed Soap

❖ This model predicts understanding of cold pressed soap. *R* denotes the correlation between predicted and observed performance. In our case, $R = 0.24$ (Table 6). Since this is a very high correlation, our model predicts understanding of cold pressed soap rather precisely.

❖ *R* squared is simply the square of *R*. It indicates the proportion of variance in understanding of cold pressed soap that can be explained by three predictors.

Table 7. Opinion of Respondents About Organic Products

		t Test		
		One-Sample Statistics		
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Opinion on Organic Products	75	2.33	1.614	0.186

Table 8. *t*-test

			Test Value = 0			
	t	*Df*	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
Opinion on organic products	12.523	74	.000	2.333	1.96	2.70

Table 9. Relationship Between Age And Factors Influencing Purchase of Soap

			Age * Important Aspect of Soap Cross tabulation				
			Important Influencer of Soap				
			Fragrance	Brand Name	Doctors Suggestion	Price	Total
Age	20-25	Count	9	0	0	0	9
		% within age	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within important aspect of soap	22.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.0%
		% of total	12.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	12.0%
	25-30	Count	14	20	0	1	35
		% within age	40.0%	57.1%	0.0%	2.9%	100.0%
		% within important aspect of soap	34.1%	100.0%	0.0%	16.7%	46.7%
		% of total	18.7%	26.7%	0.0%	1.3%	46.7%
	30-35	Count	10	0	0	0	10
		% within age	100.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
		% within important aspect of soap	24.4%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	13.3%
		% of total	13.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	13.3%
	above 35	Count	8	0	8	5	21
		% within age	38.1%	0.0%	38.1%	23.8%	100.0%
		% within important aspect of soap	19.5%	0.0%	100.0%	83.3%	28.0%
		% of total	10.7%	0.0%	10.7%	6.7%	28.0%
Total		Count	41	20	8	6	75
		% within age	54.7%	26.7%	10.7%	8.0%	100.0%
		% within important aspect of soap	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%
		% of total	54.7%	26.7%	10.7%	8.0%	100.0%

❖ Because regression maximizes *R* squared for our sample, it will be somewhat lower for the entire population, a phenomenon known as shrinkage. The adjusted R square estimates the population R squared for our model and thus, gives a more realistic indication of its predictive power.

Table 7 shows that the mean difference in the population means was 2.33 ("Mean Difference" column) and the 95% confidence intervals of the difference were 1.9 to -2.7 ("Lower" to "Upper" columns). For the measures used, it would be sufficient to report the values to two decimal places. The score was statistically significantly lower by 2.3 (95% CI, 1.96 to 2.7051) than a normal depression score of 0, $t(79) = 12.5, p = 0.000$.

There was a statistically significant difference between means ($p < 0.05$) and, therefore, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. Although, a statistically significant difference was found between the depression scores in the opinion of organic products versus the normal depression score. It does not necessarily mean that the difference encountered, 2.3 (Table 8: 95% CI, 1.96 to 2.70), is enough to be practically significant.

Table 9 shows that the relationship between age and important influencers of soap. Table 10 exhibits the results of the Pearson Chi-Square row $\chi(1) = 0.65$ $p = 0.65$. This tells us that there is no statistically significant

Table 10. Chi-Square Tests

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	*df*	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-square	62.242a	9	0.000
Likelihood ratio	68.124	9	0.000
Linear-by-linear association	13.558	1	0.000
N of valid cases	75		

Table 11. Symmetric Measures

Symmetric Measures			
		Value	Approx. Sig.
Nominal by Nominal	Phi	0.451	0.228
	Cramer's *V*	0.260	0.228
N of Valid Cases		75	

Table 12. Classifications of Respondents on the Basis of Opinion on Important Aspect for Purchase Cold Pressed Soap Online

S.No.		Strongly agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1	Displaying organic certification of the manufacturer	60 (80%)	7 (9%)	6 (8%)	1 (1%)	1 (1%)	75
2	Clarity in content used	34 (46%)	6 (8%)	26 (35%)	4 (5%)	5 (1%)	75
3	Making video presentation	40 (53%)	3 (4%)	20 (27%)	8 (11%)	4 (5%)	75
4	Sharing proposition of the content used	40 (53%)	10 (13%)	10 (13%)	12 (16%)	3 (4%)	75
5	Online consultation on suitable flavour for skin	60 (80%)	2 (2%)	0 (0%)	8 (11%)	5 (7%)	75

association between age, and factors influence in buying a soap.

Phi and Cramer's V are both tests of the strength of association. We can see that the strength of association between the variables is very weak (Table 11).

Table 12 exhibits that the majority (80%) stongly agreed that a seller should showcase organic certification while selling online. It was also important to note that 46% of the respondents strongly agreed that clarity in content should be there while posting online. 53% of the respondents strongly agreed that adding video added value to the content, and 53% respondents also strongly agreed with sharing the proposition of the content added would increase trust. 80% of the respondents strongly agreed with the idea of adding consultation online before ordering as it would help to order right and suitable products.

Important Findings of the Study

❖   There is no relationship between profession and the preferred categories to buy products online.

❖   Acceptance of cold pressed soap is found at all levels of educational qualification.

❖   Respondents are ready to accept online as a medium for purchasing online soap provided they are confident about the seller, and for improving trust about the seller showcasing organic certificates, making videos, and sharing the proposition would help to improve trust in the minds of the customers.

❖   Clear content and original images played a significant role in influencing consumers while buying online.

❖   Providing an interactive platform and providing consultation for suitably flavoured soap will be a welcome move for consumers.

❖   Fragrance is also considered as an important factor for consumers but there is no influence of age in choosing a soap.

Limitations of the Study

❖   The first limitation of the study is that it was carried out only in Chennai City. Hence, the findings do not necessary reflect the opinion of other metro cities or town.

❖   The sample size was limited to only 75. The sample size was too small in order to draw a general conclusion.

Implications of the Study

❖   The study may help entrepreneurs to view cold pressed soap making and selling online as a business model for a start up with limited capital.

❖   Going forward the study can provide an opportunity to small and micro merchants like coconut oil merchants etc. to eliminate the distribution channel and directly sell to the consumers, thereby getting the maximum price share.

❖   Further studies can be done in the area to identify opportunities for making farmers create value for the produce, and to create a market.

Scope for Further Research

Further research can be done to analyze opportunities for selling cold pressed soap online in other cities and other markets. Flavour specific studies can be done to understand the favourable flavours and create more new products in the segment. More studies in the area can encourage new economies that will help the rural economy grow.

Conclusion

According to "The global organic soap market," (2017), the global organic soap market was projected to cross $ 206 million by the end of 2022. There were multiple factors like growing neo-middle-class income, general increase of awareness for organic soaps in emerging economic heavyweights such as China and India that are expected to drive the global handmade organic soap market through 2022. Thus, it has been elaborated how the implementation of selling handmade organic soap through e-commerce platforms can be successful in the Indian market.

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