

Retailers' Readiness to Deal and Customers' Preferences to Buy Herbal Products

Senthil Kumaran N¹, Selva Rathinam B²

Associate Professor¹, Mepco School of Management Studies, Mepco Schlenk Engineering College, Sivakasi.

MBA Student², Mepco School of Management Studies, Mepco Schlenk Engineering College, Sivakasi.

ABSTRACT

The herbal products sector in India has experienced significant expansion, driven by growing consumers' awareness of health, sustainability and natural living practices. This study investigates retailers' readiness to manage herbal products alongside customers' purchase preferences within this evolving market. A descriptive research design was adopted, with prime data collected from 43 retailers and 150 customers in Tamil Nadu.

The findings indicate that while retailers exhibit a moderate level of awareness regarding herbal products, they face notable challenges related to quality assurance, regulatory compliance, and inadequate marketing support. From the consumers' perspective, younger, educated and health-conscious segments demonstrate a strong preference for herbal soaps and powders. Product quality and brand trust emerge as the primary determinants influencing purchase decisions.

The study highlights the necessity for herbal product firms to strengthen their market positioning through effective branding strategies, enhanced retailer education, improved packaging, and reliable certification practices. These measures are critical for building consumers trust and ensuring sustained competitiveness in the rapidly expanding herbal products market.

Keywords: Herbal products, Retail readiness, Consumers preferences, Soapnut powder, Natural personal care

1. Introduction

In recent years, the global market has witnessed a substantial transition toward natural and herbal products across personal care, food, and healthcare industries. This transformation is largely driven by increasing consumer awareness regarding health, wellness, environmental sustainability, and ethical consumption practices. Consumers are progressively favoring products that not only contribute to personal well-being but also reflect environmentally responsible and sustainable lifestyles. Compared with synthetic alternatives, herbal products are widely perceived as safer, eco-friendly, and free from harmful chemicals, artificial preservatives, and synthetic additives. Consequently, the demand for herbal products has grown significantly, reflecting a broader shift toward preventive healthcare and sustainable consumption patterns.

India, endowed with a long-standing tradition of indigenous medicinal systems such as Ayurveda, Siddha, and Unani, has emerged as one of the rapidly expanding markets for herbal and natural products. The growing acceptance of herbal products has intensified competition within the industry, making it essential for marketers and manufacturers to understand the determinants of consumers purchasing behavior. Consumers' buying decisions are influenced by a sequence of interconnected stages, including problem recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase intention, and post-purchase evaluation.

In this context, the present study examines retailers' readiness to stock and promote herbal products and explores the factors influencing customers' preferences and buying behavior toward herbal products. The study seeks to provide insights into the retail acceptance of herbal products and the evolving consumers' inclination toward natural and sustainable alternatives in the marketplace.

The herbal industry has emerged as one of the fastest-growing segments of the global healthcare and wellness economy, encompassing the cultivation, processing, and commercialization of medicinal plants and herbal-based products. Rooted in centuries-old traditional healing practices, the industry has evolved considerably in response to growing consumers' demand for natural, sustainable, and preventive healthcare solutions. The increasing preference for herbal products is largely attributed to rising awareness regarding the potential side effects of

synthetic drugs, changing lifestyle patterns, and the growing inclination toward holistic well-being and eco-friendly consumption practices.

Historically, the use of medicinal herbs can be traced back to ancient civilizations such as Egypt, China, Greece, and India, where plant-based remedies formed an integral part of healthcare systems. Traditional Indian systems of medicine, particularly Ayurveda and Siddha, have significantly contributed to the development of the modern herbal industry. Ayurveda, which originated more than 3,000 years ago, emphasizes holistic healing through natural remedies and lifestyle management, while Siddha, practiced predominantly in South India, focuses on maintaining balance among bodily elements through herbal and mineral formulations. Similarly, Traditional Chinese Medicine and Unani Medicine have played important roles in shaping global acceptance of traditional medicinal practices. Indigenous healing traditions across different regions of the world have also contributed to the preservation and use of herbal knowledge for preventive and curative healthcare.

In the contemporary era, the herbal industry has transformed into a multi-billion-dollar global enterprise supported by scientific advancements in phytochemistry, pharmacology, and natural product research. Increased consumer consciousness regarding health and wellness, an aging population seeking preventive healthcare measures, and expanding interest in organic and chemical-free products have accelerated the growth of the herbal market worldwide. Scientific validation of herbal formulations has further enhanced the credibility and acceptance of traditional medicinal systems among modern consumers.

India represents one of the most prominent and rapidly expanding herbal product markets due to its rich biodiversity, traditional medicinal heritage, and strong consumers base for natural products. The Indian herbal industry forms a vital component of the country's pharmaceutical and wellness sectors and continues to experience substantial growth. The sector is supported by government initiatives and regulatory frameworks administered by the Ministry of AYUSH, which promotes and regulates traditional systems of medicine and herbal healthcare practices. Major market participants such as Himalaya Wellness Company, Dabur India Limited, Patanjali Ayurved Limited, Baidyanath Group, and Zandu Realty Limited have contributed significantly to the commercialization and expansion of herbal products in domestic and international markets.

Despite its rapid expansion, the herbal industry continues to face several challenges, including quality standardization, regulatory compliance, authenticity of raw materials, and the need for extensive scientific validation of product efficacy and safety. Nevertheless, the growing consumers' preference for natural and sustainable alternatives continues to create significant opportunities for retailers and manufacturers within the herbal product market. In this context, understanding retailers' readiness to deal in herbal products and identifying the factors influencing consumers' purchase preferences have become increasingly important for sustaining market growth and competitive advantage.

2. Objectives

The present study aims to examine the demographic profile of consumers purchasing herbal products and to understand the major factors influencing their preference toward such products. The study also seeks to assess the level of retailers' readiness to stock, promote, and sell herbal products in the market. Further, it intends to analyze the level of brand awareness and the buying habits of consumers with respect to herbal products, thereby providing insights into consumers' behavior and retail acceptance within the herbal product industry.

3. Scope and Methodology

The present study focuses on examining retailers' readiness to deal in herbal products and understanding customers' preferences and buying behavior toward herbal products. The scope of the study encompasses the analysis of consumers' awareness, purchasing habits, and the factors influencing preference for herbal products in the contemporary market environment. In addition, the study evaluates the willingness and preparedness of retailers to stock, promote, and sell herbal products, thereby providing insights into market acceptance at the retail level. The research also considers demographic characteristics of consumers to identify variations in buying behavior across different customer segments. By exploring both consumers and retailer perspectives, the study contributes to a better understanding of the emerging opportunities and challenges within the herbal product industry.

The study adopts a descriptive research design to systematically analyze consumers' preferences and retailers' readiness toward herbal products. Both primary and secondary sources of data were utilized for the purpose of the research. Primary data were collected from 43 retailers and 150 customers through a structured questionnaire comprising demographic-related questions and statements measured using a five-point scale. The data collection process was carried out through the direct survey method by employing a convenience sampling technique. The survey was conducted during the period from June 7, 2025 to June 17, 2025.

Secondary data were gathered from journals, research articles, published literature, and relevant online sources to provide conceptual and theoretical support for the study. For the purpose of data analysis, statistical and analytical tools such as frequency analysis, cross-tabulation, and the Chi-Square test were employed. Frequency analysis was used to determine the distribution and frequency of responses, while cross-tabulation was utilized to examine the relationship between demographic variables and other study variables. The Chi-Square test was applied to identify significant associations between selected variables. In addition, pie charts and bar charts were used for graphical and visual representation of the collected data to facilitate better interpretation and presentation of the findings.

4. Literature Review

The growing global demand for herbal and natural products has attracted considerable academic attention toward understanding consumers' behavior, purchase intentions, and market acceptance of herbal products. Existing literature indicates that consumers increasingly prefer herbal products due to their perceived safety, natural composition, and health benefits. Several studies have explored the factors influencing consumers' adoption of herbal products, including health consciousness, trust, demographic characteristics, social influence, product quality, and pricing strategies.

Venkatesh R. and Sureshkumar V. (2019) emphasized that consumers' trust and health awareness are among the most significant determinants influencing the purchase of Ayurvedic and herbal products. Their study highlighted that trust acts as a critical factor in converting consumers' purchase intentions into actual buying behavior, particularly in the context of health-related products where perceived safety and reliability strongly influence decision-making.

Similarly, Rani K., Kesarwani R., and Rana S. (2019) examined the consumers' decision-making process for herbal products and observed that family members, relatives, and neighbors serve as primary sources of information for consumers. Their findings underline the importance of social and cultural influences in shaping consumers' attitudes and purchase behavior toward herbal products, especially in traditional and community-oriented markets.

A descriptive analysis conducted by Bhowmick S. (2020) revealed that factors such as price, product quality, and packaging significantly affect consumers' buying decisions related to herbal goods. The study further indicated that many consumers possessed relatively low perceptions regarding product quality and advertising effectiveness, suggesting the need for improved branding, communication strategies, and quality assurance mechanisms within the herbal industry.

Research by Mphafi P. (2023) on consumers' preferences for herbs and spices in South Africa demonstrated that demographic variables such as age and educational qualification considerably influence the adoption of herbal products. The findings suggested that younger and more educated consumers exhibit stronger preferences toward natural remedies and herbal alternatives, reflecting increased awareness regarding preventive healthcare and wellness-oriented lifestyles.

Further, Jadhav H. B. and Sablani S. (2023) identified health consciousness, product knowledge, and social influence as important determinants governing consumers' purchasing behavior toward nutraceutical and herbal products. Their research emphasized that consumers who possess greater awareness and knowledge regarding the benefits of herbal products are more likely to develop positive purchase intentions and long-term usage behavior.

Studies by Barnes J., Barclay L., McCaffery K., and Aslani P. (2019) examined decision-making related to complementary medicine products and highlighted the role of perceived safety, health benefits, and accessibility

in influencing consumers' choices. Likewise, Bharathi S. and Mayya M. (2022) reported that purchase intentions toward Ayurvedic products are strongly associated with consumers' attitudes, perceived effectiveness, and trust in herbal formulations.

In addition, Grove, Khan, and Singh (2022) conceptually explored consumers' behavior toward herbal skincare products and concluded that increasing awareness regarding chemical-free and environmentally sustainable products has positively influenced consumers' attitudes toward herbal alternatives. Similarly, the doctoral research conducted by Walji R. (2021) emphasized the importance of consumers' perception, cultural beliefs, and healthcare awareness in shaping the adoption of complementary and herbal healthcare products.

Although previous studies have extensively examined consumers' preferences, purchase behavior, and factors affecting herbal product adoption, limited research has integrated both retailer readiness and consumers' preference within a single analytical framework. Existing literature largely focuses either on consumers' perspectives or product-related attributes, with relatively less emphasis on the preparedness of retailers to stock and promote herbal products. Furthermore, prior research indicates that demographic variables such as gender, age, educational qualification, and cultural orientation significantly influence decision-making toward herbal and nutraceutical products. Therefore, the present study attempts to bridge this research gap by simultaneously examining retailers' readiness and customers' buying preferences toward herbal products, thereby offering a more comprehensive understanding of the herbal product market.

5. Result and Discussion

Demographic Profile of Retailers

The study collected responses from 43 retailers operating across urban, semi-urban, and rural areas. Among them, 20 retailers each were from urban and semi-urban regions, while only 3 retailers belonged to rural areas. This distribution indicates that herbal products currently enjoy stronger retail penetration in urbanized and semi-urban markets when compared to rural locations. With respect to business type, supermarkets constituted the majority of the surveyed outlets, accounting for 30 respondents, followed by pharmacies with 8 respondents and health stores with 5 respondents. The findings suggest that herbal products are increasingly becoming part of organized retail formats and mainstream consumers markets.

Analysis of business experience revealed that 18 retailers had been operating for 1–5 years, while 15 retailers reported business experience between 6–10 years. This indicates that relatively newer retail establishments are actively participating in the herbal product sector. Regarding familiarity with herbal products, 23 retailers stated that they were somewhat familiar with herbal products, whereas 18 retailers reported being highly familiar. The results demonstrate a satisfactory level of awareness among retailers regarding herbal product categories and market potential.

The study further identified suppliers and online research as the most important sources of information regarding herbal products, with both sources being cited by 23 retailers each. Retailers largely depended on supplier networks and digital platforms for gaining product-related knowledge and market updates. Among the major concerns associated with selling herbal products, quality control emerged as the most significant challenge, cited by 29 retailers, followed by customer demand concerns reported by 23 retailers. These findings indicate that maintaining product quality and ensuring consistent consumers demand remain critical issues within the herbal products market.

With regard to purchasing sources, 23 retailers procured herbal products from local suppliers, while 11 retailers purchased directly from manufacturers. This highlights the dominant role played by intermediary supply channels in the herbal products distribution system. Additionally, 32 retailers expressed the need for marketing support to improve product sales, whereas 16 retailers required better supplier connections and 7 retailers emphasized the importance of training and educational support. Notably, 32 out of the 43 retailers indicated plans to expand their herbal product offerings in the future, reflecting positive market expectations and growing retailer confidence toward the herbal products industry.

Demographic Profile of Customers

The customer sample consisted of 150 respondents, including 76 female respondents and 74 male respondents, indicating a nearly balanced gender representation in the study. Age-wise analysis revealed that the majority of respondents belonged to the 21–30 years age group, accounting for 54 respondents, followed closely by the 31–40 years category with 52 respondents. The findings suggest that herbal products are predominantly preferred by young and middle-aged consumers who are generally more health-conscious and wellness-oriented.

Geographical distribution of respondents showed that 77 customers were from semi-urban areas, 42 respondents belonged to rural regions, and 31 respondents were from urban areas. This indicates that herbal products have gained considerable acceptance among consumers residing in semi-urban and rural markets in addition to urban populations. Educational qualification analysis revealed that 60 respondents possessed undergraduate degrees, followed by 28 respondents with higher secondary qualifications, 20 respondents with postgraduate degrees, 11 respondents with SSLC qualifications, and 1 respondent holding a diploma qualification. The findings indicate that consumers with higher educational attainment demonstrate greater awareness and acceptance of herbal products.

Occupational analysis showed that 101 respondents were employed, while 49 respondents were unemployed. This suggests that employed individuals with stable income sources are more likely to purchase herbal products regularly. Monthly income analysis further revealed that the largest proportion of respondents, comprising 68 consumers, belonged to the ₹10,000–₹20,000 monthly income category. The findings imply that herbal products are particularly popular among middle-income consumers who perceive such products as beneficial for health and personal well-being.

Consumers' Buying Behavior toward Herbal Products

The analysis of consumers' buying behavior revealed a high level of awareness regarding herbal products among respondents. Word-of-mouth communication emerged as the most influential source of awareness, cited by 108 respondents, highlighting the significant role of interpersonal communication and social influence in promoting herbal products. Social media represented the second most important awareness source, influencing 83 respondents, thereby demonstrating the growing impact of digital communication platforms on consumers' decision-making.

The study identified product quality and brand reputation as the key factors influencing consumers' purchase decisions. Consumers appeared to associate reputed brands with product safety, effectiveness, and reliability, which strengthened their purchasing confidence. In terms of product categories, health supplements emerged as the most frequently purchased herbal products, preferred by 108 respondents, followed by hair care products purchased by 76 respondents. These findings reflect the increasing consumers' preference for preventive healthcare and natural personal care solutions.

Purchase frequency analysis indicated that 74 respondents purchased herbal products on a monthly basis, while 62 respondents reported purchasing them weekly. The results suggest that herbal products have become integrated into consumers' regular lifestyle and consumption habits rather than being occasional purchases. The consistent purchasing pattern also reflects stable demand for herbal products in the market.

Retailers' Readiness toward Herbal Products

The findings related to retailers' readiness indicated that most retailers possessed moderate to high familiarity with herbal products, with 23 retailers reporting moderate familiarity and 18 retailers indicating high familiarity. This reflects a generally positive attitude among retailers toward dealing in herbal products. However, several operational concerns were also identified. Approximately 45 percent of retailers cited quality control as the primary challenge associated with herbal products, while around 35 percent highlighted uncertainty regarding customer demand. These concerns emphasize the importance of product standardization, authenticity, and market consistency within the herbal products sector.

A majority of retailers expressed the need for institutional and promotional support to strengthen their market participation. Specifically, 54 percent of retailers indicated a requirement for marketing support, 27 percent

required improved supplier connections, and 12 percent emphasized the need for training and educational assistance. These findings suggest that retailers require greater support mechanisms to improve product visibility, consumer engagement, and sales performance.

The study further revealed that 32 out of 43 retailers planned to expand their herbal product offerings in the future, indicating optimistic market expectations and confidence in the growth potential of herbal products. Statistical analysis also revealed a significant relationship between market demand and supplier support, with a p-value of 0.008. This finding indicates that stronger supplier backing positively influences retailers' readiness to stock and promote herbal products. Overall, the results suggest that retailers are moderately prepared to engage in the herbal products market but require structured marketing initiatives, supply-chain support, and educational assistance to enhance operational readiness.

Brand Awareness and Buying Habits of Consumers

The study revealed that all 150 respondents were aware of herbal products, indicating widespread consumers' familiarity and market penetration of herbal brands. Among the various awareness sources, word-of-mouth communication emerged as the most influential factor, cited by 81 respondents, followed by advertisements with 33 responses and online reviews with 28 responses. These findings demonstrate the continuing importance of personal recommendations and promotional communication in influencing consumers' awareness.

Analysis of buying habits showed that most consumers purchased herbal products either monthly or weekly, with 74 respondents purchasing monthly and 62 respondents purchasing weekly. The findings indicate stable and recurring consumers demand for herbal products. In terms of product categories, personal care products dominated consumers purchases, accounting for 72 percent of total responses, followed by dietary supplements at 15 percent and herbal medicines at 13 percent. This suggests that consumers increasingly prefer herbal alternatives for everyday personal care and wellness requirements.

Brand reputation emerged as the most influential factor affecting purchase decisions, with 47 respondents identifying it as a major determinant, followed by online reviews cited by 37 respondents. Consumers appeared to rely heavily on trusted brands and positive customer experiences while selecting herbal products. Statistical analysis further identified a significant relationship between brand reputation and overall consumers' experience, with a p-value of 0.010, indicating that strong brand credibility positively contributes to customer satisfaction and continued product usage. However, variables such as product quality and health awareness exhibited comparatively weaker relationships with overall satisfaction, suggesting that emotional trust and perceived brand value may exert a stronger influence on purchasing behavior than functional attributes alone.

Overall, the findings of the study indicate that consumers possess strong awareness and favorable attitudes toward herbal products, while retailers demonstrate moderate readiness to engage in the herbal products market. The study highlights the growing significance of brand reputation, social influence, supplier support, and marketing assistance in shaping both consumers buying behavior and retailers participation within the herbal products industry.

6. Findings

The study revealed that retailers show strong interest in expanding herbal product offerings; however, challenges such as quality control issues and inadequate marketing support limit their readiness to actively promote these products. A significant relationship was identified between market demand and supplier support, indicating that effective supplier assistance enhances retailers' willingness to stock herbal products.

From the consumers' perspective, awareness of herbal products was found to be very high, with word-of-mouth communication and brand reputation emerging as the major influencing factors in purchase decisions. Consumers predominantly purchased herbal products on a monthly or weekly basis, indicating regular usage and growing acceptance of herbal alternatives in daily life. Personal care products were identified as the most preferred category among consumers.

The study further highlighted that brand reputation has a stronger influence on consumers' satisfaction and repeat purchasing behavior than product quality perceptions alone, emphasizing the importance of trust, credibility, and

positive customer experience in the herbal products market.

7. Limitations and Research Gaps

The present study is subject to certain limitations that should be considered while interpreting the findings. The research was conducted using a convenience sampling technique with a relatively small sample size of 43 retailers and 150 customers, which may limit the generalizability of the results to a wider population. The study was also confined to a specific geographical region and a short data collection period, thereby restricting broader market representation. Consumers' responses were based on personal opinions and perceptions, which may vary over time and be influenced by individual biases.

Despite the growing literature on herbal products, limited studies have simultaneously examined both retailers' readiness and consumers' buying preferences within a single framework. Existing research largely focuses on consumers' behavior, with comparatively less attention given to retail participation, supply-chain support, and retailer challenges. Further research may incorporate larger samples, comparative regional analysis, and advanced statistical models to provide deeper insights into the herbal products market.

8. Conclusion

The study concludes that consumers' buying behavior toward herbal products is influenced by a combination of personal, psychological, cultural, and social factors that collectively shape purchase decisions and consumption patterns. Increasing health consciousness, preference for natural alternatives, and growing awareness regarding wellness and preventive healthcare have contributed significantly to the rising acceptance of herbal products among consumers. The findings reveal that trust, brand reputation, and perceived product quality play a vital role in influencing consumers' preferences and repeat purchase behavior.

The study further indicates that retailers possess a reasonable level of familiarity with herbal products and demonstrate a positive inclination toward expanding their herbal product offerings. However, challenges relating to quality control, inconsistent customer demand, and insufficient marketing support continue to limit their operational readiness and sales potential. Retailers emphasized the need for stronger promotional assistance, supplier support, and consumers' awareness initiatives to improve market performance.

Among the various product categories, health supplements and hair care products emerged as the most preferred herbal products, reflecting increasing consumers' interest in natural health and personal care solutions. Overall, the study highlights the growing market potential of herbal products and emphasizes the importance of strengthening product quality, brand credibility, retailer support systems, and customers trust to ensure sustainable growth within the herbal products industry.

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