ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Review Of Literature On Branding Startegies Of Oil Marketing Companies In Rural India

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ABSTRACT

This research paper is a compilation of research works done by various researchers on petroleum retailing in India. There are also some studies from Pakistan, South Africa, Malaysia, Turkey and Ghana to compare and contrast. The articles broadly covered on petroleum retailing which includes consumer behaviour, customer loyalty and branding. Also, topics on branding strategies of PSU Oil Marketing Companies and rural marketing were included. The articles were collected from various journals, research papers, literature reviews available on the internet and were summarized with an aim to help other researchers for further research. The consumers felt that all petrol available in fuel outlets is same irrespective of any brand. Hence, they do not show inclination towards any brand of the service station and is therefore, not important. To differentiate customer experience, fuel retailers are busy embracing and developing web, mobile and social touch points to complement their physical site whether it is in rural or urban. Government of India is well focussed on various developmental activities. Rural market is a vast economy with untapped potential, inspite of challenges on distance, diversity, and dispersion. Fuel marketers use various ways to reach the rural customers. In Assam, mobile theatre is very popular in rural areas. Marketers use the platform to reach the rural customers where using the traditional method is a herculean task. In view of shrinking marketing margins and low per pump throughput in rural areas, fuel retailers are driving non-fuel revenue such as availability of seeds, fertilizers, groceries, beverages and a host of FMCG products are made available to make the sites viable. Researchers have shown that improvement in the services and relationships is possible through increase in loyalty programs. Customers turn up to the places where they perceive better quality products, better price, quick service and friendly environment.

Key words: *Consumer Behaviour, Customer Loyalty, Branding, Non-Fuel, Marketing Margins*

INTRODUCTION

India's economy is divided into two main sectors, viz: Urban and Rural. The Rural sector is again comprised of two main sub sectors i.e. agricultural and non-agricultural sectors. Rural India comprised of all places that are not urban. With very high proportion of population about 700 million living in rural areas, its character is reflected in the India's national economy. A large portion (68.84%)[1] of India's population leaves in rural areas. Out of which 90% population leaves in villages with a population less than 2000. There are about 600,000 villages in India. 25% of all villages account for 65% of the total rural population. Thus, the Indian rural market has a vast size and demand base.

[1] http://censusindia.gov.in/2011-prov-results/paper2/prov_results_paper2_india.html

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Public Sector Undertaking (PSU) Oil Marketing Companies (OMCs) of India have realised that opportunities for them lie in the rural market to increase their market share and the retail network. Venturing into the rural market has become the mantra of public sector oil companies. Due to stiff competition in the urban market, OMCs have started penetrating the rural markets. OMCs are focussing on the rural market to increase their volume, especially for diesel. The major thrust of the OMCs is to increase revenues and this is achieved by offering products and services in the rural and semi-urban areas. The two main targets for the OMCs are to reach the rural consumers and to take advantage as a first mover in the long run.

The consumers felt that all petrol available in fuel outlets is same irrespective of any brand. Often consumers confused over various fuel brands, quality and prices available in the market. Consumers feel all the fuels are same in terms of price, quality and brands. They do not show inclination towards any brand of the service station and is therefore, not important. Oil is a stalemate industry and fuel is a distress purchase that people do not enjoy. Customers do not like to wait either to get the service at the fuel refilling station waiting in the long queue. 'Smart Retail Outlet' can be the solution providing integrated range of services through automation. They look for service stations which are prompt and fast service. Fuel marketers are taking omni-channel marketing through digital platform to improve the service. To differentiate customer experience, fuel retailers are busy embracing and developing web, mobile and social touch points to complement their physical site whether it is in rural or urban. Rural areas being remote and customers being less literate, implementation is a challenge.

Keeping the above in view and to know more about the petroleum retailing, various literatures were searched in the internet and were reviewed. The literatures cover researches on petroleum retailing of India as well as of Pakistan, South Africa, Malaysia, Turkey and Ghana. The literatures were reviewed and compiled in a group. Grouping was done w.r.t. rural marketing, petroleum retailing in India and abroad, consumer behaviour, customer loyalty, branding, branding strategies adopted by PSU OMCs.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Abhishek & Dandotiya G. (2015) has studied a case about an advertising company Q-Connect that had used Assam mobile theatre for reaching the rural customers. Q-Connect is an advertising company having vast network. Reaching the rural people of Assam by traditional media / method is a herculean task where movie and entertainment halls / centre are available only in the cities and towns in Assam. Rural areas does not have place for such centers. Dinesh Sibal, CEO, Q-Connect had come across with a marketing manager of a consumer durables company. The company wanted to use the network of Q-Connect for demonstration and sales of its products to the target customers in Assam. Sibal was working for NRHM Assam to evaluate impact of behaviour change communication of NRHM Assam. He travelled extensively length and breadth of the state of Assam for conducting qualitative and quantitative research. He found that though radio was popular amongst the respondents in rural areas in listening the news and songs, the TV viewership was limited as the electricity power in the rural areas was erratic. It was found that many of the respondents received the healthcare messages through mobile theatre instead of having radio and TV. NRHM sponsored dance drama with messages of healthcare on pilot basis which was shown through the mobile theatre and the respondents were able to recall the healthcare messages. Sibal have noticed that there are about 40 mobile theatre companies in Assam. They travelled across the state and organized shows mostly in the semi-urban and rural areas. They hire renowned Assamese film personalities for the shows for the entire season. The season starts from mid August to mid April. Each theatre companies station at a place for about 3 days and organize atleast two shows per day. Each day they come up with different stories and themes. Mostly the stories are scripted based on day-to-day burning issues. The Assam mobile theatres are very popular in Assam and are an excellent medium to reach the rural people. About 2000 to 3000 people per day attend. Sibal came in contact with Baruah owner of Monalisha, an agency accredited with AIR and DD as national TV broadcaster. He is the son of Uttam Baruah a popular Assamese writer who had authored more than 25 dramas. Sibal and Baruah jointly started approaching theatre owners with the business model of sponsorship from various brands. Once they

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

could rope in two big players, others have also followed. Q-Connect approached various companies for a tie up for promotion of their brands in the Assam mobile theatre, as the theatre groups has unique reach to the rural customers. Q-Connect has identified 5 areas in the mobile theatres, for putting up advertisement materials. The 5 areas are inside walls of tents, stage of theatre, outside tents but inside theatre premises, outside ticket counter areas and catchment area of audience. As the companies started using Assam Mobile Theatre as the platform for promotion of their brands, Q-Connect kept on analysing regularly the performances of the brands and provided feedbacks for any failure or success of the promotion. Q-Connect had to ensure that the theatre companies also get adequate results from the brands.

Gupta M. & Jain M. (2016) during their study have observed that the per capita income of the rural population is on the rise. Availability of low finance rate has also increased the purchasing power of the rural population. As a result, their preferences and habits are changing rapidly. The literacy rate in the rural area is increasing which is bringing social change and further the change in life style. They have now become more brand conscious. Therefore, the rural markets pose a huge potential for the marketers. Steps taken by the government for infrastructure development in the rural areas to provide all-weather roads, to provide electricity, to construct 6 million rural houses and to connect telephonically all inhabitants have drawn opportunities for the marketers. The researchers have studied that rural marketer to develop marketing strategies to hire villagers to establish contact with the rural areas and to market the products. Where commuting is a problem in rural areas, employing local peoples can increase the accessibility. However, the researchers have observed three challenges i.e. distance, diversity and dispersion in the rural areas. Problems with physical distribution of products, rural logistics, engagement of rural sales force and effective marketing communication are the challenges often encountered by the marketers. Catering to dispersed population over a widely spread area in the rural areas is a greatest task for the rural marketers. Two fifth of the rural population are illiterate which is another challenge for marketers to communicate. Therefore, the researchers have suggested that the greatest challenge in rural market is to develop a scalable model to persuade rural consumers. The traditional urban marketing strategies cannot be implemented across the rural markets. However, the same can be localized to meet the demands of the rural markets. By increasing the purchasing power and change in consumption pattern, the rural markets can be developed. The rural market can be further developed with the increase in access to IT, improvement in infrastructure and increase of government initiatives.

Jayadatta S. & Abhinaya H. (2018) has studied on the recent trends, changing future, marketing strategies of rural marketing in India. The myth that potential for agricultural inputs like fertilizers, seeds, cattle feed, pesticides and agricultural machinery are available for the growth in rural market. But in reality there is commendable growing demand for consumer goods as well in the rural areas. The researchers have observed that the rural market is growing at the rate of five times when compared with its urban counterpart. Till a decade ago, the rural market was not a priority destination for marketers. In view of government initiatives in various sectors to uplift the rural areas, the rural market has changed to a large extent. Stiff competition faced by the companies in the urban markets has compelled retail marketers to move to rural areas. FMCG companies came up with customize special small packs for the rural as a part of the rural strategy. Chic shampoo sachets, TV's by LG, Amla oil by Marico etc. are the examples covered by the researchers. Mandis, haats and festival places are popular destination of the rural customers. These places has significant role as influencer in pushing a particular brand / product. The researchers brought forward various rural strategies adopted by the companies on customize communication, customize promotion, customize merchandise, customize the store operations and customization of price. The most important of the rural marketing strategy is the communication. Proper communication in local language is required so that it is easily understandable. Communication should not be an obstacle to promote the products especially in the rural market. The researchers have observed that Indian rural customers are not price sensitive, but are found brand conscious. Customers are now in a position to differentiate the products, the qualities and their utilities. They value for the money and are ready to pay premium for premium products. To customize the products for the rural requirements, most companies design and develop rural specific products. Under the concept Made for India, Electrolux has developed a Fridge product for the rural

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

customers which can withstand long electric power cuts. Rural are generally seen frequent and long power cuts. Insurance companies have also geared up with micro insurance products to suit rural customers. After the demonetisation, many mobile wallets and e-commerce companies are focusing on rural locations. The impact of demonetisation have affected to huge transformation in market dynamics. During pre-demonetization period there were only few takers from rural sectors using digital payment solutions. But post demonetization there is an exponential growth in the provision of Point of sales (POS) machine and digital payments modes. Researchers view rural markets as having vast economy with untapped potential. The future of rural market is promising and continues to remain considering the various developmental activities taken by the government of India for upliftment of the rural areas. Government of India is totally focussed for improvement of the economy of the rural areas and driving for go rural.

Pallavi Dr. (2011) in her study on 4As of rural marketing mix has reiterated that rural markets in India are huge and have plenty of opportunities for the marketers. The rural areas are home for 3/4th of country's population and generate more than half of the revenue of the country. The researcher therefore, cited that rural markets are green pastures for companies to graze around. Although, agricultural is the main source of income for the rural areas, but the government rural scheme and the infrastructure projects have increased the cash flow in the rural markets. Thereby, companies from all the sectors are attracted to the rural areas and are moving towards the rural India. Focus of government of India in the rural areas have lead to the increased in direct government expenditure on agriculture sector during last few years. In addition, government of India under Bharat Nirman Yojana has focused on development of infrastructure viz: roads, housing, telecommunication, electrification and irrigation. The growing investments, has fueled the demand in the rural areas. Low per capita income is the main problem in the rural areas. Therefore, government of India under the National Rural Employee Guarantee Act (NREGA), assured minimum 100 days of employment to all the adult members of the rural people. This had reduced the dependency on the agricultural income which is seasonal and has supplemented the family income. The increase in literacy rate and education of the rural population have increased living standard of the lives. This had increased the demand in the rural areas and opened potentials for companies to market products and services. The researcher has also observed that rural people are mostly salaried and working with the government services. Thus, they are insulated from any economic slowdown of any industry. Due to various issues in the rural areas, it is of the view of the researcher that the traditional 4Ps of marketing mix of products and services has changed to 4As in case of rural marketing, i.e. affordability, awareness, availability and acceptability. Rural people have low disposal income and therefore, are price sensitive. Products should be of lower price and smaller packs which are more affordable. Therefore, affordability is the main factor to be considered by the marketers. Rural people are less literate. Hence, they need to be aware of brands and their utilities. Word of mouth is the important medium where the popularity of products spread like wildfire. Therefore, creating awareness of products through appropriate media is the basic in rural areas. Positioning of products and making availability in fur flung areas of remote villages is a challenge. Therefore, companies must resort to ensure availability of products in the rural areas for success of any products. Rural consumers consider not only value for money but also add-ons value on each products. Therefore, products should be offered to the rural consumers that suits them for their acceptability. The researcher has observed that it is the rural market which will be booming in the future. With the vast potential, the rural markets cannot be ignored and to be considered on priority. The increase in literacy, economic development of the rural areas through government continuous focus and government's commitment to bring up the backward areas has generated great opportunities for the marketers to promote their products and services. The rural India campaign has fueled the rural markets as hubs for the growth of nation.

Shrivastava Dr. R., Sahu R. K. & Siddique Dr. I. N. (2018) have studied on the opportunities and challenges exist in the Indian rural market. Rural market is a huge potential compared to the urban areas. Many companies although have realized the growth opportunity in the rural areas, but many of them are unsure of the profitability. The researchers are of the view that there are many companies who have penetrated the rural areas, are still unsure how to jack up the rural operation but they are optimistic about the opportunity. Cut throat competition in urban market has compelled marketers to

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

look for rural options. Therefore, both the rural and urban markets are growing shoulder to shoulder. Rural markets are full of untapped potential. There is an unparallel growth of auto industry and had propelled 2/3 wheeler segments to take 80% market share in the Indian Auto industry. This is a great opportunity available in the rural areas. Increasing in disposal incomes and increase in aspiration level of the rural people has automatically pushed up the requirement of consumer durables. Similarly, rural electrification and increase in popularity of online purchase have further supported the Indian consumer market in the rural area. The rural FMCG Indian market will likely to graduate from US$ 29.4 billion in 2016 to touch US$ 220 billion by 2025. Demand for branded products has also increased in the rural areas. The researchers have observed that the availability of internet in rural areas and rapid usage of e-commerce are the main contributors for the growth consumer durables. The challenges faced in the rural market as per the researcher are - distance, diversity, and dispersion. Indian rural areas are scattered located spread over large areas. Large number of dispersed villages with dispersed population poses a major challenge for marketers to reach the rural customers. The diverse culture of the villages too makes it difficult for the marketers to do business. However, improvement in infrastructure facilities has uplifted the living standard of the rural people followed by quality of life.

Wadia M. (2016) in his research had studied in depth of the government of India's various schemes towards the development of rural. As per the Census of India, "Urban India constitutes places with a population of more than 5,000, a population density above 400 per square kilometer, all statutory towns, that is, all places with a municipal corporation, municipal board, cantonment board, notified area council, etc. and with 75% of the male working population engaged in non-agricultural employment. All those non-urban is rural. The government is totally focussed on the economic development of the rural areas and the rural people. The major rural schemes NREGA, Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G), Pradhan Mantri Gram Sadak Yojana (PMGSY) and National Social Association Programme (NSAP). There is continuous upgradation and amendment to the existing schemes and programmes. The researcher had cited that due to increase in rural development, it has caught the attention of large marketers and thereby, it has become that target market for every business houses. India's rural potential can be estimated from number of haats the country is having. There are 47,000 haats (congregation markets) when compared to 35,000 supermarkets in the US. As per the researcher, the increase in prospect in rural areas is mainly due to slowdown in the growth of urban areas. The slow growth of IT, real estate, financial services and automobile sectors have contributed to the slow growth in the urban areas. After, the government fixes the Minimum Support Price (MSP) of the products of the rural areas, there is an increase in procurement price which has contributed to the rise in rural demand, thereby, have increased the rural purchasing power. Government is spending huge expenditure in development of the rural areas. Government's approved outlay in respect of various schemes during the 12th five year plan have increased from ₹31,443 crores in 2012-13 to ₹74,370 crores in 2015-16. The increase in expenditure under rural development is the last factor which increased the potential of the rural areas. The total amount sanctioned by the government under NREGA has increased every since its incorporation which signifies that coverage of households under the scheme has increased every year. As per the researcher, there is an enhancement in the wage earning under the scheme. The average wage payment has also increased from ₹ 65 in FY 2006-07 to ₹ 99 in FY 2010-11. This is indicates there is an improvement in the living standard of rural people. Opening of bank and post office accounts have also increased every year which signifies that number of households receiving the wages through banks and post offices have increased. Government has made mandatory to disburse the wages through banks and post offices. Total 9.37 crores bank and post office accounts were opened in the financial year 2009-10. Another major scheme of the government for the rural people is the Swaranjayanti Gram Swarojgar Yojana (SGSY). The basic objective of the scheme is to help the poor families in generating income through mix of bank credit and various government subsidies so as to bring them above the Poverty Line. The scheme mainly provides incentives for the poor Swarojgars to setup their own enterprise. In line with NREGA, the amount of government fund allocation towards SGSY has increased every year. This signifies that the government is focussed on the scheme and hence disbursing more credit and subsidies to Self Help Groups (SHGs) every year. SHGs are own organisations build by the poor through social mobilization to eradicate poverty. The poor families participate fully in the SHGs and

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

take decisions on all issues so as to enable them to cross the poverty line. Government take various steps in increasing the number of SHGs. It was found by the researcher that the number of SHGs formed has increased every year from about 24 lakhs in 2006-07 to 40 lakhs in 2010-11. The researcher had found that most of the rural people are aware of NREGA and SGSY schemes of the government and they were benefitted to a large extent. This shows that the government had implemented the schemes properly in the rural areas and are fully focussed on the development of rural areas.

Aithal R. K. (2008) has studied the case of a major Oil PSU of India in rural petroleum retailing and have described that poor infrastructure facilities in the rural areas is the main hurdles for reaching the rural markets. The rural consumers have to travel along distance to fetch the fuel required for farming and transportation. The quality of products the consumers get is not assured as land up in purchasing products from unreliable sources. To meet the requirement of the rural people, the oil PSU Major has decided to open rural outlets in the rural areas so as to bring the products at the door step of the rural consumers. The investment for setting up such rural outlets is very less compared to a regular outlets set up in the urban or the highways. Accordingly, the payback period of such investment in rural outlets is around 3 to 4 years. To enhance the revenue from these rural business, non-fuel value added services such as availability of seeds, fertilizers and a host of FMCG products which are generally consumed by the rural consumers are made available in these rural outlets. There are many FMCG corporates taking the rural retail. Few corporates that took the rural initiatives under various brands are ITC’s eChoupal, Godrej’s Godrej Aadhar etc. The investment is the main differentiator between the FMCG’s initiatives and the PSU rural model. While FMCG model operates on high investment and lesser number of outlets, the PSU model is on low investment with more number of outlets. But with the changing situation due to initiatives taken by the governments, the present status of half of the villages in India connected with all weather roads will go to change. The government of India has planned to build 1,46,185 kms of new rural roads and upgradation of 1,94,132 kms of existing rural roads. Therefore, with the improvement in physical connectivity, the requirements of fuel for transportation will increase in the rural markets.

Alvi M., Ikram M., Mirza M. H. & Khan M. M. Q. (2016) have studied the perception of people while selecting a petrol pump in Karachi. Various factors play in the mind of the customers before they actually decide to purchase products. Customers from their previous experiences draw certain perception and finally decide to choose a product or brand. They develop these perceptions from the marketing strategies created by companies to improve the quality of products and rewards to customers. In respect of fuelling station locations, customers generally prefer to visit fuelling stations located nearby or on the way to their work place. But the customers do not like to wait to get the service at the fuel refilling station waiting in the long queue. They usually avoid fuelling stations located in crowded areas keeping the convenience in mind to avoid wastage of time and fatigue unnecessarily, when there are alternate fuel stations. To increase loyalty, the services and relationship with consumers has to be improved. The interaction and effective dealing with the customers have a positive impact on the seller - customer relationship. Customers turn up to the places where they perceive better quality products, better price, quick service and friendly environment. In case, the customer is not satisfied with the product or service, the customer is likely to switch to service provider or product. The perception of people are based on three parameters i.e. location, quality & service and reward for the customers. In their study on respondents choosing a particular fuelling station, they have observed that the mean value of rewards is greater than the mean value of location and quality. Therefore, the development of customers’ perception towards the loyalty rewards plays a major role with respect to the location and quality. The results from the study showed that all the above three parameters have no significant role to attract customers to a fuel refilling station amongst customers in Karachi. The reason being, the increased number of vehicles has compelled the customers to make long queues at fuelling stations. Therefore, the customers prefer station where they can easily get the desired services without waiting for a minute; even if the station is located at distant place. The most clean and modernized stations also do not attract the attention of the customers. As per the researcher, the quality of the product and services do not make any difference in customers’ perception while choosing a fuel refilling station. During need, customers do not think about the

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

quality and avail even a poor service to get their vehicles refuelled. Similarly, the rewards do not develop any interest for the customers while they go for refuelling. The rewards offered by the fuelling station do not make significant value for customers and therefore, has no impact on their choice about fuel refilling station.

Choudhury S. (2018) have analysed that petroleum retail companies are developing to improve services to customers taking omni-channel. They are trying to provide unmatched customer experience leveraging digital and IT like cloud, mobility, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented / Virtual Reality (AR/VR), Voice and Vision User Interface (UI). To differentiate customer experience, fuel retailers are busy embracing and developing web, mobile and social touch points to complement their physical site. There are research forecasts that by 2020, 85% of customers will manage their brand experience without human interaction. In view of shrinking marketing margins, fuel retailers are driving non-fuel retail (NFR) to make the sites viable. The companies are integrating consumer requirements like groceries, beverages, vehicle care, hotel, hospitality etc. to make it available in the fuelling stations. All these can be possible leveraging omni-channel marketing through digital platform. Through omni-channel; personalised offerings, one-on-one engagements and new payment solutions are possible for targeted customers. The customer experience can be further enhanced using combination of social, mobile, analytics and cloud technologies. Consumers now prefer hyper or big box format rather than traditional fuel stations for fuelling and non-fuel items. Hypermarts or big box retailers have provision for loyalty systems, personalised offers, discounts; and mobile and web based services for the customers, besides their normal requirements. Time has come to acquire 360^{o} view of the customer in terms of its demographic profile, favourite fuelling stations, fuel purchase pattern, vehicle type (4 wheeler or 2/3 wheelers), payment preference, loyalty card details; purchase pattern of groceries, home products, etc. However, the researcher has observed that there will be challenges of disparate customer processes, inconsistent service delivery, inability to create deeper arrangements and inability to create differentiators for the fuel retailers to perform.

Saini Y. K. & Matinise S. V. (2014) had studied on the various factors that influence the decision making of the consumer towards a fuelling station in South Africa. Petroleum retail industry in South Africa has to operate under strict laws. In South Africa, oil companies are not allowed to retail fuel directly to consumers. Therefore, the retailing of fuels is done by franchisees. The franchisees operate the service stations and have the exclusive rights to purchase products and manage the brand of the franchisor. In South Africa, the price of petrol is set by the government whereas the prices for diesel are set by the service stations. The researchers have observed that consumers rate convenience as the top priority while choosing the service stations. Moreover, it is observed that the consumers do not show inclination towards any brand of the service station and is therefore, not important. The consumers felt that all petrol are same irrespective of any brand. Another factor is that consumers do not want to spend lot of time in service station. They look for service stations which are prompt and fast service. In this regard, besides other prompt services, payment methods with credit / debit cards or mobile apps should be introduced to reduce the waiting time in the service station. Often consumers find confused over various fuel brands, quality and prices available in the market, as there are too many brands in the market. Consumers feel all the fuels are same in terms of price, quality and brands. According to the researchers, the location and speedy, prompt and convenience of services of a fuelling station are important factors in the decision making of the customer in South Africa. The researchers have observed four main factors which influence the decision making of the consumers. The factors in order of their ranks as evaluated by the researchers are variety, confusion, impulse and location. Therefore, the fuelling stations should expand to provide other convenience facilities to draw the attraction of the consumers. In addition, the brands of the companies also influence the choice of the consumers to a small extent.

According to Bailey J. F. (2011) on customer buying behaviour at selected petroleum shops at Cape Town, the functional elements of store is the most important element. The element includes neatness and cleanliness of a store. The above is followed by the elements such as attitudes, behaviour, helpfulness and courteousness of store personnel. The researcher observed that physical

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

characteristics are the most important factor as rated by the consumers. Neatness and cleanliness of the store, its decor, the wideness of the aisles, air-conditioning and lighting are included in the physical characteristics of the store. The study done by the researcher has found that there is a significant difference between the choice of store and its general characteristics. In another study, the researcher has found that there is a significant difference between the choice of store and its location. Convenience stores are important and are additional sources of revenue for fuelling stations. It supplements losses incurred in the business resulting in overall profit of the fuel station. It was also found that those stores / brand that enjoy a high level of awareness and visibility, are also trusted and respected. Availability of various product ranges in a store is one of the most important elements that attract the consumers. The researcher found that there is a significant difference between the choice of a store and its' product range. Providing need of the consumer by making availability of services is another important factor. The researcher has observed that there is a significant difference between the customer services offered by the store and the choice of store.

Dugar A. (2013) in his study on customer's preferences and attitudes towards branded petrol have found that the customers are gradually shifting away from price sensitiveness and valuing other things like brands, services, ambience, etc. Also, the companies should not only focus on advertising and promotions to draw the attention of the customers but should also consider creating differentiation among other companies. This would give consumers strong reasons to buy the products. For long period till 2002, oil companies were marketing the normal petrol. Consumers were accustomed with the same petrol price, orthodox and the same petrol pumps. There were no advertisements of products. After 2002, everything has changed with the entry of private players. All the PSU OMCs have started marketing branded fuels to create differentiation amongst the products and provide a different customer experience. This has lead to the change in orientation of the customers. Branded petrol is available as normal commodities and at various prices. Celebrities were engaged for endorsements similar to other FMCG products. Companies were found spent millions of rupees for marketing of the petrol. As per the study carried out by the researcher, although consumers think that they are sensitive to price for petrol, in reality they are not. The results show that consumers were not exactly clear about their price sensitiveness. They are not aware of the exact petrol price, when they decide to buy petrol. As per the researcher, they are not sure, whether the price of the petrol is the influencing factor that affects their decision while buying petrol. However, consumers perceived themselves to be sensitive to price but they were not able to prove it. The marketing companies therefore, should provide other facilities like brands, services, ambience, etc., that would have indicated the complete success of marketing strategies. It is also of the opinion of the researcher that the companies should not only focus on advertising and promotion but should prepare strategies to create differentiation so as to enable customers to choose amongst the brands. It was also found that there is very high correlation between the two variables i.e. price sensitivity and consumers preference towards non-branded petrol. This means those who are actually sensitive to price are the ones who usually prefer normal petrol instead of branded petrol.

Kumari R. K. & Devi Dr. N. Y. (2016) has studied on consumer behaviour towards petrol services in Coimbatore city. The major PSU players of the oil sector in India are the Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) and Hindustan petroleum Corporation Limited (HPCL). To differentiate themselves and to gain edge over the others in the market, the oil marketing companies introduced various products and services. The services such as: food, convenience stores, medicine stores, ATM etc. are added to improve the customer service. It also improves the customer experience, loyalty and satisfaction. Out of the total respondents, the researchers in their survey had found that 53.5% of the respondents are two wheelers and majority (58.5%) of the respondents use petrol in their vehicles. Regarding facilities preferred by the consumers in an outlet, the researcher has found that 61.5% respondents give high importance to availability of air facility. 45% customers preferred space / area in an outlet. The space is required for the customers to safely park their vehicles while they use other facilities viz: convenio stores, ATM etc. available in the outlet. The analysis done by the researcher also reveals that 63% of the customers use the air facility service. This is followed by ATM where 56% of the customers use the facility. Analysis were done w.r.t. to the perception of customers with different the type of vehicles. It has been observed by the researcher that the consumers' perception towards importance of the various services available at the petrol retail outlets does not vary significantly based on type of vehicle used by them. The customer's perception remains same irrespective of the type of vehicles they drive in to the outlets. With respect to ATM and convenience stores, the researcher has observed that there is association between frequency of visit to the petrol retail outlets and service utilization by the consumers. This shows that customers visit the outlet for utilizing the facilities. However, the same is not true w.r.t. drinking water, rest rooms facility, lubricants, air pressure check, vehicle cleaning and petro card facility. Therefore, there is no association between frequency of visit to the petrol retail outlets and service utilization by the consumers. Despite having facilities at the outlets, many customers have shown dissatisfaction, as observed by the researcher, since they could not avail the facilities due to non-availability of adequate manpower. It is recommended that adequate manpower to be placed to deliver the services. Generation of fuel revenue is an innovative concept and is the source of additional revenue for increasing the profitability. Other allied facilities, viz, free air pressure checking, vehicle cleaning, and convenience store are also required to be made available for the customers as these are prime need of consumers.

Srinivasan Dr. T. (2015) had studied on the consumer preference of petroleum retail outlets. To compete with the private players as well as amongst them, the fuel marketing companies have introduced various services and schemes to attract customers; and to meet the expectations of customers. In the study, the researcher has observed that majority of the respondents i.e. 46% do not prefer any branded fuel. Amongst the respondents' who prefer branded fuel, 24% of the respondents prefer Power (Branded petrol of HPCL), 14% of the respondents prefer Speed (Branded petrol of BPCL) and 6% prefer Xtrapremium (Branded petrol of IOCL). While companies' brands influence the customers towards the outlet for refuelling the vehicles, the other factor which influences the customers mostly (mean score 77.16) is the nearness of the outlet. This is followed by availability of good services and basic facilities viz: air, water, parking facilities etc. It was observed that majority i.e. 34.29% of the male respondents spends higher amount on fuel than the female. With regards to relationship between gender and monthly expenses on fuel, it has been found by the researcher that there is no significance relationship between gender and monthly expenses. Similarly, there is no significance relationship between income and consumption of fuel. Different age groups prefer different brands. The researcher during his study, has found that 43.48% respondents belongs to various age groups prefer HPCL in the study area. However, neither there is any significant relationship between age and companies brand nor there is any significant relationship between occupation and consumption of fuel. Companies are creating competition among themselves to retain the consumers and to be a leader in the market. He had suggested for providing facilities of petro card by all the marketing companies and credit facilities for regular customers. His suggestion also includes introduction of services like 'Swagat' of Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. and provision of refreshment rooms on outlets located on national highways. Provision for facilities like ATM and spacious parking area are also important factors which lead to better customer satisfaction.

Dutsenwai H. S., Abdullah A., Jamak A. B. S. A. & Noor A. M. (2015) has studied the factors which influence customer loyalty in Malaysian petrol stations. In today's dynamic market and fierce competition, it has become too difficult for companies to sustain profitability and retain customers for a longer time. They are forced to look for better methods to retain their customers. This has resulted companies to focus on customer loyalty which is the heart of the customer relationship. Loyal customers do repeat purchase and have positive attitude of the company. The researchers have found that there is affiliation between service quality, sales promotion and product assortment. These are important factors which affect the customer loyalty. Also, customer satisfaction has mediating effect on the loyalty of customers. The study was done considering the consumers of the petrol stations of Petronas, Esso and Shell in Malaysia. The researchers have conducted correlation analysis between the variables (service quality, sales promotions and product assortment) and the customer loyalty. The results have shown that all the variables were positively and significantly correlated with customer loyalty. The product assortment is having the highest positive correlation with the customer loyalty and ranks the top. This is followed by sales promotion and service quality. They have found that to increase customer loyalty in petrol stations service in Malaysian petrol stations; the quality, sales

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

promotion and product assortment should be considered. In addition, the researchers have also observed that the customer satisfaction mediates the relationship between the independent variables (service quality, sales promotions and product assortment) and the loyalty. Out of the above three, while the customer satisfaction fully mediates the relationship between service quality and loyalty, it partially mediates the relationship between sales promotion and loyalty. Similar is the case for partial mediation between product assortment and customer loyalty. Therefore, the customer satisfaction is very important in petroleum retail outlets and is the main factor in retaining the customers. The study has revealed that location moderates the relationship between customer satisfaction and loyalty. To conclude, while the customer loyalty is directly influence by service quality, sales promotion and product assortment, the same is indirectly influence through customer satisfaction. Therefore, all the independent variables (service quality, sales promotions and product assortment) are major factors which influence the customer loyalty in petrol station.

Gultekin, Dr. B. & Turgut, M. U. (2013) studied on the role of brand loyalty, customer and brand related factors in the gas station industry in Turkey. In Turkey, unlike US and Europe, not all gas stations have the facility of self service. Competition in Turkey is very tough amongst the gas stations, as the gas sold per station is very less and therefore, becomes unviable for some gas stations. To create competitive advantage amongst the gas stations, it is required to improve the service which is the tool to create differentiation amongst the stations. Besides service, long term relationships and loyalty build the customer satisfaction. Another important factor is the location of the station. The station should be easily accessible and convenience. This will improve the loyalty, as switching to another station will have potential cost as per customer’s perception. When customers get services of higher quality, they feel more satisfied and their expectation increases. Therefore, satisfaction of customers is positively affected by service quality. The researchers have studied the significant of influence of service quality and access convenience on customer satisfaction. They have found that the model is significant and hence, there is a positive effect of both service quality and access convenience on customer satisfaction. Similarly, they have observed that the access convenience has a positive effect on switching costs. In another study on the effects of satisfaction, access convenience, switching costs, brand trust and brand affect on brand loyalty, the results have shown that the overall model was significant. That is, loyalty is positively affected by satisfaction, switching costs, brand trust and brand affect. However, access convenience has no significant effect on loyalty. From the above analysis, the researchers have concluded that when gas stations are easily accessible and convenient, customers feel satisfied. Gas companies therefore, should plan the locations of the gas stations in access convenience as the same has positive impact on the customer satisfaction. Satisfied customers do not prefer switching to another station as the associated costs are higher. Therefore, the service quality and access convenience are the main factors in customer satisfaction.

Reddy, P. (2016) has studied the factors influencing customer loyalty in the South African fuel retail. The fuel market has become highly competitive. To compete and survive in the market, companies have increased the services to differentiate. The services include convenience stores, ATMs, car wash, eateries and other fuel additives. Also, the location of the service station is a major factor in drawing customers. Reddy P. in his research on fuel retail in South Africa had done both qualitative and quantitative studies. During his qualitative survey, he observed that most of the respondents of South Africa have mentioned their expectations about the good and satisfied service. Few customers have not gone back to the outlets due to poor customer service. Therefore, fuel stations with satisfied customer service will tend to retain their customers. Similarly, all respondents have voiced for location as the significant factor for selecting the fuel station. Customers consider convenience key factor and hence, prefer the fuel stations which are either close to their home or on their way to work place. As per the researcher, respondents though showed mix reactions towards fuel brand, but some of them are loyal to a brand because of consistency and reliable facilities. Another factor as feedback from respondents is the quality of service. Customers return due to consistent, friendly and good quality of service. The availability of superior fuel products and additives at the outlet also draws the customers. Other factors mentioned by the respondents during the qualitative survey are availability of convenience stores, additional services, site appearance, development of customer relationship, brand trust and availability of loyalty and reward programs. From the quantitative study, the

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

researcher has observed that trusted relationship with fuel brand and; loyalty and reward programs directly influence the customers' loyalty towards a fuel brand. Other factors such as site appearance and attractiveness, quality of service and convenient location indirectly influence the customers' loyalty towards a fuel brand. Convenience and additional services does not significantly influence the customers towards a fuel brand.

Attri R., Pahwa Dr. M. S. & Urkude A. M. (2011) has studied on brand position and customer loyalty for PSU OMCs. The petroleum retailing in India is mainly in the hands of PSU OMCs. The PSU oil companies are Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (HPCL). All these PSU oil companies have very strong brand in the market. However, different customers exhibit differently while choosing the outlet. The brand position and the brand loyalty play the major role in rating the brand equity. With the government allowing entry of private oil companies, the PSU OMCs had to work on their respective brands to compete with them. In petroleum retailing, there is very little way to make product differentiation. Therefore, oil companies have started introducing branded products with superior specification alongwith other brands. IOCL has launched Xtrapremium branded petrol and setup Xtracare retail outlets for select urban and semi-urban markets; Swagat brand outlets for highway motorist and and Kisan Seva Kendra's for the rural markets. The Xtrapower Fleet Card program was launched for building customer loyalty. BPCL had launched Speed the branded petrol and introduced PetroCard and Smartfleet as their loyalty cards. The company had introduced 'Pure for Sure' outlets to communicate the brand promise of Q&Q to the customers. BPCL came with the concept, "Ghar" outlet for highway customers to take care of the drivers and the vehicles, by making available "Dhaba" services, In & Out convenience stores, secure parking spaces, restrooms. Following the steps, HPCL too has launched 'Power' the branded petrol. The company has launched "Club HP" outlet with the tagline "Achcha Lagta Hai" with an assurance to customers about vehicle and consumer cares. HPCL also introduced loyalty program 'Drivetrack' card for the benefit of the fleet owners. To enable the rural customers to cook their foods in gas, the company has started a project under 'Rasoi Ghar' for the rural market. Under the project, the villagers need not required paying any security deposit nor do they carry any LPG cylinder. They only have to pay for the gas used.

The researcher has observed that although, all the PSU OMCs have resorted to creating and promoting their brands to differentiate themselves, but their brands could make practically little impact on the consumers mind. The researcher has observed that OMCs are positioned differently in the minds of the consumers' against different income levels and therefore, there is significant difference in the positioning of the oil marketing companies amongst the consumers. The result reveals that the people belonging to the category of lower income have a higher affinity towards IOCL whereas the people of middle income and high income group have a higher affinity for BPCL. In another analysis, the researcher has observed that the consumers of the oil marketing companies show higher loyalty towards IOCL loyalty program as compared to other two PSU OMCs. Hence, there are significant differences in the level of customer brand loyalty for the PSU OMCs. There is significant difference in the level of customer brand loyalty for the oil marketing companies across different income levels. The researcher therefore, feels that OMCs should continuously work on their brands, adding different values and benefits targeting different customers of different income levels. More emphasis to be given on customer relationship building schemes so that the customers can make out difference between the oil marketing companies.

Attri R., Urkude Dr. A. M. & Pahwa Dr. M. S. (2012) have studied on the brand awareness of various PSU OMCs. PSU OMCs have initiated various strategies in introduction and promotion of brands of various products and services. This is to create differentiation in the minds of the customers. IOCL had launched 'Xtrapremium' for petrol and 'Xtramile' for diesel branded fuels. The company has also set up Xtracare, Swagat and Kisan Seva Kendra retail outlets for urban, highway and rural markets respectively. The company has loyalty program under the brand Xtrapower Fleet Card program for fleet operators and corporate. The various sales promotion campaigns launched by IOCL and made its presence felt are 'Saal Bhar Free Fuel' and the 'Car in A Tank'. BPCL had introduced 'Speed' for the branded petrol and 'Hi Speed Diesel' for the branded diesel. The company had launched 'Pure for

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Sure' to communicate the brand promise to the customers. The company has launched ‘Ghar’ for outlets on major highways. These outlets offer “Dhaba” services, secured parking spaces, restrooms, emergency assistance and messaging services to the fleet owners. The company opened convenience stores under the brand “In & Out” at the retail stations. The loyalty programs introduced by BPCL are PetroCard and Smartfleet loyalty card for fleet owners and corporate customers. The company has launched promotional campaigns of “Bharo Petrol Chalo London” to build customer loyalty. Similarly, HPCL has introduced ‘Power for branded petrol and ‘Turbojet’ for branded diesel. HPCL has upgraded outlets under the Retail Brand ‘Club HP’ ‘Achcha Lagta Hai’ with an assurance to customers of high - quality and personalized ‘Vehicle and Consumer Care’. For the rural markets, the company has introduced ‘Rasoi Ghar’. Under this project, the villagers paid for the gas used and were not required to pay any deposit.

The researchers during their study have observed that respondents are not much aware of the various brands launched by the PSU OMCs, be it the branded fuel or the brand of the outlets. Most of the respondents (approx. 60%) were not able to recall and connect the name of branded fuels with the parent company. Regarding recall of the punch lines of the OMCs, the situation is worst. More than 70% of the respondents failed to correctly remember the punch lines and connect with the companies. For loyalty cards, where more than 70% of respondents are not aware of the cards related to the parent company. Also, more than 65% of the respondents are unable to recall the oil marketing company with the convenience store. With respect to sales promotional campaign launched by OMCs, more than 80% of the respondents could not recollect the name of the company based on the promotion campaigns. The OMCs therefore, have to redesign the marketing communications as per the target customers, so that it fits and stay live in the customer’s mind. The companies need to know the insight of how the customers think, act and make purchase decisions. The brands are required to be connected with customers with emotion, to improve the brand awareness and brand image of the products and services created by the companies. The researcher has suggested OMCs to place adequate hoardings at prominent places for better visibility and recalls.

Shafiwu A. B. & Mohammed A. (2013) has studied the effect of product differentiation on profitability in the petroleum industry of Ghana. To avoid price competition, marketers had to build strategy to differentiate their products from those of competitors. Differentiation can be on features, product performance, image of the company and other attributes such as innovation, consistency, durability, reliability and reparability. The researchers have studied the petroleum industry of Total Ghana with respect to its product Total Effimax. Total Ghana had introduced the product in 2011. The product has been differentiated and positioned as high performance. When used regularly, it improves the durability of the engine of the vehicle. After the launch of the Effimax, there was recorded positive gross margin during the year 2012. The researchers have observed that there is a positive relationship between product differentiation and profitability. It was therefore, suggested that companies should introduce more such differentiated products as Effimax so as to increase profitability of Total Ghana. In addition, the company should also introduce differentiated products in other categories by improving upon its existing products. The differentiation of a product may not always be limited to money or financial terms, but can be on enhancing the value for the customers. Superior product quality, innovative features, strong brand name, superior service levels and wide distribution coverage are some of the few parameters where the differentiation can be made. Total Ghana has developed as the leading company with its improvement in the services and made the petrol stations for customers to feel easy way to use and pay for customers, which otherwise customers do not enjoy purchasing fuels.

Attri R. & Pahwa Dr. M. S. (2012) has analysed and compared the brand building activities of OMCs of India with their western counterparts. After deregulation of Administered Pricing Mechanism (APM) in 2002, private oil players have entered the Indian market. To compete with the private players, PSU OMCs have started marketing communication of their various brands for the customers. The researchers have observed that PSU OMCs do not maintain large budget on marketing communication activities unlike the international oil companies operating outside India. PSU OMCs are found limited to the hoardings available at the retail outlets giving less coverage through electronic

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

media whereas regular contests, reward schemes and brand activities are common promotional campaigns adopted by the international oil marketing companies regularly. The international oil companies also take the route of e-branding. The researchers have found that only one brand each for petrol and diesel products are introduced by the PSU OMCs. These branded products contain high octane levels and additives which boost the fuel efficiency of the vehicle. Due to high fuel prices followed by high difference in normal and branded fuels, customers do not prefer the branded fuels. Also, the lack of benefits of the products as perceived by the customers is the barriers which come on the way. However, the same is the not case with international oil companies operating outside India. They have more than one brand of premium fuels both in petrol and diesel at different price range targeting different customers. In addition, they market various grades of additives to suit the customers for all categories. The study indicated that although PSU OMCs have introduced loyalty cards in the Indian market, but the customers' acceptability and usage are not encouraging. The PSU OMCs charge an amount for the card towards registration and processing fee which the customers are reluctant to pay. Therefore, the customers do not have any inclination towards the PSU OMC loyalty cards. However, the international oil companies maintain focus on building customer relationships through loyalty cards. Each of the companies have partnered with various grocery stores, pharmaceutical stores, restaurants etc. to redeem the accumulated points against the loyalty cards of the customers during shopping at the stores. PSU OMCs should learn from their western counterparts in developing ways to engage the customers, by generating awareness amongst the customers through attractive offers or through contest or other ways of promotions and implement the same in India. Further, the PSU OMCs develop schemes to change the customers' perception so that they patronise the company's brand.

From the study, it has been observed that the convenience stores which is a successful business propositions in the west, has not been seen as a popular strategy in India. Due to low footfalls of customers, many convenience stores in India were closed. Lack of adequate parking available in the forecourt of the fuel stations is the prime reason for low response from customers. The spending of customers in the convenience stores of fuelling stations located in the cities has decreased to a large extent. However, there is hope for the OMCs to succeed in the convenience stores on highways. But, it has been observed that unlike cities, more than 50% of the outlets of OMCs located on highways do not have convenience stores where the footfalls are more. Therefore, it was of the opinion that OMCs should not under-estimate the importance of provision of convenience stores facilities on highways where potential for non-fuel is vast. Accordingly, OMCs should re-draft the retail strategy on non-fuel on highways.

Despite the fact that companies have introduced different brand of fuels to avoid customer switching over, consumer prefers to patronize an outlet that is easily accessible either near his residence or en-route his place of work. It is consumers' relationship with the dealer staff that determines the level of satisfaction. Even then, there exists difference in segment wise in the level of understanding with the brand values. They have also observed that the perception of the brand values is different for different groups. Therefore, it is important for the OMCs to have a clear segmentation of the target market depending upon the consumer behaviour and their consumption patterns.

Attri R. & Pahwa Dr. M. S. (2012) in another study on the brand association of the customers with the PSU OMCs has observed that the perception of the brand values is different for different groups. Levels of brand association of the customers were studied for the items on high quality, personalised vehicle and personalised customer care with HPCL. Similarly, customers brand association with BPCL on the items of innovation, care and reliability was studied. Also, levels of customers brand association with IOCL on its brand values Care, Innovation, Passion and Trust was measured. From the above studies, the researchers have observed that there is a significant difference in the level of brand association shown by the customers for the PSU OMCs. Results revealed that customers with high income group agreed with the high quality of HPCL, but customers under low and middle income group could not associate with any brand value of HPCL. However, for personalised vehicle care and personalised customer care, the levels of customer association with the brand values of HPCL are same across the income groups. In case of BPCL, results shows that customers under high

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

income group have agreed more with the brand value of Reliability as compared to the other brand values of Innovation and Care. The brand values of IOCL are Care, Innovation, Passion and Trust. Results for IOCL revealed that, customers under middle income group could associate with the brand value of Care. Similarly, for middle and low income group, customers could associate with the brand value of Trust of IOCL, whereas, customers with high income group do not have association with Care and Trust of IOCL. Researchers have also observed that customers exhibit indifference while making choice amongst the three brands of Oil Companies to refuel their vehicles. Therefore, it is important for the OMCs to segment the target market taking into consideration of the consumption patterns of the consumers. The results pointed towards the need to work on segmentation and marketing communication activities by the Oil Marketing Companies to build unique brand associations with different segments of the society. The researchers have recommended that the OMCs will need to strive continuously and make consistent efforts to communicate the unique brand values to the customers through an integrated approach of marketing communications. They have also recommended that these efforts would lead to strong customer based brand equity which in turn would reduce the customers from switching over to other brands.

Dugar A. (2007) has studied the marketing of petrol in India which transformed from an undifferentiated low involvement commodity to a high involvement brand. The researcher presented a brief history of petroleum industry since the day it was first struck in 27th August 1859 in North Western Pennsylvania, USA and later in 1889, the first commercial oil was discovered in 1889 in Digboi in Assam in India. He also briefed about the Indian petrol market and a descriptive analysis of the development and implementation of branding strategies by the Petrol Selling companies in the Indian market. After independence, the entire petroleum business was under the strict control of the government with marketing rights with only 3 (three) PSU players viz: Indian Oil Corporation Ltd. (IOCL), Bharat Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (BPCL) and Hindustan Petroleum Corporation Ltd. (HPCL). During the period, petrol was an undifferentiated commodity in India. The product marketed by the oil companies was of same characteristics and at the same price. Therefore, the oil companies need not fight for the consumers. During this era, neither, the customers expected for any product development and value added services in the outlets nor the oil companies desired to do so. The period was seen as ‘distribution of petrol’ rather than ‘marketing of petrol’. He had observed that understanding the consumer behaviour and loyalty was never important for OMCs in India, as it has been found presently. The marketing of loyalty or any brands was out of the subject, as the petrol was an undifferentiated commodity. The sales of the companies were completely dependent upon the number of outlets of the respective companies. Therefore, to increase the volume and thereby, increase the market share, the focus of the oil companies was to add more and more retail outlets into their network. After deregulation of Administrative Pricing Mechanism (APM) in 2002, the scenario in India has changed with the entry of private players. Competition has emerged amongst the Oil marketing companies. The PSU OMCs are facing new challenges with one side the companies have to secure India’s energy needs i.e. conserve oil and on the other side for its survival of threat from private players including global giants. For survival, PSU OMCs have to promote their brands with profitability. Hence, marketing of petrol has moved from the age old tradition of undifferentiated product to a branded product. The entire marketing of petrol needs research as are been done by FMCG companies for their products. Loyalty programs are rolled by OMCs to woo the petrol consumers. As the petrol product is a commodity, which is same for all the OMCs, companies are providing various value added services to attract consumers to have a pleasant experience instead of just buying the product.

Jain A. K., Dixit M., Bhat R. & Maheswari S. (2005) has studied the gradual transformation of the retail branding upon nationalisation of the oil companies in India. Public sector units viz. IOCL, BPCL and HPCL were formed after nationalisation of Multinational National companies (MNCs) like Caltex, Burma-Shell and Esso; and promotion of other national companies. With the liberalisation in oil sector in early 90s, the government had allowed private companies to enter refining sector. Subsequently, in 1997, government decided to dismantle the Administrative Pricing Mechanism (APM) and allowed pricing of petroleum products to be fixed with respect to international rate. Besides IOCL, BPCL and HPCL; government had allowed private companies to enter the retail

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

sector. Accordingly, Reliance Industries, Essar Oil and Shell have opened retail outlets. The researchers had observed that till mid 90s, the promotion of brands was restricted to the name of the oil companies and their logos. During the period, the oil companies were limited to distribution of oil to the dealers with little care for the customers. Between 1990s and 2004, oil companies have started developing branding strategies to compete with the rivals. BPCL is the first company to launch the campaign "Pure for Sure" in 2000 to assure quality and quantity for the customers. Also, the company had launched "Speed", the superior performance petrol. This was followed by HPCL with the campaign "Club HP" in March 2002 for assurance on vehicle and customer care. HPCL had also launched branded fuels as Power (petrol) and Turbo (diesel). To meet the challenges and take on both the companies, IOCL had introduced "Xtracare" brand covering all the assurances of BPCL and HPCL. While Reliance focussed mainly on highways with an assurance "brand like quality at non branded price"; Essar emphasis on lower price; the company Shell however, concentrated on urban areas.

BPCL through their retail strategy promoted "Pure for Sure" i.e. on quality and quantity. The consultant of HPCL had suggested the company to focus on vehicle owners by taking care of the driver and the vehicle in addition to the fuel needs. Thus, HPCL promised assurance in terms of quality and quantity, in addition to top class facilities and services. The consultant had further assessed the retail brand of HPCL. It was observed that there is continuous increase in competition in the markets and therefore, location of the outlet plays the key factor for customer while choosing the outlet. Though, customers' recall of the "Club HP" brand was much more than that of "Pure for Sure", HPCL brand could not able to communicate message for customers as desired unlike the brand of Pure for Sure of BPCL. However, the main reason for consumer's preferences of a fuel is assured quality and quantity. The other reasons being preferences for a particular outlet are location; services and look of the outlets. Services offered are fuel care, vehicle care and drivers' care. The group of professors has also observed that for the success in petroleum retailing, the retail branding is always required to be supported by product and services branding.

CONCLUSION

Rural areas having limited resources, marketing in rural areas is not an easy going. Product positioning in the remote corners, educating the rural masses etc. are herculean tasks for the marketers. Government is fully focused to develop the infrastructure of the rural areas. Reaching the bottom of the pyramid customers for the marketing communication is challenging. In Assam, the mobile theatre is very popular in the rural areas. Mobile theatre is an excellent platform for promotion of products in rural areas. People perceived petrol as an undifferentiated commodity as it is same for price and quality for all the companies. Hence, the marketing of loyalty or any brands was out of the syllabus. Oil companies were focused only on increasing the retail network to increase the market share. After deregulation of Administrative Pricing Mechanism (APM) in 2002, with the entry of private players, the scenario in India has changed. Competition has emerged amongst the Oil marketing companies. Customers exhibit indifference while making choice amongst the three brands of Oil Companies. Therefore, OMCs have realised the need to work on segmentation and planned for strategies to build unique brand for promotion of their fuelling stations as well as products. BPCL is the first company to launch the campaign "Pure for Sure" branded retail outlets in 2000 assuring quality and quantity for the customers. This was followed by HPCL with "Club HP" and IOCL with "Xtracare" brands. However, researchers have observed that for success in petroleum retailing, the branding of retail outlets will always required to be supplemented by branding of product and services.

The research paper-wise brief conclusion of various authors are summarized and tabulated below:

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Sl. No.	Author & Yr. of publication	Conclusion
RURAL MARKETING		
1	Abhishek & Dandotiya G. (2015)	Reaching the rural people in Assam was a difficult task for Q-Connect, an advertising company working for NRHM Assam. The company could find out that Assam's mobile theatre is an excellent media to reach the rural people for any brand promotion.
2	Gupta M. & Jain M. (2016)	The traditional urban marketing strategies cannot be implemented across the rural markets. The same has to be localized. Therefore, the rural marketer has to develop marketing strategies to hire villagers to establish contact with the rural areas and to market the products.
3	Jayadatta S. & Abhinaya H. (2018)	The rural marketers have to bring in various rural specific strategies on customize communication, customize promotion, customize merchandise, customize the store operations and customization of price.
4	Pallavi Dr. (2011)	It is of the view of the researcher that the traditional 4Ps of marketing mix of products and services has changed to 4As in case of rural marketing, i.e. affordability, awareness, availability and acceptability.
5	Shrivastava Dr. R., Sahu R. K. & Siddique Dr. I. N. (2018)	The challenges faced in the rural market are on distance, diversity, and dispersion. Indian rural areas are scattered located with dispersed population and have diverse culture makes it difficult for the marketers to do business.
6	Wadia M. (2016)	The government of India is totally focussed on the economic development of the rural areas and the rural people. The major successful rural schemes are MGNREGA, Pradhan Mantri Awaas Yojana – Gramin (PMAY-G), PMGSY and National Social Association Programme (NSAP). The minimum support price (MSP) of products as fixed by the government has contributed to the rise in rural demand.
PETROLEUM RETAILING		
7	Aithal R. K. (2008)	Considering the demand in the rural areas and also to meet the requirement of the rural people, the oil PSU Major has decided to open rural outlets in the rural areas so as to bring the products at the door step of the rural consumers. To enhance the revenue from these rural business, non-fuel value added services such as availability of seeds, fertilizers and a host of FMCG products which are generally consumed by the rural consumers are made available in these rural outlets.
8	Alvi M., Ikram M., Mirza M. H. & Khan M. M. Q. (2016)	The perception of people are based on three parameters i.e. location, quality & service and reward for the customers. But, the results from the study showed that all the above three parameters have no significant role to attract customers to a fuel refilling station amongst customers in Karachi.
9	Choudhury S. (2018)	To differentiate customer experience, fuel retailers are busy embracing and developing web, mobile and social touch points to complement their physical site. The companies are developing omni-channel to improve services to customers. They are trying to provide digital and IT like cloud, mobility, Artificial Intelligence (AI), Augmented / Virtual Reality (AR/VR), Voice and Vision User Interface (UI) for better customer service.
10	Saini Y. K. & Matinise S. V. (2014)	In South Africa, the price of petrol is set by the government whereas the prices for diesel are set by the service stations. The consumers of South Africa felt that all petrol are same irrespective of any brand. The consumers do not show inclination towards any brand of the service station and is therefore, not important. The consumers rate convenience

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Sl. No.	Author & Yr. of publication	Conclusion
		as the top priority while choosing the service stations. They look for service stations which are prompt and fast service.
CONSUMER BEHAVIOUR IN PETROLEUM RETAILING		
11	Bailey J. F. (2011)	The researcher observed that physical characteristics are the most important factor as rated by the consumers of Cape Town. The study done by the researcher has found that there is a significant difference between the choice of store and its general characteristics; between the choice of store and its location; and between the choice of a store and its' product range. The researcher has also observed that there is a significant difference between the customer services offered by the store and the choice of store.
12	Dugar A. (2013)	The results show that consumers are not aware of the exact petrol price, when they decide to buy petrol. But, consumers perceived themselves to be sensitive to price. There is very high correlation between the two variables i.e. price sensitivity and consumers preference towards non-branded petrol. The marketing companies should therefore, focus on advertising and promotion and prepare strategies to create differentiation so as to enable customers to choose amongst the brands.
13	Kumari R. K. & Devi Dr. N. Y. (2016)	The consumers' perception towards importance of the various services available at the petrol retail outlets does not vary significantly based on type of vehicle used by them. Customers visit outlets for utilizing the facilities like ATM and convenience stores. But, the same is not true for drinking water, rest rooms facility, lubricants, air pressure check, vehicle cleaning and petro card facility. Despite having facilities at the outlets, many customers have shown dissatisfaction, as they could not avail the facilities due to non-availability of adequate manpower. It is recommended that adequate manpower to be placed to deliver the services as these are the prime need of the customers.
14	Srinivasan Dr. T. (2015)	Oil companies' brands and nearness of the outlet are the factors which influence the customers towards the outlet for refuelling the vehicles. This is followed by availability of good services and basic facilities viz: air, water, parking facilities etc. The researcher suggested provision of refreshment rooms on outlets located on national highways. Provision for facilities like ATM and spacious parking area are also important factors which lead to better customer satisfaction.
CUSTOMER LOYALTY IN PETROLEUM RETAILING		
15	Dutsenwai H. S., Abdullah A., Jamak A. B. S. A. & Noor A. M. (2015)	There is affiliation between service quality, sales promotion and product assortment which affect the customer loyalty. The correlation analysis between the variables (service quality, sales promotions and product assortment) and the customer loyalty have shown that all the variables were positively and significantly correlated with customer loyalty. The researchers have found that to increase customer loyalty in petrol stations service in Malaysian petrol stations; the quality, sales promotion and product assortment should be considered.
16	Gultekin, Dr. B. & Turgut, M. U. (2013)	Besides service; long term relationships, loyalty and location of the station build the customer satisfaction. The station should be easily accessible and convenience. This will improve the loyalty, as switching to another station will have potential cost as per customer's perception. Loyalty is positively affected by satisfaction, switching costs, brand trust and brand affect. However, access convenience has no significant effect on loyalty.
17	Reddy, P. (2016)	Some of the customers are loyal to a brand because of consistency,

ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

Sl. No.	Author & Yr. of publication	Conclusion
		reliable facilities, quality of service and availability of superior fuel products. Customers return due to consistent, friendly and good quality of service. Other factors which affect the loyalty are availability of convenience stores, additional services, site appearance, development of customer relationship, brand trust and availability of loyalty and reward programs.
BRANDING IN PETROLEUM RETAILING		
18	Attri R., Pahwa Dr. M. S. & Urkude A. M. (2011)	Although, all the PSU OMCs have resorted to creating and promoting their brands to differentiate themselves, but their brands could make practically little impact on the consumers mind. There is significant difference in the positioning of the oil marketing companies brands amongst the consumers. Also, there are significant differences in the level of customer brand loyalty for the PSU OMCs across different income levels.
19	Attri R., Urkude Dr. A. M. & Pahwa Dr. M. S. (2012)	People are not much aware of the various brands launched by the PSU OMCs, be it the branded fuel or the brand of the outlets. Most people are not able to recall and connect the name of branded fuels with the parent company. The OMCs therefore, have to redesign the marketing communications as per the target customers, so that it fits and stay live in the customer's mind.
20	Shafiwu A. B. & Mohammed A. (2013)	The researchers have observed that there is a positive relationship between product differentiation and profitability. It was therefore, suggested that companies should introduce more such differentiated products so as to increase profitability.
BRANDING STRATEGIES OF OIL MARKETING COMPANIES		
21	Attri R. & Pahwa Dr. M. S. (2012)	The PSU OMCs do not maintain large budget on marketing communication activities unlike the international oil companies operating outside India. They are found limited to the hoardings available at the retail outlets giving less coverage through electronic media whereas the international oil companies take the route of e-branding. PSU OMCs have introduced loyalty cards but are not focussed. However, the international oil companies maintain focus on building customer relationships through loyalty cards.
22	Attri R. & Pahwa Dr. M. S. (2012)	The researchers have observed that there is a significant difference in the level of brand association shown by the customers for the PSU OMCs. Customers exhibit indifference while making choice amongst the three brands of Oil Companies to refuel their vehicles.
23	Dugar A. (2007)	Petrol marketed by the oil companies was of same characteristics and same price. The product was an undifferentiated commodity in India. The period was seen as 'distribution of petrol' rather than 'marketing of petrol'. However, later PSU OMCs have to promote their brands with profitability, thereby, marketing of petrol has moved from the age old tradition of undifferentiated product to a branded product.
24	Jain A. K., Dixit M., Bhat R. & Maheswari S. (2005)	Till mid 90s, the promotion of brands was restricted to the name of the oil companies and their logos. During the period, the oil companies were limited to distribution of oil to the dealers with little care for the customers. However, after that PSU oil marketing companies have started developing branding strategies to compete with the rivals.

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ISSN: 0971-1260
Vol-22-Issue-3-July-September-2019

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