

ISSUES AND CHALLENGES IN MARKETING OF 'MENSTRUATION CUP', (FEMININE HYGIENE DEVICE) IN INDIA: A STUDY

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Abstract History has witnessed many progressions and assimilations of various beliefs and practices related to menstruation. Since time immemorial, clothes were used for menstruation. Until some decades ago when the use of sanitary napkins was promoted, no one could have anticipated the enormity of its negative impact. According to a recent survey by The Menstrual Hygiene Alliance of India (MHAI), 36 percent of 336 million menstruating women use sanitary napkins. This means 121 million women, dispose of approximately eight sanitary napkins per cycle, which counts to 12.3 billion sanitary napkins as environmental waste. Menstrual Cup is an appropriate solution for all the sanitary waste. These are reusable, hygienic, environment-friendly, and pocket friendly for every woman. This study specifies the issues and challenges in marketing menstrual cups in India. It focuses on the various initiatives that will boost the market for menstrual cups. The findings of the study have observed that awareness programs related to menstrual cups should be started not only to increase the demand for menstrual cups but also to educate women about menstrual hygiene and sanitary waste. This study has environmental implications and also for medium and small-size startups.

Keywords: Menstruation Cup, Sanitary Waste, Startups, Woman hygiene, Feminine Hygiene Device.

Introduction

From as far as history can recall, women and generation have always been interdependent. Women always had the forward lamp for the coming generations. Many myths, beliefs, and practices related to menstruation are brought forward along with the generation. Unlike the notions carried by society, menstruation is and always has been pure. Menstruation is a physiological phenomenon, still a social embarrassment. Practices related to women's sanitary of using cloths and gradually upgrading to sanitary napkins are still in the frame of the Indian market. Proper adsorbent materials affect a woman's life during this time. According to the National Family Health Survey 2015-2016, 36 percent of women use sanitary napkins (Ali Khan, 2019). But Sanitary napkins have an adverse impact on the environment as it contains a huge amount of plastics. It can take up to 800 years to decompose a single sanitary napkin. In the past few years, the Government has made efforts to promote sanitary napkins but there was no information about how to dispose of them. In urban areas, menstrual wastes are disposed of

by flushing in toilets and throwing in dustbins or through solid waste management whereas, in rural areas, menstrual wastes are disposed of by burying, burning, and throwing in the garbage or pit latrines (kaur et al., 2018). Therefore it is very much needed to find a sustainable alternative to menstrual hygiene practices in India. During menstruation, good hygiene practices are an important health issue (Farage et al., 2011). Menstrual Cup is a healthy and environment-friendly alternative to the conventional sanitary napkins and tampons (Rabin, 2019). A menstrual cup is a feminine hygiene sanitary device that is inserted into the vagina during the menstrual cycle. Its sole purpose is to collect menstrual fluid and prevent any kind of leaking to the clothes. Menstrual Cups are usually made of flexible medical grade silicone and are reusable and safe and are eco-friendly. In India, the use of menstrual cups is limited by a large number of factors like the unavailability of physical stores, lack of product awareness, and effective promotion (Regie et al., 2020). So though there are limitations and challenges in selling the cups in India still there is a huge market for it.

Research Methodology

The study is based on primary as well as secondary data. The primary data has been collected by conducting an in-depth interview of 300 women between the age group of 20-35 years. The secondary data is collected from various published documents available in the form of articles, reports, internet, white papers, news, etc. This research has environmental implications and also for medium and small-sized startups who can get a new dimension to think about the marketing of the menstrual cups and strategies to increase the demand for menstrual cups.

Objectives

1. To identify the issues and challenges in the Marketing of Menstruation Cup (Feminine Hygiene Device) in India.
2. To understand the gap between the acceptance of the menstrual cup in the Indian market and in the global market.
3. To understand the scope for creating a demand for Menstrual Cup.
4. To understand the awareness level of the Menstrual Cup in the Indian Market.

Present Scenario in The Indian Market

Menstrual Cups are hardly known in India, and other developing countries compared to its widespread acceptance and use (Eti et al., 2019). Recently many companies have come out

with this product. It may be difficult for companies to make enough profit from this product as one single menstrual cup can last for five years or longer use. Most women hear of menstrual Cups through the internet or word of mouth, rather than through conventional [advertising](#) on TV, banners, or posters. Cups are not readily available in local shops, and there's a steep learning curve. The only way it is available is through e-commerce as of now. In India, market researchers have estimated that by 2026 menstrual cups will spread across the market of India. With the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, a survey by MHAI observed that menstruation products were not easily available due to the prolonged lockdown hence menstruation was neglected. It has to be understood that menstruation will continue whatever the circumstances. In situations like this menstrual cup is of great help.

Small research has been done following the Google trends and a survey with around 300 ladies to understand the present scenario in India. Looking at the worldwide trend, in the past 5 years, the search for the menstrual cup has been rising, and it's increasing every passing day.

According to Google Trends, the top 5 countries who have searched the most about this product are New Zealand, Australia, South Africa, Singapore, and Nepal.

Similarly, when we view the trend of the past 5 years within India, we see Kerala, Goa, Karnataka, Meghalaya and Puducherry top the list. This product has already started reaching pharmacies in South India. There are around 15 start-up companies for menstrual cup across India, mainly from the South. Looking at the east there is none yet. Hence the popularity is also low.

Now turning the focus at the various survey responses carried out among women of age group 20-35yrs, it has been found that 68% women get skin rashes due to wear and tear of the skin during to the use of sanitary napkins. 85% of women cannot focus on their work completely. While 57% of women worry about bad body odour, which occurs due to the exposure of menstrual fluid to the air. And only 7% of women do not worry about their leakage.

After all these questions when women were asked if they would like to switch for a better alternative. They were willing to do so. But when they were asked to insert something in their body they became doubtful. Some of their responses included:

“What if I get hurt”, “what if I can't use it properly”, I am scared”, and “never heard anything of this sort before”. And many more.

Present Scenario in The Global Market

According to a report by Technavio, the global menstrual cups market size is expected to grow by USD 309.15 million from 2020-to 2024, progressing at a CAGR of over 4% throughout the forecast period. The report provides the market impact and new opportunities created due to the COVID-19 pandemic (Sharma, 2019)

The major market growth comes from the retail segment as it allows consumers to see and assess the quality of products and get the required product information. Since retail chains operate on a large geographical scale, it helps increase the adoption of menstrual cups. Moreover, sales professionals in retail outlets advise consumers regarding the advantages of menstrual cups over alternative products, which contributes to the growth of the menstrual cups market.

North America had the largest menstrual cups market share in 2019. The rising awareness regarding menstrual hygiene, new products, digital marketing strategies, and the rising healthcare expenditure will influence the menstrual cup market. As the business impact of COVID-19 spreads, the menstrual cups market from 2020-to 2024 is expected to have Positive growth across the world.

Issues and Challenges

The main reason behind such a scenario in India is our superstitions. People even today think period to be dirt. Whereas the Kamakhya Temple, each year the Brahmaputra River turns blood-red in June for 3 days, and a grand celebration is organized, devotees from all over India visit the temple to witness and celebrate goddess SHAKTI or rather the worship of women's fertility. Even today women across India feel embarrassed to talk about menstruation, its awareness, and problems openly let alone inserting a cup. There are so many superstitious beliefs and rules followed by women generation after generation, making women their own enemies. Even though the menstrual cup has a wide range of benefits, still the acceptability and knowledge are negligible.

The biggest challenge & also the opportunity is the lack of awareness about menstrual Cups (Ballal and Bhandary, 2020). As it is a new menstrual care product, the learning curve is quite steep and women have many concerns related to the product. As the usage is more like a tampon as opposed to a sanitary pad, Indian women need to pass a mental hurdle before giving

it a try. India has primarily been a consumer of sanitary napkins as opposed to tampons and hence the idea of menstrual Cup is new to the consumer.

In many parts of India menstruation are considered 'impure' (Dasgupta and Sarkar,2008). Women are not allowed in certain activities and are also isolated during their menstruating days. For many women, touching of blood is considered dirty and impure. But, since menstrual Cups collect blood instead of absorbing blood like tampons and sanitary napkins, Cup users end up touching their own blood in the process of using the Cup. The main concern of Indian women range from comfort, hygiene and pain to the mess it may create. Finding the correct size is often a challenge for many first-time users (Kakani and Bhatt, 2017) In this 21st century when we all focus on women empowerment then menstruation shouldn't cause any obstacle on the way of day-to-day lifestyle. There is no time to worry about stains, leakage, rashes, discomfort, changing and disposal of sanitary napkins or tampons. One can be confident knowing that one can wear any possible outfit and can perform any kind of physical activity without any stress.

Competitive Market

Considering the least expensive sanitary napkins, then a woman uses around 2 packets of sanitary napkins costing up to Rs. 60 per menstrual cycle which amounts to a total expenditure of Rs. 720 by the end of one year, requiring a continuous change after 6 hours. Talking about tampons a woman spends around Rs 125 per menstrual cycle which amounts to Rs. 1500 by the end of the year and need to be changed every 4 hours.

Switching over to a menstrual cup will help in saving a lot of money. A woman spends around Rs 250- 500 for a menstrual cup and uses it over 5-10 years and can be used for up to 8-12hrs without changing. A menstrual cup will not only help save money but will also help in reducing the waste created by sanitary napkins and tampons every month. Menstrual cup's initial investment may sound huge but the result is always positive.

With many startups coming up with the same product but various designs it's often difficult for consumers to analyse the best-suited product at the first go. They test and trial different companies to get the best one out. The product is in the rising stage and this is the best time to enter the market.

Marketing Initiative

On analyzing the SWOT (Strength, Weakness, Opportunity and Threat) we find that Menstrual Cup is odorless, it maintains pH balance, avoids dryness and rashes. It is a healthier alternative allowing usage of 8-12 hrs without change along with leakage and stain proof. It is easy to use, portable, long-lasting, reusable, and easy maintenance with a pocket-friendly price suiting women of all lifestyles and supporting all types of physical movement. (Stewart et al., 2009). Talking about portability, there is always an embarrassing situation while buying, using or disposing of sanitary napkins. But this problem is resolved by using the Menstrual Cup. While talking about suiting all lifestyles. Yes, it does but for women of the age group 13-18 yrs, it is generally their mother who takes the decision. So introducing a new product to them directly is not a great idea. Only when their mothers are ready, they can be introduced to the newness.

The biggest weakness of all is social acceptance. It is always the same story. It's difficult for people to accept the new. It is trust and faith along with the awareness that will bring the acceptability of the product. The main opportunity here is market penetration. Since it's a blooming product and very few people are aware of it as of now. So this is the right time to enter the market. But the main threat is the conventional market of sanitary napkins. There are no TV ads or direct social awareness of this product. It is only spread from ear to ear.

The main marketing initiative is social awareness (Kaur et al., 2018). Until and unless women start talking about menstrual health and hygiene openly it will be always difficult to popularize an insertion menstrual hygiene product. So the very first step could be to organize workshops and awareness camps regarding the use and utility of menstrual cups through different NGOs, women's associations and clubs, schools, and colleges. It is easier for the young generation to accept the newness but always difficult to change the mindset of aging people. So the target audience is preferably between the age group of 18- 35 years, who are capable of making their own decision and accepting the new. The next target group could be the poor and rural sections of society. They are already economically badly affected by the Covid-19 pandemic. Hence they cannot always afford sanitary napkins and end up using unhygienic clothes for menstruation, menstrual cup at a subsidized price can be a good alternative since health is wealth for everyone. This way of approach will not only increase

the awareness of menstrual cups but also the awareness of menstrual hygiene among different classes of society. The awareness in rural areas can be done by Asha workers under different panchayats as they know the local people better. Network business of menstrual cups can help increase employment among household women along with the popularity. Doctors can suggest and recommend a menstrual cup to women during their menstrual cycle. It will help to remove any disbelief about the product among them and thereby the purchase rate of the menstrual cup will increase. Other typical ways of marketing the product include advertising social media marketing, availability of the product in pharmacies and cosmetic outlets, and e-commerce platforms which will influence the buying decision of consumers (Portakalci & Kilic, 2016).

Implication & Conclusion

Menstrual Cup is a hygienic, environmentally, and pocket-friendly product. Though familiarity with this product is not much, some noticeable demand is rising in the southern Indian market within the age group of 20 to 35. The awareness regarding this product is to be promoted as it can expand the market of Menstrual Cups which in turn increases the demand. Use of Menstrual Cup is suffering from various issues like lack of a financial assistant, unavailability of physical stores, typical mindset, lack of product awareness, and effective promotion. In the global market, the popularity of the menstrual cup is poor compared in North America, and New Zealand. Same category products like Sanitary Napkins are decreasing the market demand for menstrual cups. Despite these issues, there are huge opportunities to upgrade the market of the menstrual cup in India. In India, Government, as well as private organizations, should take initiatives by spreading awareness among the people about the benefits of using it. For the faster growth of the market for menstrual cups, a network business should be started which will not only increases the popularity of menstrual cup but also will generate income for household women.

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