

Ceramics Tableware Products' Market Positioning: A Comparative Study on Leading Companies in Bangladesh

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Abstract: Many companies are producing ceramic products but very few are producing ceramics tableware products; i. e., Shinepukur Ceramics Ltd., Monno Ceramics Ltd., Artisan Ceramics Ltd., Bengal Fine Ceramics Ltd. etc. This study attempted to understand perceptions of domestic consumers toward leading companies of ceramic industry of Bangladesh through ceramic tableware products. The study found that, Shinepukur is the market leader, second position is captured by Monno and then others. Consumers prefer the products of Shinepukur for high quality, brand image and nice-looking design. On the other hand, consumers prefer the product of Monno for reasonable price, availability and quality. Very few consumers also buy products of other two leading companies for negligible reasons.

1. Introduction

“Government of Bangladesh has given top priority to the growth of local industries for achieving economic prosperity and creating of job opportunities. Ship building, ceramic, light engineering and small and medium enterprises are in the priority list of the government. It is possible to buy a square foot of tiles for only Tk. 30 now, which was Tk. 130-140 seven to eight years back. It has become possible, as local manufacturers in a bigger way have come into the scenario. Earlier, a major portion of the local demand for the item was met through imports. In the past fiscal year, 21 local leading ceramic ware factories earned more than \$35 million from exports of their products to 50 countries. Of the products, ceramic table wares are exported to about 50 countries including, the US and Canada, tiles to India, Nepal and Bhutan, and sanitary wares to the Middle East, specially to the UAE. Besides earning valuable foreign currency, the exporting factories and 24 others manufacturers also cater to the entire demand of domestic market, the size of which has grown to Tk 700 crore in 2008-09” (bangladesheconomy.wordpress.com).

People are used to household appliances from the very beginning of human civilisation. Habitually human beings are paying attention to aesthetics and are contributing new and newer utensils everyday by their maturity. Ceramic products are these kinds of household utensils. Now-a-days Ceramics Tableware are not only utility, they are also ornaments of showcases and sign of status.

“The art of ceramic is perhaps as old as human civilization. Initially, it started with clay and then passed through stages of molding various media like wood, stone, shell and metal before reaching the age of ceramic and porcelain. Ceramic industry took a formal start in this country in 1958. The main types of ceramics are Abrasives, Advanced Ceramics, Artwares, Biomedical Ceramics, Bisque, Building Ceramics, Ceramic Fiber, Collectables, Composite Ceramics, Cookware, Electronic/Electrical, Fireplaces, Giftware, Glass, Household Items, Kitchenware, Molds, Mosaics, Porcelain Enamel, and Pottery” (www.ceramics-directory.com).

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“In 2001, Bangladesh had ten ceramics companies but now Bangladesh has more than ten ceramic industry units. Five of them are fairly large and these are Monno Ceramic Industries, Shinepukur Ceramic Industries, Bengal Fine Ceramic Industries, Standard Ceramic Industries and Peoples Ceramic Industries. These companies produce high quality ceramic and porcelain wares. The annual production is about 15,000 tons of ceramic items. Initially, all ceramic industries catered to the domestic market only. Many providers, with help from the research community, are beginning to realize that providing consumer satisfaction is a key element of strategy and a crucial determinant of long-term viability and success. Information about consumer satisfaction about tableware is important for doing the business effectively in this industry. About 95% of raw materials for making quality and exportable ceramic products in Bangladesh are imported from abroad. The materials are imported mainly from Japan, Germany, New Zealand, South Korea and India. The prime raw materials of ceramic products are white clay and sand” (banglapedia.search.com).

“Bangladesh ceramic industry, which produces tableware, tiles and sanitary ware, has been witnessing a steady growth in the last few years due to usage of cheap gas, which resulted in low production cost, says industry sources. This has prompted many foreign buyers to make increased orders to Bangladesh. There are over a dozen of ceramic factories in Bangladesh, which produce over 40,000 tons ceramic products a year. Monno, Shinepukur, Bengal Fine, Standard, Peoples and National Ceramic are engaged in tableware while RAK, Fu Wang, China-Bangla and Mir are engaged in tiles and sanitary ware. Ceramic products including stone tableware, porcelain tableware, bone China tableware, tiles and sanitary ware have a \$20 billion world market of which Bangladesh's share is only 0.17 percent” (Rahim, 2005).

Market is the set of all actual and potential buyers of a product or service (Kotler and Armstrong, 2004). “Consumers (market) are overloaded with information about products and services. They cannot evaluate products every time they make a buying decision. To simplify the buying process, consumers organize products into categories – they ‘position’ products, services, and companies in their minds. A product’s position is the complex set of perceptions, impressions, and feelings that consumers hold for the product compared with competing products. Consumers position products with or without the help of marketers. But marketers do not want to leave their products’ positions to chance. They must plan positions that will give their products the greatest advantage in selected target markets, and they must design marketing mixes to create these planned positions” (Kotler and Armstrong, 1997). The concept of positioning, now common currency in marketing, was promoted by two American consultants, Ries and Trout (1982). “The key elements, as they expressed it, is that, Positioning is not what you do to a product. Positioning is what you do to the mind of the prospect. That is, you position the product in the mind of the prospect” (Randall, 1993). “Positioning starts with a product, a piece of merchandise, a service, a company, an institution, or even a person. But positioning has nothing to do with the product, it is all about what you do to the mind of the prospect. To secure a unique position for its product offer, a firm must look inside the prospect’s mind and not at the physical features of the product alone” (Panwar, 1997). “Positioning is the

act of designing the company's offering and image to occupy a distinctive place in the mind of the target market. The goal is to locate the brand in the minds of consumers to maximize the potential benefit to the firm" (Kotler and Keller, 2005). Positioning is consumer perceptions of a product image or benefits that distinguish it from the competition (Anderson and Vincze, 2006).

"Economists often talk about goods and services providing a 'bundle of utility'. When they use the term utility, they basically mean *satisfaction*. As we'll see, marketing is closely involved with exchange process that provides satisfaction to people within society. When we lay out cold, hard cash for a product, we expect to get some satisfaction in return. The satisfaction we receive, however, comes from many different facets of what we buy. Satisfaction certainly results from the function, or use, of a product. Besides this functional satisfaction sometimes we get psychological satisfaction also" (Schewe and Smith, 1980). Depending on this functional & psychological satisfaction products take position in the mind of customer.

The broad objective of the research is to compare perception of domestic consumers to leading companies of ceramic industry of Bangladesh through ceramics tableware products.

More specifically, the study has following three objectives:

- a) To find out tableware producing players of ceramics industry of Bangladesh for the local market;
- b) To find out ceramic tableware sub-sector dominating players of Bangladesh in the local market; and
- c) To compare market positioning of these leading companies.

2.0 Related Constructs of This Study

It is necessary to clarify the related constructs of this study; i.e., market, market positioning, comparison of market positioning, ceramic industry, Ceramic Tableware Products & Leading Companies.

2.1 Market

Market is people or organizations with (i) wants (needs) to satisfy, (ii) money to spend and (iii) the willingness to spend it (Stanton et al., 1991).

2.2 Market Positioning

"Product positioning and Market positioning are used interchangeably, because product takes room in the mind of the consumers. A product's position is the way the product is defined by consumers on important attributes – the place the product occupies in consumers' minds is relative to competing products" (Kotler and Armstrong, 1997).

2.3 Comparison of Market Positioning

This study has compared market positioning of different leading companies depending on different factors; i.e., company preference, reasons of buying, product quality, price, product shape, product design, after sales services, delivery system, product availability and unique product.

2.4 Ceramic Industry

Product which is made of clay and hardened by heat is called ceramic product: a ceramic bowl (www.encyclopedia.com). “The companies which are producing such types of products are jointly called ceramic industry. Ceramic industry took a formal start in this country in 1958. Ceramic tableware sub-sector took a formal start in this country in 1965” (www.ceramics-directory.com).

2.5 Tableware Ceramic Products and Leading Companies

Which ceramic products are used for fine art of dining and showcase are called tableware ceramic products. In the tableware ceramic industry, companies are delivering almost same types of products. In domestic market different types of ceramic tableware products are marketed; i.e., Bone China, New Bone China, Ivory China, Porcelain, High Alumina Porcelain (Tableware Catalog, 2007). The companies which are producing such types of products are: Shinepukur Ceramics Ltd., Monno Ceramics Ltd., Artisan Ceramics Ltd., FARR Ceramics Ltd., Bengal Fine Ceramics Ltd., Peoples Ceramics, H & S Ceramics Ltd., Standard Ceramics, National Ceramics Ltd. (Financial Express, 2005). The study was done only on some leading companies which are producing ceramic tableware products to know the product's positioning of those companies. The leading companies are Shinepukur Ceramics, Monno Ceramics, Artisan Ceramics and Bengal Fine Ceramics (From discussion with employees of Shinepukur Ceramics).

3.0 Methodology

3.1 Research Design

The first stage of this research was exploratory research. The methods of exploratory research were survey of experts and pilot survey. To conduct the pilot survey a questionnaire was developed. For pilot survey the questionnaire was less structured with more open ended questions. After the exploratory research population and sampling frame were defined more clearly, and questionnaire was made more structured (used close ended questions) with very few open ended questions. The second stage of this research was descriptive under conclusive research; the insights gained from exploratory research were verified to assist the decision maker in determining, evaluating, and selecting the best course of action to take for tableware ceramics industry.

3.2 Sources of Data

The study was done based on primary as well as secondary data. In this study the main target population was the consumers who use ceramic tableware products in Bangladesh. Sampling frame was the consumers of Dhaka city who use the tableware products. Sampling technique of the study was convenient sampling under non-probability sampling and results are valid for sample only, not for the universal. “Non-probability sampling relies on the personal judgment of the researcher rather than chance to select sample elements. The researcher can arbitrarily or consciously decide what elements to include in the sample” (Malhotra, 2006). According to this argument sample size of this study was 50. Primary data were collected from consumers of tableware products of

Dhaka city by using a pre-tested questionnaire (for reducing sampling and non-sampling error). The methods for collecting information were personal interview, conversation, survey and observation. Secondary data were collected through different reports, papers and prospectus of different companies, relevant journals, dailies, periodicals, related research works, and relevant books and websites.

3.3 Data Presentation and Analysis

Data analysis performs in different statistical techniques such as summary statistics, i.e., frequency distribution and cross-tabulation. Data were analyzed by using SPSS 12 Software.

4.0 Discussions and Results of the Study

“Customer satisfaction is the extent to which a product’s perceived performance matches a buyer’s expectations. If the product’s performance falls short of expectations, the buyer is dissatisfied. If performance matches or exceeds expectations, the buyer is satisfied or delighted” (Kotler and Armstrong, 1997). “Smart companies aim to delight consumers by promising only what they can deliver, then delivering more than what they promise. A company can always increase consumer satisfaction by lowering its price or increasing its services” (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2007-2008). Consumer satisfaction and positioning are related. Without consumer satisfaction a product cannot take a good position. Through this study, it has been tried to compare consumer perceptions of different leading companies under ceramics industry of Bangladesh for tableware products. After analyzing the collected data, this study has found a scenario of ceramic tableware products positioning.

4.1 Consumers’ Response to Company Preference

The study has tried to find out impact of company name on consumers’ buying behavior. The study finds that, most of the consumers prefer Shinepukur Ceramics and Monno Ceramics when they buy ceramic tableware products. Among 50 respondents, 23 respondents prefer products of Shinepukur Ceramics and 21 respondents prefer products of Monno Ceramics. Some respondents prefer Artisan and Bengal Fine Ceramics also (Table 1).

Table 1: Frequency Distribution of Company Preference

Company Name	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Shinepukur	23	46	46
Monno	21	42	88
Artisan	5	10	98
Bengal Fine	1	2	100
Total	50	100	

4.2 Factors Affecting Consumers' Buying

Consumers buy any product not only for a single reason, rather for more than one reason. From the following cross tabulation it is clear that, consumers purchase products of Shinepukur for nice-looking design, brand image as well as good quality also. On the other hand, consumers mainly purchase the products of Monno Ceramics for affordable price and for quality also. Few consumers purchase the product of Artisan because of design and quality and purchase the product of Bengal Fine only for quality (Table 2).

Table 2: Cross-tabulation of Affecting Factors of Buying

Company Name	Reasons for buying					Total
	Brand Image	Design	Quality	Availability	Affordable Price	
Shinepukur	6	12	9	0	0	27
Monno	1	3	5	1	7	17
Artisan	0	3	2	0	0	5
Bengal Fine	0	0	1	0	0	1
Total	7	18	17	1	7	50

4.3 Perception of Consumers to Quality of the Products

Through this study it was also tried to understand positioning of different leading companies depending on overall product quality. From the following table the study finds that, consumers mainly purchase the product of Shinepukur for supreme quality (overall). Most of the respondents have no doubt about the product quality of Shinepukur. On the other hand, the product quality of Monno is also excellent which is comparable to Shinepukur. Among the 50 respondents, more than half of the respondents are using Shinepukur products only for the excellent quality. Few consumers also said that, the product quality of Artisan is also good, and their product's quality is improving day by day (Table 3).

Table 3: Cross-tabulation of Quality of the Products of Leading Companies

Company Name	Overall quality of products			Total
	Excellent	Good	Standard	
Shinepukur	15	10	2	27
Monno	8	6	3	17
Artisan	2	2	1	5
Bengal Fine	0	1	0	1
Total	25	19	6	50

4.4 Consumers' Reaction to Price

It is said that, where there is a question of money, everybody is alert . Money is related with price. Price is a considerable factor for consumer satisfaction as well as for product positioning. Basically consumers want quality products as well as reasonable price. From the survey, it was found that, only Monno Ceramics offers reasonable price. Among the 50 respondents 37 or 74% said that Monno offers reasonable price, 10 respondents or 20% said that Shinepukur offers reasonable price. Rest of the respondents said that Artisan and Bengal Fine offers reasonable price (Table 4).

Table 4: Cross-tabulation of Consumers' Reaction to Price

Company Name	Price of Product			
	Reasonable	High	Total	% of satisfied customers
Shinepukur	10	40	50	20%
Monno	37	13	50	74%
Artisan	2	48	50	4%
Bengal Fine	1	49	50	2%
Total	50	150	200	100%

4.5 Consumers' Perception to Product Shape

Product quality can be considered from specific point of view also, like shape, color, design etc. This study found that, Shinepukur offers suitable product shape. Among the 50 respondents, 31 or 62% prefer Shinepukur for suitable product shape, 15 respondents or 30% prefer Monno and the rest of 4 respondents or 8% prefer Artisan for suitable product shape. Nobody prefers other company for suitable product shape (Table 5).

Table 5: Cross-tabulation of Consumers' Perception to Product Shape

Company Name	Product Shape			
	Suitable	Not Suitable	Total	% of satisfied customers
Shinepukur	31	19	50	62%
Monno	15	35	50	30%
Artisan	4	46	50	8%
Bengal Fine	0	0	0	0%
Total	50	100	150	100%

4.6 Consumers' Perception to Product Design

Consumers' preference is also affected by product design. In this study it was also tried to know the perception of the respondents for product design. From the analysis of the collected data the scenario is Shinepukur ceramics offers beautiful product design. Among the 50 respondents 36 or 72% prefer Shinepukur for beautiful product design, 10 respondents or 20% prefer Monno and rest of 4 respondents or 8% prefer Artisan for beautiful product design. Nobody prefers other company for beautiful product design (Table 6).

Table 6: Cross-tabulation of Consumers' Perception to Product Design

Company Name	Product Design			
	More beautiful	Less beautiful	Total	% of satisfied customers
Shinepukur	36	14	50	72%
Monno	10	40	50	20%
Artisan	4	46	50	8%
Bengal Fine	0	0	0	0%
Total	50	100	150	100%

4.7 Consumers' Feedback Regarding After Sales Services

After sales services are also important for earning competitive advantage and to take strong position. Through this study the found scenario of after sales services of leading companies through following table is after sales service of SCL better than other. Among the 50 respondents 26 or 52% prefer Shinepukur, 18 or 36% prefer Monno, 5 or 10% prefer Artisan and 1 respondent or 2% prefers Bengal Fine for after sales services. Most of the respondents said that, the product design of Shinepukur lasts long time compared to other company's product (Table 7).

Table 7: Frequency Distribution Regarding After Sales Services

Company Name	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Shinepukur	26	52	52
Monno	18	36	88
Artisan	5	10	98
Bengal Fine	1	2	100
Total	50	100	

4.8 Consumers' Feedback Regarding Delivery System

Sometimes customized products are also delivered. If product is not delivered timely, consumers may be dissatisfied, need may be unfulfilled or consumers may go to available competitor. When need is unfulfilled, they may try to satisfy need by alternative products. Going to available competitors if consumers are satisfied, they will never comeback. So, both are harmful for the organization. So, to deliver products timely is very important for positioning. The survey result shows that, products delivery system of SCL is better than others. Among the 50 respondents, 26 or 52% says that delivery system of Shinepukur is ok, 16 or 32% says about Monno, 7 or 14% says about Artisan and 1 respondent or 2% says about Bengal Fine (Table 8).

Table 8: Frequency Distribution Regarding Delivery System

Company Name	Frequency	Percent	Cumulative Percent
Shinepukur	26	52	52
Monno	16	32	84
Artisan	7	14	98
Bengal Fine	1	2	100
Total	50	100	

4.9 Consumers' Response Regarding Product Availability

If products are not available at right place at right time consumers will be dissatisfied and product will take negative position in the mind of the customer. The study result shows that, in the domestic market products of Monno Ceramics are more available than others. Out of 50 respondents, 86% say that, products of Monno Ceramics are more available and only 14% say that, products of Shinepukur Ceramics product are more available in the market. Respondents did not say anything about availability of other two brands (Table 9).

Table 9: Frequency Distribution Regarding Product Availability

Company Name	Frequency	Percent (%)	Cumulative Percent
Shinepukur	7	14	14
Monno	43	86	100
Artisan	0	0	100
Bengal Fine	0	0	100
Total	50	100	

4.10 Availability of Unique Product(s)

The Bone China is a new arrival and it is only provided by Shinepukur. The products under Bone China brand are very much lucrative compared to porcelain products. The main characteristics of bone china is transparent, high quality, nice looking design and easy to use also. In the domestic market, the demand of bone china is increasing day by day. The result of the study shows that, most of the consumers are aware about Bone China of Shinepukur Ceramics. Among the 50 respondents, only 12% are not aware about Bone China and the rest of the respondents are well aware about Bone China. But the noticeable negative side of the brand is high price.

5.0 Concluding Remarks of the Study

In our country tableware ceramic industry is developing day by day. There are already many companies in the market serving the consumers by delivering the quality products. In domestic market it is important to know the requirements of the ultimate customers and to develop the products based on that requirement for appropriate positioning. In our

country, there are many companies that are now successful because they can fulfill the consumers' requirement. In competitive world, survival in the market is important. That's why company has to retain the consumers as much as possible. Many changes have taken place in the tableware ceramic industry in last few years. Once upon a time consumers were not concerned about the shape, design and other factors. But now these are the considerable factors for consumers. In modern world consumers' demand is changing day by day and they switch the company frequently. So, retaining the consumers is important and it will be possible when companies will be aware about the perception of consumers and will be able to take position according to that perception. By creating competitive advantage, company has to do something special for consumers and by this way company can increase their relative market share as well as achieve top position also. Shinepukur Ceramics Ltd. is the number one tableware manufacturer in our country. In domestic market and international market it is ahead of others. Second position is captured by Monno Ceramics Ltd and then others.

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