

Brand Positioning: A Study on Microwave Ovens

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Introduction

The microwave oven is one of the great inventions of the twentieth century. Microwave ovens are popular because they cook food incredibly quick. Compared to the conventional cooking time, microwave cooking takes only 30% of the time. Besides, microwave cooking helps retain the nutrients in the food. Further, microwave ovens offer great cooking flexibility. They are safer and cheaper to operate than the conventional ovens and turn off at a predetermined time. Most microwaves have a touch pad for programming operations. Microwaves have become an increasingly visible presence in the Indian homes. With the phenomenon of nuclear families becoming a reality and with women moving out of their households in order to augment their family income, a microwave comes in handy to share the burden of household chores.

Kelvinator was among the first to introduce the microwave ovens in India. Today, major brands include BPL, IFB, KENSTAR, BOSCH and Daewoo. BPL has been marketing its range in India for a long time. Microwave marketers are, however, trying innovations to entice customers. Some models of BPL and Samsung ovens have facilities for grilling and others have facilities for browning. A player like LG has positioned its microwaves as a health care product.

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The information relating to the market share of the leading brands of microwave ovens is given in the Table below :

Market share of leading brands of microwave ovens

Brand	Market share (%) (Jan-Dec 1999)
LG	20.9%
BPL	19.1%
Kenstar	18.2%
Samsung	18.2%
IFB	9.1%
Others	14.5%
Total	100

Source: TV Veepar Journal (indiainfoline.com)

Table 1 reveals that LG has a maximum market share followed by BPL, Kenstar, Samsung, IFB, etc. With competition heating up with increasing capacities and players, companies with the ability to cater to the requirements of middle income households will emerge winners in market.

A case for perceptual analysis

To compete successfully in today's competitive markets, marketers must attack niche markets that exhibit unique needs and wants through market segmentation to improve the company's competitive position and better serve the needs of the consumers. In the real sense, marketers sell along with the products, the competence of the product to offer expected use, performance and satisfaction. The consumer should be so satisfied with the product that he should think that there cannot be any substitute in place of this brand. The strategy must be to create a perception for the brand in the consumers' mind so that it stands apart from competing brands and approximates much more closely to what the consumers want.

Positioning is the pursuit of differential advantage. Brands can create franchises of loyal consumers only when they are seen to be different in some way which is persuasive for the target segment. Customers buy not only 'physical' product but also economic and mental satisfactions. Hence, marketers must define their market in terms of product functions i.e., what the consumer expects from the product. The selling points of a product are identified as the physical attributes, utilities, brand, package and label, design (colour, style, finish, beauty etc.,) price, services, company image, safety to users, etc. If the actual performance of the product exceeds the expectation, the customer will be satisfied and the seller's mission is said to be fulfilled.

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Against this backdrop, this paper Brand Positioning: An Empirical Study on Microwave Ovens identifies the image that a brand of microwave oven has in the minds of the consumers and helps to understand the differences

Table 2

PROFILE OF CONSUMERS OF MICROWAVE OVEN

	Consumers	
	F	(%)
Age group		
20-30	12	24
31-40	22	44
41-50	12	24
51 & above	4	8
Total	50	100
Income Level		
Below Rs15000	2	4
Rs 15000 - Rs 25000	9	18
Rs 25000 - Rs 35000	15	30
Rs 35000 & above	16	32
Not mentioned	8	16
Total	50	100
Gender		
Male	25	50
Female	25	50
Total	50	100

Survey data

among various brands in creating a favourable image in the consumers' minds. This study is carried out with the following objectives.

1. To determine the position of leading brands of microwave ovens as evidenced by the consumer's brand-ownership.
2. To evaluate the satisfaction level of the consumers.
3. To identify the product attributes that influence the positioning of the brands.
4. To ascertain the ranking of product attributes as perceived by the consumers.

Methodology

The study is based on the primary data personally collected from fifty consumers of microwave ovens in Bangalore city. Structured questionnaire was prepared for the

Table 3

Brands owned by the consumers of microwave ovens

Brand	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
LG	12	24	1
Sharp	6	12	3
Kenstar	8	16	2
BPL	4	8	4
Philips	3	6	5
IFB	3	6	5
Others	12	24	6
Not specified	2	4	-
Total	50	100	

Source : Survey data

Table 4

Consumers' acquaintance of the microwave ovens

Mode	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Demonstration	2	4	4
Advertisement	26	52	1
Showroom	7	14	3
Friends	15	30	2
Total	50	100	

Source : Survey data

Table 5

Brands recalled from advertisements

Brand	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
Kenstar	12	24	1
LG	10	20	2
BPL	9	18	3
Samsung	3	6	4
Sharp	2	4	5
Philips	1	2	6
Others	3	6	7
Not seen advertisement	10	20	-
Total	50	100	

Source : Survey data

consumers of microwave ovens. Published data have also been utilised for developing a general background of this study. The sources of secondary data include official records of the Confederation of Indian Industry (CII), Bangalore, records of the dealers, newspapers, magazines, journals, etc. Besides, a number of websites were also browsed.

An exhaustive list of all the members of population is not available at one place nor is it feasible to develop such a sampling frame for the entire range of households in the city of Bangalore. Hence, non-probability sampling method is used in the present study. The information relating to the profile of the consumers covered under this study is presented in Table 2.

For the empirical analysis, the statistical tools like Percentages, Rank analysis have been used.

Analysis and Discussion

The discussion on the theme chosen for this empirical study is carried out from the following points of view:

- 1 Brand ownership
- 2 Acquaintance of microwave ovens
- 3 Brands recalled from advertisement
- 4 Awareness of product features
- 5 Ranking of product attributes
- 6 Perceptions of the best brand.

1. Brands owned by the consumers of microwave ovens:

It is essential to ascertain the positive image that a particular brand of microwave ovens has created in the minds of the consumers. Among others, a popular criterion would be the number of consumers who own and use a given brand. It helps to understand the image that it has earned for itself in the minds of the consumers. Hence, a need to examine the brands owned by the consumers.

The information relating to the brands owned by the consumers of microwave ovens is given in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that 24% of the respondents own LG, 16% own Kenstar, 12% own Sharp, 8% BPL and the like. LG has more consumers for its product in the market. This may be due to the features offered by LG which are far ahead of other brands. Kenstar and Sharp have also occupied a distinct place.

2. Acquaintance of microwave ovens: The marketer must know the consumer's acquaintance of the product and accordingly use the best acquaintance channel in order to attract the prospective buyers. The

Table 6

Awareness of the features of microwave ovens

Features	Aware (%)	Unaware (%)	Total (%)
Retains nutritional value in vegetables	82	18	100
Sustains erratic power supply	50	50	100
Saves cooking time	100	-	100
Cannot cook Indian dishes as it involves	64	36	100
Automatically shuts when the cooking is	92	08	100
Less messy, no fume and sweat	94	06	100
No oil is used	88	12	100
Does not provide the satisfaction of actual	56	44	100

Source: Survey data

Table 7

Ranking of factors while buying microwave oven

Factors	Rank I(%)	Rank II(%)	Rank III(%)	Rank IV(%)	Rank V(%)	Not ranked (%)	Total	Rank
Price	20	26	14	10	14	16	100	2
Performance	58	16	10	4	-	12	100	1
Capacity	-	20	18	32	18	12	100	4
Convenience	6	18	40	18	6	12	100	3
Appearance	-	8	6	24	50	12	100	5

Source: Survey data

Table 8

Consumers' perceptions of best brand

Brand	Frequency	Percentage	Rank
BPL	11	21.25	1
IFB	7	14	3
Kenstar	6	11.25	4
LG	10	20	2
Samsung	4	8	5
Sharp	4	8	5
Others	3	7.5	7
Not specified	5	10	-
Total	50	100	

Source: Survey data

choice of an appropriate medium strongly influences on creating the awareness for the product. Since the microwave oven is a latest addition to the array of white goods, the mode of acquaintance of microwave ovens by the consumers assume a special attention. Hence, a need to know acquaintance of the microwave ovens

by the consumers.

The information relating to acquaintance of the microwave ovens by the consumers is given in the Table 4.

Table 4 shows that more number of consumers (52%) have established acquaintance through advertisement. 30% have acquainted through

demonstrations and 14% through showrooms. Only a very few (2%) have been influenced by demonstration. It can be inferred that advertisements plays a significant role in the positioning of microwave ovens.

3. Brands recalled from advertisement:

Recalling a brand by the users, signifies its ability to draw attention of the consumers. The more a brand is recalled by a consumer, the greater is the brand's ability to create an effective image and vice versa. Hence, a need to ascertain customers' ability to recall advertisements of microwave ovens.

The information relating to the recall of brands of microwave oven is given in Table 5. Table 5 shows that 24% of the respondents can recall Kenstar advertisements, 20% can recall LG advertisements. The other brands that follow include BPL and Samsung.

4. Awareness of the features of microwave ovens:

It is essential that the users should be aware of the features of the product while purchasing it. Microwave ovens are upcoming products. It is necessary to ascertain the extent of awareness of the product features. The marketers should focus on those features which are not yet known by consumers and create a competitive advantage for the products. Hence, the need to study the extent of awareness of the features of microwave ovens.

The information relating to the consumers' awareness of the features of microwave ovens is given in Table 6.

Table 6 shows that all the consumers are aware of the time saving feature of microwave ovens. Less messy, no fume and sweat and programming features are known to more than 90% of consumers. The other features which are known to most of the consumers include non usage of oil, retention of nutritional value in vegetables etc. The brands should project more on those features which the consumers not yet aware.

5. Ranking of product attributes:

The important attributes of microwave ovens are the price, performance, capacity, convenience and appearance. These attributes strongly influence on creating an image of the brand concerned. Hence, a need to know the consumers response for these attributes.

The information relating to the ranking of factors by consumers while buying a microwave oven is given in Table 7

Table 7 shows that Performance is a key attribute in selecting a microwave oven, followed by Price. Other factors in order of importance include convenience, capacity and appearance. These insights enable

producers and marketers to position their brands strongly.

6. Perception of the best brand: A brand is strongly positioned when the consumer thinks that it has offered the desired value. The perception of the best brand depends totally on the user's judgement and the comparative analysis with other brands. Consumers are the best judges who rightly decide the best brand that fulfils their expectations. It signifies the strong brand positioning. It is important for the marketers to know whether their brand is perceived as the best by the user. Hence, a need to ascertain consumers' perception of the best brand of microwave ovens.

The information relating to consumers' perception of the best brand is given in Table 8.

Table 8 shows that BPL and LG have positioned themselves strongly in the minds of the consumers. The other brands that follow are IFB, Kenstar, Samsung and Sharp.

Conclusions and suggestions

1. Most of the respondents own LG, Kenstar, Sharp, and BPL.
2. Maximum number of consumers has established acquaintance through advertisement.
3. Most of the respondents can recall Kenstar advertisements. LG, BPL and Samsung are other few brands which respondents recall.
4. Quick and easy to cook feature has greatly aroused interest in microwave ovens. Time saving and nutrition maintenance are the other factors influencing consumers.
5. All the consumers are aware of the time saving feature of microwave ovens. Most of the consumers also know that microwave ovens are less messy, no fume and sweat and possess programming features.

6. Performance and price are the strong points considered by consumers while selecting a microwave oven.
7. BPL and LG have positioned themselves strongly in the minds of the consumers.

The microwave industry has to create more awareness among the users. Most of the Indian consumers do not know much about this product. Brand managers has to carry out perceptual mapping to understand the position of his brand, to discover ideal points or preferred positions of his target consumer; to explore combinations of physical and other manipulable features that can best create the desired perception for his brand. Analysis of market helps the manager to understand the customers, the competitors, the organisation and the brand itself.

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