

Herbal Health Promotion Culture: A Thematic Conceptual Review of Consumer Behaviour for Herbal FMCG Products

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ABSTRACT

This paper thematically reviews how the value proposition of culture, traditional consumption patterns, and behavioural health care shapes consumer behaviour towards herbal products. Further, this review is a useful indicator to assess how the conceptual design of herbal FMCG functions as a valuable selling proposition for consumer goods and services. Abstraction of herbal image in the FMCG sector reflects the integration of traditional knowledge of herbs with modern health culture. This image positioning of herbal products forms a part of the cultural construct to promote a healthy lifestyle among consumers. This growing acceptance prioritizes a health-conscious approach and culturally resonant choices, providing functional and symbolic benefits to the targeted segment. To deduce themes for the current review, epistemological deductions had conducted from the previously available data (World Health Organization, World Health Reports, Indian Ministry of AYUSH, Indian Economic Survey, Google Scholar, & SCOPUS) on consumer behaviour, cultural values, and health marketing to understand key drivers behind the increasing shift towards herbal FMCG products. This review highlights how cultural knowledge of herbal product consumption contributes to consumer confidence and health-conscious decision-making. The research has implications for the herbal FMCG market, where promotion of a health-conscious lifestyle through culturally resonant branding can enhance consumer engagement and purchase credibility.

Keywords: Consumer Behaviour, Culture, Herbal, FMCG, Health, Promotion, Traditional Knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

According to the WHO, eighty percent of the world's population fulfills their primary needs through natural resources and traditional means that are particularly influenced by herbs, plants, and plant alternatives (Roy et al., 2015). It is a wave of social conformity and collective behavior for the acceptance of Ayurvedic and herbal products. This consumer acceptance of the herbal product category is associated with the multi-dimensional value propositions of economic growth, socio-cultural growth, life preservation, and lifestyle.

Culture is a system constructed upon traditions and consumer socialization. Herbal Health Promotion Culture is embedded with cultural constructs, traditional knowledge of the herb- based preventive care system, and

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shaped through consumer socialization. In other words, consumers play a vital role in reshaping the traditional knowledge of herbs and plants into final products. The introduction of 'Herbal' as a brand name in the FMCG product category is a new theme but shares an anthological perspective. The promotion of health consciousness through herbal products is escalating both the health care sector and the Fast-Moving Consumer Goods (FMCG).

Cultural knowledge of product consumption, knowledge about what the product is, its ingredients, and its effect on human life influences consumer buying behavior and establishes meaning in the mind of consumers. This meaning administers consumer to buy or rebuy that particular product. Significantly, the cultural construct influenced by factors such as religion, traditional knowledge, value & belief systems, family, friends, and social acceptance which adds a scientific approach to the consumer lifestyle. According to Schwartz (2014), culture also has an exchange value; therefore, it is a product. We have to begin to address the needs and objects of the need as per the cultural propositions to meet the satisfaction of the targeted consumers. Because monitoring the demand and supply of herbal products with the help of cultural constructs is very significant.

The perceived efficacy among consumers for herbal products is high (Harnack et al., 2001). The product attributes of herbal industry are promoting the stimulus of biological influences. In simple words, herbal products provide physical and psychological benefits to the end consumer. However, these biological factors have an association with health (Institute of Medicine, 2014). In marketing and consumer behaviour these biological influences follow the characterization of healthy consumption practices and mindful conservation of natural resources. Lifestyle medicines and preventive personal care or self-care through traditional knowledge of herbs and plant alternatives, known for the behavioral interventions that encourage healthy choices (Kumar et al., 2023). The reasons for such behavioural interventions have the potential to mitigate the risk of chronic diseases, no or low side effects, and such behavioral interventions claims to maintain a healthy lifestyle (Sadiq, 2023). The rapid market acceptance of herb-based products and herbal food supplements is often consumed in the form of foods and parts of plants, including flowers, roots, seeds, and liquids, which contain concentrated sources of nutrients with a nutritional or psychological effect as a preventive health care behaviour (Food and Agricultural Organization of United Nations, 2019).

Health is a survival need. It has a unique mix of psychological, physiological and sociological needs. The epistemic perspective of modern health care system and contemporary health care provides different strategic outlook. This 'need-based' definition of health; needs mindful positioning of the products essential for the preservation of life. Therefore, understanding the socio-cultural perception of health culture with the traditional knowledge of herbs is an emerging cross-sectional area.

Further, COVID-19 has catalyzed a significant shift in 21st-century consumption culture, reviving interest in herbs & plant-based traditional practices like Ayurveda, Naturopathy, Sowa-Rigpa, and pharmacognosy. By exploring the multi anthological development of herbal product in the context of Indian consumers, this paper aims to understand the complex dynamics shaping the FMCG industry's present and future.

METHODOLOGY

Need of the Study:

The growing demand of herbal FMCG highlights the significance of preventive measures and natural remedies in maintaining overall well-being (AYUSH, 2020). The vision of this paper gained investigation from the turbulences occurred in the market place featuring herbal product proposition. After the recent outbreak of COVID-19, increasing mutation of biological viruses, civil and industrial war situations, and increasing commercial values of herbs and natural alternatives has behoved the countries, industries and people to shift towards traditional knowledge, utilitarian values of local resources, and essential consumer products for their healthy lifestyles (Kemmerling, Schetter, and Wirkus, 2022; Jwanka and Buff, 2020). These incidents have evolved a new market for healthy life style products backed by local or traditional knowledge which is at its

pioneering stage. Now herb based products are not confined to medicines only but it has been integrated with lifestyle choices, wellness branding, traditions, and culture.

Existing literature often emphasized on green branding, green behavior, environmental consciousness, organic products, medicinal value and safety concerns related to herbal products. But very few studies took integrative view of traditional knowledge of herbs, modern consumption patterns, herbal-health promotion culture, along with consumer behavior. Due to a multi-dimensional approach of current review- Herbal FMCG Products, Health, Culture, Marketing and Consumer Behaviour it becomes essential to understand specific themes that influence consumer engagement and conceptual framework for Herbal FMCGs.

Purpose of the Study: To thematically review how the value proposition of culture, traditional consumption patterns, and behavioural health care shapes consumer behaviour toward herbal products.

Methodology:

The current study is based upon the secondary data. The current study adopted a conceptual review methodology (Webster and Watson, 20023; Synder. H., 2019) with a thematic approach. The review synthesizes previous literature across multiple disciplines which include marketing, consumer psychology, cultural studies, and health promotion to provide a holistic understanding of the key drivers behind herbal product adoption and usage in the Indian Consumer Society. These different perspective supports the thematic conceptual review as it enables interpretation of how consumers make sense of herbal FMCG products through subjective and culturally mediated point of view.

Review Strategy and Sources:

For this thematic review, the epistemological deductions of the database have been taken form SCOUPS, Google Scholar, Indian Ministry of AYUSH, WHO, OECD data and Indian Economic survey reports. The scope of this review limited to articles, research papers, ministerial reports, industrial reports, books, book chapters, articles in press and reviewed papers published from 2010 to 2024 which emphasized on the specific keywords like Ayurvedic culture, herbs, traditional knowledge, natural resources, health promotion, herbal FMCGs, personal care, and Consumer behaviour.

Inclusion Criteria for Theme Identification Using VOS viewer

For the identification of key conceptual themes, this study utilized VOS viewer software for bibliometric mapping and keyword co-occurrence analysis. VOS viewer is a generally used tool for creating and visualizing bibliometric networks based on scientific literature (Van Eck & Waltman, 2010). This process enabled the identification of dominant research trends and frequently co-occurring concepts in the field of herbal FMCG and consumer behavior.

The data for this analysis was extracted from peer-reviewed journal articles and credible academic sources published between 2010 and 2024, collected from database of Scopus. The most frequently occurring keywords were clustered and analyzed thematically. The highest co-occurrence clusters were observed around the following terms:

- Consumer behaviour, Consumer attitude, Health behaviour
- Herbal medicine, Traditional medicine, Alternative medicine, Ayurveda, Federal Bodies
- Dietary supplements, Plant preparation, Plant medicinal products
- Natural products, Herbal drug, Herbaceous agent
- FMCG, Utilisation review, Demographics
- Health knowledge, Perception, Attitude to health
- India, China, Human, Consumer

These keyword networks supported the emergence of three dominant conceptual themes:

1. Herbal Products and Health Care Sector
2. Herbal Promotion and Consumer Behaviour
3. Consumption and Consumer Segmentation.

This review under the context of these three themes were subsequently used to guide the thematic conceptual synthesis and the development of the proposed conceptual framework.

THEMATIC CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

1. Herbal Products and Health Care Sector

Understanding the utility value of herbs through the health care sector is essential, as it forms a part of primary care, home care, and self-care. Inclusion of herbs and with health care sector will facilitate the scientific evidential clinical studies suitable to consumer lifestyle and market of consumer goods. Existing literature findings articulate that people are showing improvements in their health due to the expertise of traditional or local healers but lack evidential studies. However, channelising their productive insights with evidential exploration can help medical science, pharmacognosy and promotion of consumer goods.

Astin (1998) analyzed the predictors for alternative healthcare use. In his argument, many people are involved with various alternative and herbal medicines. The reasons for such behavior were poorly presented. This needs more investigation and understanding of behavior. He tested 3 hypotheses and found that 1. dissatisfaction did not predict the purchase & use of alternative medicines/ food supplements. 2. Alternative medicines provide meaning to health & wellness as consumers find more compatibility with alternative care. 3. Alternative offerings need a better holistic orientation. The findings lead to the need for psychographical consumer understanding which points toward cultural consumption understanding, health education and need for integrative formal health care structure not only to provide scientific validation, but also for the evidential promotion of herbal products.

Interestingly, plant-based products are often assumed to have no or low side effects, which can lead to lower regulatory barriers in the market. According to Cuffe, 2010 the consumer industry and trade are closely tied to drug discovery and regional food, influencing how manufacturers and businesses promote healthy products while respecting philosophical and cultural diversity. Cuffe found that Natural Health Products constitute a distinct category due to factors such as high commercial value, safety, efficacy, availability, and competition with Western products. However, there is a great need to work upon the idea of promoting and associating herbal approach with scientific health care system and medical experts' opinions.

Arguably, earlier FMCG was considered under the low-involvement product category, but the introduction of 'herbalism' & COVID-19 created a revolution in the market as consumer awareness & consumer involvement in life preservation products has increased. However, accepting the fact of safety measures with lower regulatory barriers can help industries to grow in the segment of healthy consumer goods & services.

More than 90 percent of general hospitals in China have units for evidence-based traditional medicines & therapies (Wachtel-Galor S & Benzie IFF, 2011). But, India despite having the ancient traditional healing system of Ayurveda, which utilizes plant extracts and herbs, has struggled to harness its full potential for the benefit of its people. It demands more systematic and cultural-specific scientific studies.

South Asian countries, including India, have a rich heritage of plant-based traditional healthcare systems, offering preventive, therapeutic, and curative treatments. Seeing the potential of traditional knowledge of herbs and traditional medicines' availability and benefits, WHO member countries have integrated them into their national healthcare system. This revolution marked a significant step forward in the preservation and promotion of traditional healthcare practices, acknowledging their vital role in India's rich cultural heritage. According to the AYUSH Ministry of GOI, about 80-90 percent of the Indian population in India uses

Ayurveda & Traditional health care system as a self-care tool for their primary health well-being. These products & services are derived mainly from plants, herbs, and other natural resources. But due to the absence of proper clinical studies, their perceived credibility and market values are under risk.

Featuring India as the biggest nation in terms of population and human capital, understanding its healthcare structure will help us to understand how health offerings and their exchange are taking place at the primary level in the Indian market. That means the regional, behavioral and product portfolio is huge in India which has not been systematically explored yet benefiting human lives.

Bell (2007) presented an overview of nutritional, herbal, & homeopathic treatments as a CAM alternative as adjuncts in stroke prevention, treatment, & rehabilitation. Riley et al. (2001) conducted an empirical study at six clinical sites, revealing that most European and US consumers preferred seeking care from Complementary and Alternative Medicine (CAM) practitioners for primary healthcare needs, such as headaches, digestive issues, and allergies. Notably, patients sought CAM therapies and products that aligned with their personal values, beliefs, and philosophical orientation, often using them in conjunction with expert consultation. The same orientations in the context of developing countries like India require this approach.

Wardle, Lui & Adams (2012) also provided a future perspective on health beliefs & practices in rural areas. They propounded that CAM products & services are now a common experience for all the cohorts. Many previous studies didn't understand the involvement of location, resources, and nature of health care practitioners. Therefore, there is a need to highlight the need for knowledge creation before marketing the consumption rituals and consumer confidence with different healthcare products and services and their corresponding practitioners. Rasolofoson et., al. (2018) showed that plants, herbs, and herbal products can improve community health, especially for children in developing countries, by providing diverse diets, and medicinal plants, and reducing micronutrient deficiencies. To amplify these benefits, the FMCG industry must partner with healthcare to make forest resources accessible to all, leveraging marketing, science, and customer-centric approaches to promote value-conscious herbal products.

WHO (2019) described that unsafe food and water supply system as biggest issues in the field of health system of any country. Unsafe food chains possess a threat to human health and economies too. As per the 2030 agenda they want to scale up food safety and personal care for the achievement of sustainable development globally. The main parties which are crucial for the fulfilment of this objective are Ministers of Agriculture, Ministers of health, scientific experts and their traditional unknown innovative ideas. This requires strategic global collaboration between the member countries and its health, trade and agriculturist officials. Food is considered to be the best herb on this planet for living creatures. Making policies for food quality measurement is the biggest necessity for healthy public. Thus, the fulfilment of these basic necessities giving the scope to FMCG firms, pharma sector and other sub markets to target and develop the health-conscious products according to the approach of scientific health care system.

2. Herbal Health Promotion Culture and Consumer Behaviour

It has been studied that many researchers & businesses lack recognition of the nature of the self-concept with mass-produced products (Herman et al., 2016). Buying any product provides an assigned role to the consumers. If they don't feel involved in the product customization that they need, they will not buy that product. Hence, understanding the conditioning of consumers' minds in association with demographical factors is a conscious approach to market FMCG products. This approach includes instrumental conditioning factors like family, society, federal bodies, marketplace, consumption rituals, information about the product, ingredients, and its effect on the human body (Kotler et al., 2022).

4 Culture is a system that defines the subsystems like food, art, religion, clothes, and medical diagnosis.....

In a perfect competition market, cultural capital and product design are a new explanation for creating unique selling propositions. The word culture defines the individual lifestyle and collective memory of the society. It is a consumer socialization that provides an acceptance and meaning to cultural products. The proposition of culture is an enacted plus *crescive* interpretation. Therefore, consumer products and consumption rituals need to associate and resonate with the priorities of culture for their acceptance by the consumers. This acceptance of cultural products goes through the process of co-optation where culture works like a movement of meaning for the consumer society. However, culture gives meaning to the product-consumption ritual and its utility to the targeted segment. Eventually creates scope for the suitable industries.

The cultural knowledge of product consumption is a unique differentiation in itself. Indeed, consumers play a vital role in reshaping the traditional knowledge of herbs and plants into products. That is why it is imperative to examine the herbal consumer market that strengthens this cultural value proposition with consumer product placement providing unique functional and symbolic benefits to the targeted segment.

Singh, Iglesias & Foguet (2012) examined the influence of consumer-perceived ethicality (CPE) on brand trust, brand affect, & brand loyalty. However, the research represented that the emotion of ethical consumerism is making a new space in the consumer market. The study provides a research scope on how herbal as a brand is perceived in the FMCG sector, what consumer expectations are associated with herbal brand name products, and how corporate firms in the herbal FMCG sector can differentiate themselves to appeal to ethical as well as health-conscious consumers. Khanna (2015) empirically investigated consumer perception towards the Patanjali brand. The preferable reasons were smart pricing, health- focused, & approach to spiritualism & swadeshi factor (being local). Distributors also preferred to buy and supply Patanjali products more due to its brand image promoting spirituality & healthy lives since the day Patanjali Ltd. came into existence. Arguable, Zulfikar & Mayvita (2018) and Sqapska et al., (2020) investigated that consumers focus on functional value more than social, emotional, & economic value.

As per the reports of WHO (2022); Brand Equity (2020); The New Yorker (2020); and AYUSH (2020) regardless of assessing different western promotion of healthy lifestyle approaches for all people in previous years; the 2020 changed the culture of health and healthy consumption practices on day-to-day life. These studies seem very helpful for the current research to understand how differentiation & positioning are done with leveraged value propositions of herbs in the competitive market when traditional knowledge and cultural affects are high. After the recent outbreak, the modern-day origin of public health has emerged as a concept of social marketing. A marketing practice that leads to positivity in the purchase-consumption process. We all are aware that consumption patterns and health status are fundamentally determined by the social & environmental conditions in which we are born, grow, live & age (Nutbeam & Lloyd, 2021). However, it is consistently observed that there is a causal relationship between social conditions and health outcomes. If there is an absence of awareness about product ingredients it will lead to the feeling of non-being and no interest (Iyengar, 1996). In the current scenario, consumer perception is shaped by the society and natural environment and local resources influenced by plants and plant alternatives. In the health-conscious behavior, consumers are more approachable to their locally-grown herbal ingredients and culturally influenced products, targeting the personal primary health care category (WHO, 2023). The cultural influence includes religion, traditional knowledge, value & belief systems, family, friends, and social acceptance adding a scientific approach to the lifestyle.

3. Consumption and Consumer Segmentation

Consumer segmentation is based on product-consumer relationships. The consumer buying model, which includes problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post-purchase behavior, varies from person to person. Similarly, cognitive processes such as perception, attention, memory, learning, attitudes, motivations, decision-making, and problem-solving are also highly individualized. Therefore, articulation of the consumer characterization will scale up the vision of this current thesis.

Even in the FMCG sector, which often employs a mass customization approach, the motivation behind behavioral purchase segmentation is distinct for each consumer. This means that while consumers may share some common characteristics or behaviors, their individual motivations and cognitive processes drive their purchasing decisions.

By recognizing and understanding these differences, marketers can develop more effective targeting strategies that account for the unique needs, preferences, and behaviors of each consumer segment. Understanding consumer segmentation taxonomies can lead to more personalized and effective marketing efforts, even in a mass-market context.

In support of this proposition of highlighting consumer segmentation, Bock & Uncles (2002) accentuated that conceptualizing consumer segmentation is difficult. The identification of the considerable range of potential differences between customers and grouping them into homogeneity is not only for firms but also for retailers. If researchers succeed in conceptualizing the consumer segmentation problems, the industries can conjecture about the demand and supply side issues.

Many types of differences are listed in consumer & industrial marketing practices including geography, demographics, firmographics, behavioral factors, situational factors, personality lifestyle, psychographics, and others based on the need of the study (Aaker & Keller, 1995). The majority of segmentation variables that have been proposed are directly related to consumer demand. However, this will help to understand what the buyer seeks from a firm in any given exchange.

Franke, Keinz, & Steger (2009) tested the value of product customization. The study was conducted on the assumption that customized products create higher benefits for customers as they deliver a closer preference fit. However, the same findings can provide strategic outcomes on how herbal propositions are considered and clustered in the buying and consumption behaviour of the consumers to stop the firms for wrong investments.

However, some scholars argue that consumers may struggle to make informed decisions, particularly when it comes to low-involvement products or mass-customized goods, as they may be uncertain about their preferences. To address this, customer segmentation can help us to understand consumers cognitive behaviors and normative feelings regarding regular goods and services, including herbal products.

Raaijmakers et al., (2018) proposed a model for consumer segmentation based on health-related motives & consumption of fruits & vegetables. The research area was the Netherlands. The cluster-based results showed that health is a multidimensional construct and suggested a great need to address the concept of health to create more tailored products in the market. However, the consumer motives could be health, sensory aspects, taste, familiarity, convenience, perceived benefits, or nutritional labeling while encountering any product exchanges. Very little research has been done on health as a multidimensional approach & its related product purchase and consumption practices to segment consumers with herbal propositions.

There are several motives influencing consumer behavior. As we are aware of the expenditure patterns of consumers where more than 70% is getting spent on food, nutrition, and healthcare products there is a need to nurture consumer market segmentations with the help of understanding local resources, local solutions, and local consumption patterns to emerge anew market followed by regular exchange of goods & services and positioning them towards the goal of consumer health.

CONCLUSION

Herbal and Health shares a complementary synergy but lack evidential and clinical studies. However, the positioning of herbal word in consumer architecture plays a significant role to raise the demand for health care products and services. The health care sector follows the principle of patient-centrism; where diagnosis, curing

and therapeutic stages come under the latent phenomena. Whereas prevention comes at the initial stage; followed by measure of self-care interventions and home care products supporting consumption of herbal products.

In mature industries the product and brand images are identical with the nature of firms. If they are not able to create and position the value to end consumers will face drastic changes. In a product life cycle- insights like customer perceived value, market construction and product development through social consciousness are critical for future analyses of a product. Presently, in FMCGs the purchase behaviour of consumers is being influenced by herbal based health consciousness.

We all know that health care industry and consumer market for regular goods and services is a part of mature markets that follows the strategy of innovative research and development capabilities. The driving forces of these inter-related markets are significant part of any economy's where growth has been achieved; but the challenge of sustainability for social benefits and wealth value creation raising the question of their survival. The increasing cost of western health care system with unsatisfactory results has increased the healthy consumption trend towards adoption of herbalism, naturalism and plant-based alternatives. Further this has significantly changed the perspectives of federal bodies, buyers and business houses in relation to regulation of traditional knowledge at grass root level.

The consumer choice and preferences always look for longer interest in every product which they buy. But due to lack of information in the market and incapable nature of stakeholders, they make their preferences more complex and end up with unfavourable results. It highlighted the need of interventions of government, food authority and health care sector at the point of sale of food products for the health benefits of consumers who are buying them in order to meet their necessities. Along with this evidential clinical support, the paradigm of marketing and promotion of herbal products have taken a shift towards cultural and social constructed phenomena. These nodes explain the concept of cost and price of products and services. In the phases of globalization, intellectual interests, industrial revolution and post modernism it becomes important for India to have its own theoretical framework in order to create awareness, satisfaction among its population.

As we have discussed, herbs have a cultural influence in Indian society. This instrumental conditioning is an induced phenomenon in their buying behavior that gives meanings to the products stimulated by herbalism & naturalism. As a result, herbal products in India are not just seen as mere commodities but are infused with cultural significance, emotional value, and symbolic meaning. This deeper connection with nature, tradition, and wellness drives consumer preferences and purchasing decisions. Herbal consciousness incorporates a multifaceted perspective, bridging psychological and physiological aspects. It provides a holistic approach toward a healthy lifestyle and sensory experiences (like aroma, taste, and texture) significant to spiritual & cultural connection. And we all are aware that the success of products depends on how it is valued in the culture. Therefore, for an Indian consumer, the level of attachment to herbs & plants has different meanings providing a unique segment to the FMCG sector.

This review of the 'herbal health culture' opted a thematic conceptual framework which enables a nuanced understanding of how consumers interact with herbal products, their health culture, revealing new patterns, relationships, and opportunities for growth in the market. This review explored the consumer behavior and market dynamics underlying herbal product propositions, with a specific emphasis on the brand-building strategies and unique value propositions that contribute to their market success.

By employing a multi-sectoral approach, this research identified key practices for herbal products in the consumer market and their complementary approach in the healthcare segment. Herbal Market is a cluster of complementary products that diversify the market forces into different industries but share a specific niche. Below is the conceptual, multisectoral representation of the herbal products market and its associated sub-sectors. This visual framework given below maps out how herbal products function across various domains.

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