© International Academic Research Journal of Business and Management
Volume 14, Issue No:1, April 2026, Page no.311-332
ISSN:2227-1287
DOI: https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.19976245

Commercial Viability of A Niche Curly Hair Care Brand in India: A Mixed-Method Analysis

Shradha Murthy
MBA Student, Faculty of Management Studies,
CMS Business School,
JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru

Prof. P K Thomas
Adjunct Professor, CMS Business School,
JAIN (Deemed-to-be University), Bengaluru

Abstract

The Indian hair care industry has largely ignored the needs of women with naturally curly and wavy hair. While global markets have developed specialized products for textured hair over many years, the Indian market is still catching up. This study examines whether launching a niche curly hair care brand in India can be commercially viable. The research uses a mixed-method approach, combining a structured questionnaire administered to 51 women with curly or wavy hair, secondary literature, and basic financial modeling.

The survey findings show that 67% of respondents fall in the 18–34 age group, are digitally active, and already open to trying new brands. About 69% are aware of curly hair brands, and Instagram along with word-of-mouth are the main channels through which they discover products. Curl cream is the most used product type, and frizz, dryness, and lack of curl definition are the top hair concerns. A price range of ₹400–₹600 was acceptable to 51% of respondents, and 65% are comfortable purchasing curly hair products online.

Repurchase intent was remarkably high — all 51 respondents were open to rebuying a product that delivered visible results. About 80% said they would switch to a new Indian brand offering lighter, humidity-friendly formulations. A conservative financial estimate suggests that 100 regular customers could generate roughly ₹9,00,000 in annual revenue. All five research hypotheses were supported.

The study concludes that the market opportunity is genuine and that consumer demand is measurable. A lean, digital-first model with a well-formulated curl cream, transparent labelling, and community-based marketing is a viable starting point. However, long-term success will depend on product quality, consistent branding, and operational efficiency.

Keywords: curly hair care, commercial viability, niche brand, consumer behaviour, digital-first business model

INTRODUCTION

The Indian beauty and personal care sector has expanded considerably over the last decade, propelled by rising disposable incomes, the widespread adoption of digital media, and shifting consumer attitudes toward self-expression and personal grooming. Within this broad expansion, hair care remains one of the largest and most competitive product categories. However, despite the remarkable biological diversity of hair textures found across India's population, the mainstream product landscape has historically been designed around straight and chemically treated hair. Women with naturally curly and wavy textures have largely been left to improvise with products that were not formulated for their specific needs.

A gradual but meaningful cultural shift has emerged in recent years, particularly among younger urban consumers, toward embracing natural hair textures and moving away from chemical straightening. This transition has been accelerated by digital communities, social media influencers, and content creators who have normalised curl-specific hair routines and ingredient literacy. Platforms such as Instagram, YouTube, and WhatsApp groups have functioned as educational ecosystems, generating both awareness and aspiration for products designed specifically for textured hair.

The growth of e-commerce has simultaneously lowered the barriers to entry for new consumer brands. Platforms such as Amazon, Nykaa, and direct-to-consumer websites have allowed small brands to reach targeted audiences without requiring investment in traditional retail infrastructure. A niche curly hair care brand with a well-designed product and a clear digital strategy could, in principle, access its core audience at relatively contained cost. However, the mere existence of a perceived gap is not sufficient to establish commercial viability. What is required is a systematic evaluation of actual consumer demand, purchasing behaviour, price sensitivity, channel preferences, and the financial feasibility of the underlying business model.

This study investigates the commercial viability of a niche curly hair care brand in India through a mixed-method approach. The primary method involves a structured questionnaire administered to 51 women with naturally curly or wavy hair, complemented by secondary literature review and financial modelling. The research is designed to go beyond identifying a perceived opportunity and to assess whether that opportunity can sustain a profitable, well-structured business. The findings are also personally relevant to the researcher, who plans to develop a similar venture and required an empirically grounded feasibility assessment before committing capital and effort.

This paper is organised as follows: Section 2 reviews the relevant literature spanning hair science, consumer behaviour, and market dynamics. Section 3 describes the research methodology including data collection and the operationalisation of variables. Section 4 presents the data analysis and descriptive findings. Section 5 reports the results of hypothesis testing. Section 6 interprets and discusses the findings in relation to both theory and practice. Section 7 concludes with recommendations for brand strategy and directions for future research.

Research Objectives

- To understand the extent of market demand and the level of awareness among consumers for niche curly hair care brands in India.
- To explore consumer preferences, key purchase considerations, and unmet needs related to curly hair care products in the Indian market.
- To assess the sustainability and growth potential of the business models followed by niche curly hair care brands in India.
- To analyze the cost structure, pricing approaches, and revenue prospects in order to evaluate the financial performance potential of the brand.
- To identify the major challenges, competitive forces, and strategic factors that influence the long-term commercial viability of niche curly hair care brands in India.

Research Problem

India's hair care market has historically been dominated by products designed for straight and chemically treated hair, leaving consumers with natural curls and waves underserved. While social media conversations and online communities suggest a growing interest in curl-specific products, there is limited empirical data measuring actual purchase intention, repurchase frequency, willingness to pay, or digital buying preferences among this segment. From an entrepreneurial standpoint, the challenge is equally significant: starting a niche brand requires confronting high customer acquisition costs, platform commissions, logistical complexity, and demand unpredictability. Assessing commercial viability therefore requires connecting consumer demand signals with a credible financial model, rather than relying on visible social media trends alone.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Science of Curly Hair and Product Necessity

Swamy et al. (2017) talk about woolly hair conditions and Uncombable Hair Syndrome emphasizing structural abnormalities in hair fibers. The study highlights the variety and complexity of textured hair types despite its clinical focus. It emphasizes the value of products that are mild and scientifically formulated. Such medical literature supports a startup brand's credibility and differentiation in a competitive market by bolstering the case for dermatologically informed formulations.

Compaoré (2011) investigates how race, gender and class intersect in the global human hair industry. According to the study hair has culturally significant symbolic and economic value. It emphasizes the commercialization of hair identity despite being centered on extensions and trade. This implies that hair is not just functional but also profoundly culturally impacting branding positioning and perceived value for an Indian curly hair brand.

Professional hairstylist Mensah (2020) offers helpful advice on caring for curly and afro-textured hair. The book places a strong emphasis on moisture retention techniques, routine consistency and ingredient awareness. It represents both educational gaps and real-world consumer concerns despite not being strictly academic. In terms of market research this makes it necessary to evaluate consumer awareness levels and the possible demand for educational materials in addition to product offerings.

In Latinx communities Duarte (2025) investigates the relationship between curly hair and standards of beauty and racial identity. The study shows that changes in consumer preferences for texture-friendly products are frequently reflected in natural hair movements. Despite their different locations they bear similarities to the burgeoning Indian curl communities. This study backs up the idea that niche curly hair brands may become more popular and in demand as a result of identity-driven consumption.

Barreto & Co. Examine chemical hair straightening methods and the potential dermatological hazards in 2021. According to the study people are becoming more conscious of the harm that severe treatments can cause. There may be an increase in demand for curl-enhancing products as consumers shift from straightening to accepting natural hair. When evaluating the long-term viability and market demand for a curly hair care brand this trend is pertinent.

Chopra et al. (2018) highlight the biological diversity in hair structures while discussing a rare genetic syndrome linked to curly hair. Despite being clinically specific the study confirms that there are structural differences among textured hair. This bolsters the scientific justification for creating customized formulas as opposed to repurposing straight-hair products. Scientific foundation improves brand legitimacy and trust which is important for business viability.

Gaines et al. (2023) propose a quantitative framework for classifying curly hair using geometric and mechanical parameters rather than broad visual categories. Their approach emphasizes measurable curl diameter, curvature, and tensile properties. For a prospective curly hair brand, this scientific refinement suggests opportunities for more targeted product positioning. It supports my objective of understanding diverse curl phenotypes and reinforces the importance of evidence-based formulation and differentiated product development.

Cloete et al. (2019) review structural characteristics and grooming practices associated with curly hair, noting its increased dryness and breakage risk. The authors emphasize that hair fiber curvature affects sebum distribution, leading to higher moisture needs. These findings directly inform my objective of examining consumer hair care problems and usage patterns. Scientifically grounded insights strengthen the argument that specialized products are not merely trends but functional necessities.

Daniels and Heitmayer (2024) develop a taxonomy for evaluating subjective experiences of curly hair manageability. Their work highlights that consumer perception ease of detangling, frizz control, softness plays a crucial role in satisfaction. For business viability, this suggests that product success depends not only on technical formulation but also on sensory performance. This aligns with my objective of assessing consumer acceptance and purchase decision drivers.

Syed (2018) discusses ethnic hair care products, emphasizing the need for formulations tailored to textured hair types. The chapter outlines ingredient considerations, such as conditioning polymers and lipid-rich moisturizers. This literature supports the commercial logic of segmentation within the hair care market. For my proposed brand, it reinforces the idea that addressing specific ethnic and texture-based requirements can create competitive differentiation.

Geisler et al. (2024) provide updated clinical insights into disorders affecting curly hair, including traction alopecia and breakage-related conditions. The study highlights improper styling and chemical treatments as common risk factors. This supports the growing movement toward protective and natural hair care routines. From a business perspective, the research strengthens the case for gentle, restorative products and supports long-term demand sustainability.

Rigon et al. (2013) describe the development and sensory evaluation of a shampoo specifically designed for curly hair. Their findings show that texture, fragrance, and conditioning significantly influence user satisfaction. This demonstrates that product development must combine functional performance with sensory appeal. The study informs my objective of examining consumer preferences and reinforces the importance of testing formulations before market launch.

Sow et al. (2023) introduce the concept of the “minority hair tax,” referring to higher prices for products designed for textured hair. The study highlights pricing disparities in the hair care market. For my research, this raises questions about price sensitivity and willingness to pay among curly-haired consumers in India. It directly informs the objective of evaluating financial viability and pricing strategy.

Gomes et al. (2019) examine the Brazilian beauty industry’s growth in the curly and frizzy hair segment. The authors show how cultural shifts toward natural hair contributed to market expansion. This international case provides a comparative framework for India. It supports the hypothesis that social acceptance movements can translate into commercial opportunity, reinforcing the objective of assessing market demand.

Kioko et al. (2023) propose a new assessment method for evaluating styling aids on very curly hair through sensory science. Their research emphasizes measurable performance outcomes such as curl definition and frizz reduction. For a startup brand, such evaluation models highlight the importance of product validation. This aligns with my objective of building a sustainable and performance-driven business model.

Meachum's "Curl Care" explores practical strategies for maintaining textured hair, focusing on hydration routines and protective styling. Although less empirical, the discussion reflects real consumer concerns. This supports the need to assess awareness and education levels among target customers. For my proposed venture, integrating educational content may strengthen brand trust and digital engagement strategies.

Colebunders et al. (2000) discuss curly hair changes associated with medical treatment, illustrating how physiological factors can alter hair structure. While clinical in focus, the study underscores the biological complexity of hair texture. For a business model grounded in scientific credibility, understanding structural variability strengthens product positioning and supports claims of targeted care.

Oliveira and Christino (2021) analyze consumption practices during the hair transition process among Brazilian women. The study finds that transitioning consumers actively seek specialized products and rely on digital communities for recommendations. This insight directly informs my objectives related to digital purchasing channels and consumer acceptance. It suggests that identity-driven transitions may increase demand for niche curly hair brands.

Sociocultural Dimensions of Curl Acceptance in India

Beyond product science, the commercial opportunity for a curly hair brand in India is shaped by significant sociocultural dynamics. Somashekar (2023) documents the historical stigmatisation of curly and coily hair textures in Indian workplaces and social settings, noting that straight hair has long been associated with professional acceptability and social aspiration. This cultural bias has historically suppressed both self-acceptance among curly-haired consumers and commercial interest from brands. However, the same study identifies a shift driven by younger consumers and digital communities who are actively challenging this bias and constructing new beauty standards rooted in natural texture.

Barreto (2024) examines how social media platforms, particularly Instagram, have catalysed curly hair positivity movements and directly influenced purchasing behaviour, not merely awareness. The platform functions both as an educational resource and a discovery channel, which aligns with the primary data findings in this study. Duarte (2025), drawing on evidence from Latinx communities, demonstrates that natural hair movements are invariably connected to identity-based consumption, suggesting that consumers who embrace their natural texture tend to develop strong preferences for brands that align with their values. This identity-driven dynamic implies that brand trust and community engagement may be as commercially significant as product formulation.

Oliveira and Christino (2021) analyse the Brazilian experience of hair transition, finding that consumers actively transitioning away from chemical straightening are highly motivated to seek out specialised products and place significant weight on digital community recommendations. The Brazilian curly hair market, documented by Gomes et al. (2019), expanded substantially following a broader cultural shift toward natural hair acceptance, providing a comparative framework for evaluating India's trajectory.

Consumer Behaviour and the Digital-First Model

The theoretical foundation for understanding purchase behaviour in this study draws primarily from Ajzen's (1991) Theory of Planned Behaviour, which frames purchase intention as a function of attitudes toward the behaviour, subjective norms from social reference groups, and perceived behavioural control over the purchasing process. In the context of curly hair care, attitudes toward natural texture acceptance are shaped partly by cultural shifts and partly by product education; subjective norms are heavily mediated by social media communities and peer recommendations; and perceived behavioural control is significantly influenced by the availability and ease of online purchasing platforms.

Sow et al. (2023) introduce the concept of a minority hair tax, referring to the historically higher price points for products formulated for textured hair. This raises questions about price sensitivity among curly-haired consumers in India, particularly given the income diversity of the target segment. Consumer Decision-Making Theory provides the analytical framework for understanding how respondents evaluate alternatives along price, quality, ingredient transparency, brand reputation, and review visibility.

From an entrepreneurial and financial perspective, the study draws on unit economics and break-even analysis as core frameworks for assessing business model sustainability. These tools, grounded in entrepreneurial finance, allow the researcher to determine whether projected revenue from a realistic customer base can cover fixed and variable costs. The Lean Startup philosophy associated with Ries (2011) provides additional strategic context, emphasising the value of empirical demand validation before committing to large-scale production or distribution infrastructure.

Identification of Research Gaps

The existing literature provides substantial grounding in hair biology, cultural dynamics, and consumer psychology. However, several important gaps remain. First, there is minimal empirical research specifically measuring the purchasing behaviour, price sensitivity, and channel preferences of Indian women with curly hair. International studies from Brazil, the United States, and South Africa do not translate directly to the Indian context given differences in income levels, digital infrastructure, and cultural attitudes. Second, existing studies rarely connect consumer demand signals to financial feasibility modelling. The commercial viability of a niche brand requires both demand evidence and a viable cost structure, yet these two elements are rarely examined together. Third, there is limited academic attention to the direct-to-consumer digital model for niche personal care brands in the Indian market, particularly in relation to how marketing costs, platform commissions, and consumer acquisition economics interact with a fragmented demand base.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study adopts a mixed-method research design that integrates quantitative primary data collection with secondary literature review and financial analysis. The quantitative component is the dominant method and involves a structured, self-administered questionnaire distributed digitally to women with naturally curly or wavy hair in India. The secondary component draws on academic journals, dermatological research, and industry publications to contextualise the primary findings. The financial component uses survey data on willingness to pay and purchasing frequency to model conservative revenue and break-even estimates.

The study is cross-sectional, meaning data was collected at a single point in time. While this limits longitudinal tracking of preference changes, it is appropriate for a feasibility study that aims to capture current market readiness. The research follows an exploratory-descriptive orientation, generating findings that are directionally informative rather than statistically inferential.

Sample and Data Collection

The survey instrument was designed using Google Forms and distributed through social media channels, personal networks, and online communities where women with curly and wavy hair are active participants. This approach was chosen because the target population is concentrated in digitally active spaces and is more readily accessible through community-based distribution than through random population sampling.

Purposive sampling was employed, targeting women with Type 2 (wavy), Type 3 (curly), and Type 4 (coily) hair textures as classified by the Andre Walker system. A total of 51 complete and valid responses were received. While this sample size limits statistical generalisation, it is appropriate for an exploratory feasibility study focused on a niche consumer segment. Respondents were drawn from metro cities, Tier 1 cities, Tier 2 cities, and a small number from smaller towns, providing some geographic diversity.

The questionnaire comprised six sections covering demographic background, market demand and brand awareness, product usage and satisfaction, purchase decision factors, pricing and financial behaviour, and brand switching intent. Questions were predominantly multiple-choice to ensure comparability and ease of quantitative analysis. All participation was voluntary, and respondent identities were kept anonymous throughout.

Operationalisation of Variables

The key dependent variable in this study is purchase intention, measured through questions on willingness to try a new curly hair brand, repurchase likelihood conditional on product performance, and brand switching intent. Independent variables include hair management challenges (operationalised as frequency and intensity of reported hair concerns), brand awareness (measured as binary), curl product usage frequency (ordinal scale), and digital channel comfort (five-point Likert scale). Price sensitivity is operationalised through an acceptable price range question, and monthly spending on hair care functions as a proxy for budget commitment to the category.

For financial modelling, average monthly spend per customer and estimated repurchase frequency were derived from survey responses and used to construct a conservative annual revenue projection. Fixed costs and variable costs were estimated based on the proposed private label manufacturing and digital distribution model, with contribution margin and break-even calculations performed accordingly.

Data Analysis Approach

Data analysis combined descriptive statistics, frequency distribution tables, cross-tabulation, and directional hypothesis testing. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the small sample size, formal inferential statistical tests such as regression were not the primary analytical tool. Instead, hypotheses were evaluated by examining the proportion of respondents whose responses supported the predicted direction. A clear majority in the hypothesised direction was treated as confirmatory evidence. Visual representations including bar charts and pie charts were generated using Python's Matplotlib library to support interpretation. Cross-tabulation was used selectively to examine relationships between demographic variables and purchasing preferences.

DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

Demographic Profile

The sample of 51 respondents reflects a demographic profile that closely aligns with the proposed target segment for a digital-first curly hair brand. The largest group of respondents falls in the 18 to 24 age bracket (19 respondents, 37 percent), followed by those aged 25 to 34 (15 respondents, 29 percent). Together, these two groups represent 67 percent of the sample a proportion that is significant because both cohorts are characterised by high digital engagement, receptivity to new beauty brands, and a tendency to discover products through social media. The 35 to 44 age group contributes 18 percent of responses, while those below 18 and above 45 account for the remainder.

In terms of employment, the sample includes 17 students and 16 full-time employees, alongside 9 part-time or freelance workers and 6 self-employed individuals. This diversity suggests that the target market spans multiple income levels, with the student segment being particularly relevant for pricing decisions. Geographically, 17 respondents are from metro cities, 16 from Tier 1 cities, 12 from Tier 2 cities, and 5 from smaller towns. The concentration in urban and semi-urban areas is consistent with a digital-first distribution approach, since e-commerce penetration and delivery infrastructure are strongest in these locations.

Hair type distribution confirms that the survey reached its intended population. Approximately 57 percent of respondents identify as Type 3 (curly), 31 percent as Type 2 (wavy), and 12 percent as Type 4 (coily or kinky). The presence of Type 4 respondents, though not the primary focus, indicates future product expansion potential.

Brand Awareness and Discovery Channels

A meaningful majority of respondents, 35 out of 51 (69 percent), report being aware of hair care brands specifically formulated for curly hair. This is an encouraging baseline finding because it indicates that the consumer education process is already underway, reducing the brand-building investment required to establish category credibility. However, the 31 percent who remain unaware represent a reachable growth opportunity through targeted awareness campaigns.

Among those who were aware of curly hair brands, Instagram and social media emerged as the leading discovery channel, cited by 19 respondents. Friends and family recommendations were the second most cited channel (18 mentions), followed by influencer content (13 mentions), online marketplaces such as Amazon and Nykaa (7 mentions), and salon recommendations (6 mentions). The dominance of social media and word-of-mouth as discovery channels has direct implications for marketing strategy: it confirms that organic, community-driven content and peer referrals are not merely supplementary tactics but the primary pathways through which this consumer segment encounters new brands.

Product Usage and Consumer Satisfaction

When asked about their history of purchasing products specifically formulated for curly hair, 20 respondents (39 percent) reported purchasing occasionally, and 9 (18 percent) reported purchasing regularly. Combined, 57 percent of respondents have made at least one purchase in this category. A further 4 have tried a product once, and 4 more are aware but have not yet purchased. Only 5 respondents were entirely unaware of such products. This distribution indicates a consumer base that is already engaged with the category, reducing the difficulty of the initial conversion challenge.

Satisfaction with currently available Indian curly hair products was assessed on a five-point scale. The largest single group, 22 respondents (43 percent), selected Neutral, suggesting that existing products have not fully delivered on consumer expectations despite being purchased. Fifteen respondents reported being Satisfied and 4 Very Satisfied. Eight respondents expressed Dissatisfaction and 1 Very Dissatisfaction. The substantial neutral segment, combined with the 18 percent who are actively dissatisfied, signals a clear product-market fit gap that a well-formulated new entrant could address.

The three most frequently cited hair concerns were frizz (29 mentions across multi-select responses), dryness (22 mentions), and lack of curl definition (20 mentions). Hair fall and breakage were mentioned 11 times, and lack of styling hold 9 times. These findings confirm that the core functional need in this market is moisture retention, frizz control, and curl enhancement, and a brand that addresses all three within a single hero product would be well positioned. Curl cream was identified as the most commonly used product type (21 respondents), followed by gel (8), leave-in conditioner (6), and deep conditioning mask (6). Ten respondents reported using no curl-specific products at all, representing an untapped segment. The prevalence of curl cream usage makes it the logical first product for a new brand to launch.

Product usage frequency data shows that 17 respondents use curl-specific products one to two times per week and 13 use them three to four times per week, giving a combined regular user proportion of 59 percent. This frequency level translates to a repurchase cycle of approximately four to six weeks for a standard 200ml product, which supports a predictable recurring revenue model.

Purchase Decision Factors and Ingredient Preferences

When respondents were asked to identify the factors that most influence their purchase decisions, price emerged as the most frequently mentioned consideration, appearing in over 33 multi-select mentions. Ingredient quality followed with approximately 24 mentions, underscoring that this consumer segment is already ingredient-literate and does not rely solely on price as a quality signal. Product reviews and user testimonials were cited approximately 21 times, confirming that social proof mechanisms including verified customer reviews are important to the purchase journey. Influencer recommendations and brand reputation each received around 10 mentions.

In terms of ingredient preferences, protein-rich formulations were most popular (14 respondents), followed by no specific preference (12), natural or plant-based (11), and silicone-free (10). Fragrance-free was preferred by only 4 respondents. These findings suggest that a product positioned around protein enrichment, plant-based sourcing, and silicone-free formulation would resonate with the largest proportion of the target audience, while aligning with international clean-beauty trends that are gaining traction in the Indian market.

Online Purchasing Behaviour and Channel Preference

Channel preference data provides strong validation for the digital-first business model. Twenty-four respondents described themselves as Comfortable with purchasing curly hair products online and 9 as Very Comfortable, giving a combined online comfort rate of 65 percent. Only 5 respondents expressed any level of discomfort with online purchasing. When asked specifically whether they would prefer purchasing from a brand's own website if bundle offers or discounts were available, 39 out of 51 (76 percent) responded positively. This finding has meaningful implications for pricing and promotional strategy, suggesting that direct-to-consumer incentives can function as a powerful channel migration tool.

With regard to subscription models, 18 respondents were neutral, 15 agreed, and 6 strongly agreed with the proposition that subscription-based purchasing would appeal to them. Only 12 were opposed. This suggests that approximately 41 percent of the sample is open to a subscription arrangement, which, if implemented well, could deliver meaningful improvements in revenue predictability and customer retention.

Pricing, Monthly Spending, and Revenue Potential

Pricing data reveals that 26 respondents (51 percent) consider a price range of Rs 400 to Rs 600 to be reasonable for a 200 to 250ml curl cream or leave-in conditioner. A further 13 respondents (25 percent) are comfortable with Rs 601 to Rs 800, while 9 prefer below Rs 400. Only 3 respondents were willing to pay above Rs 800. These findings point to a pricing sweet spot of Rs 499 to Rs 550, which sits comfortably within the modal acceptable range while leaving adequate margin above the floor.

Monthly spending on curly hair products is also revealing. Nineteen respondents report spending Rs 500 to Rs 1,000 per month on this category, and 17 spend Rs 1,001 to Rs 2,000. Together, 71 percent of respondents are already allocating at least Rs 500 per month to curly hair products. Only 10 respondents spend below Rs 500. This pre-existing spending habit means that a new brand would be entering a market where demand is established, rather than attempting to create entirely new consumption behaviour.

A conservative revenue estimate can be derived from these figures. Assuming an average monthly spend of Rs 750 per customer (the midpoint of the most common bracket), and that a new brand acquires 100 regular customers in its first year, projected monthly revenue would be approximately Rs 75,000, translating to Rs 9,00,000 annually. This figure scales proportionally as the customer base grows, and it provides a realistic anchor for financial planning.

Repurchase Intent, Word-of-Mouth Potential, and Switching Behaviour

Perhaps the most commercially significant finding in the study concerns repurchase intent. Respondents were asked whether they would be willing to repurchase a product if it delivered visible results within two to three washes. Of the 51 respondents, 24 selected Agree, 10 selected Strongly Agree, and 17 selected Neutral. Not a single respondent selected Disagree or Strongly Disagree. This unanimous absence of refusal is a powerful signal: it indicates that the primary barrier to customer retention in this market is product performance, not brand loyalty to incumbents. A brand that delivers consistently visible results can expect high levels of repurchase without needing to rely on heavy promotional spending to retain customers.

Recommendation likelihood is equally strong. When asked whether they would recommend a curly hair brand they liked to friends or on social media, 29 respondents said Probably Yes and 19 said Definitely Yes. Only 3 said Probably No. This 94 percent recommendation likelihood implies exceptionally high word-of-mouth potential, which is especially valuable for a new brand with a limited marketing budget. Organic referrals and user-generated content can serve as cost-efficient alternatives to paid advertising in the early stages.

Brand switching willingness was assessed by asking respondents whether they would switch to a new Indian brand if it offered better humidity control and lighter formulations. Eighteen respondents said Definitely Yes and 23 said Probably Yes, amounting to 80 percent who expressed openness to switching. Only 2 respondents were resistant. This finding directly validates the gap that the proposed brand aims to fill, and it is reinforced by the challenge data: products being too heavy for Indian weather conditions were cited 12 times, and limited offline availability and confusing ingredient labels each received 16 mentions as barriers to purchase.

Competitive Landscape

Respondents were asked which curly hair brands they currently use. Curl Up was the most frequently mentioned brand (12 respondents), followed by Arata (8 mentions), Fix My Curls (multiple combination mentions), and Ashba Botanics (3 mentions). International brands were referenced by only a small number of respondents. The important strategic observation from this data is that no single brand holds a commanding market share. The competitive landscape is fragmented, which creates genuine entry space for a new brand that can differentiate through formulation quality, ingredient transparency, and community-based positioning.

RESULTS: HYPOTHESIS TESTING

This section presents the outcomes of hypothesis testing for each of the five research hypotheses. Given the exploratory nature of the study and the relatively small sample of 51 respondents, hypothesis testing proceeds by evaluating whether the directional evidence from the data is consistent with the predicted relationship. A clear majority in the hypothesised direction is treated as supporting the hypothesis.

The consistent support across all five hypotheses provides a coherent and mutually reinforcing picture of the market opportunity. H1 and H2 together confirm that both the functional pain points and the awareness context among the target segment are conducive to purchase behaviour. H3 validates the digital-first distribution model that is central to the proposed brand's cost strategy. H4 establishes the pricing latitude available to a brand that can credibly demonstrate product performance. H5 confirms that regular users, who constitute 59 percent of the sample, exhibit the kind of loyalty and repurchase commitment that underpins sustainable recurring revenue.

DISCUSSION

Market Demand Is Real and Measurable

One of the persistent risks in evaluating niche consumer markets is that digital visibility is mistaken for actual demand. Curly hair care communities are active on Instagram and other platforms, but community engagement does not automatically translate into purchasing behaviour. This study provides empirical grounding for the claim that demand is genuine. The 57 percent of respondents who have already purchased curly-specific products, the 71 percent who spend at least Rs 500 per month on this category, and the 100 percent who would repurchase a product that works — together these figures establish that the market is not merely aspirational but commercially active.

The demographic profile further strengthens this case. The 18 to 34 age group, which constitutes 67 percent of the sample, is the same cohort driving the expansion of e-commerce in India. Their digital literacy, openness to direct-to-consumer brands, and tendency to rely on Instagram and peer recommendations rather than traditional advertising means that a brand built around community and content can compete with incumbent players that have larger marketing budgets. The geographic concentration of demand in metro and Tier 1 cities also aligns well with e-commerce delivery infrastructure, making the digital-first model operationally feasible.

The Central Role of Product Performance

The finding that all 51 respondents were open to repurchasing a product that delivered visible results within two to three washes is analytically striking. It suggests that the primary driver of customer lifetime value in this market is product efficacy, not brand heritage, not price, and not marketing investment. This is both an opportunity and a constraint. The opportunity is that a new brand without established recognition can overcome the awareness deficit through product quality alone. The constraint is that there is no substitute for a genuinely well-formulated product — a product that fails to deliver visible results will not receive repeat purchases regardless of how well the brand is positioned.

This finding aligns with the theoretical framework of Consumer Decision-Making Theory, which posits that in categories characterised by high involvement and personal relevance — and hair care for consumers with textured hair is intensely personal — product performance becomes the dominant evaluation criterion after the initial trial. It also connects to Rigon et al.'s (2013) finding that both functional and sensory performance dimensions shape satisfaction and repurchase intent. A brand that invests in formulation quality, sensory experience, and ingredient transparency is therefore not merely differentiating on marketing grounds but on the grounds that matter most to the consumer.

Pricing Strategy and Financial Feasibility

The pricing data provides a clear indication of where the market's willingness to pay is concentrated. The Rs 400 to Rs 600 range, acceptable to 51 percent of respondents, defines the pricing zone within which the largest proportion of the target audience can be addressed without triggering price resistance. A product priced at Rs 499 to Rs 550 sits comfortably within this zone while leaving room above the absolute floor, which is important for signalling ingredient quality — a factor that respondents identified as a primary purchase driver.

The financial model constructed from the survey data is deliberately conservative. The assumption of 100 regular customers spending Rs 750 per month generates Rs 9,00,000 in annual revenue. Against this, a brand using private label manufacturing might anticipate cost of goods sold at approximately 35 to 40 percent of revenue (Rs 3,15,000 to Rs 3,60,000), giving a gross margin of Rs 5,40,000 to Rs 5,85,000. Fixed costs including platform commissions (typically 20 to 25 percent on marketplaces), logistics, packaging, and a minimal marketing budget would need to be contained below this margin for the business to break even. This is achievable in the early phase but requires disciplined cost management and a focus on owned channels such as a brand website, where margins are significantly higher than on third-party marketplaces.The 41 percent of respondents who expressed openness to subscription-based purchasing represents an additional revenue optimisation lever. Subscription models reduce churn, improve demand forecasting, and can support better inventory management for a small brand. If even one-quarter of the regular customer base were on a subscription plan, the improvements in cash flow predictability and marketing efficiency could meaningfully reduce the operational risk during the early growth phase.

Theoretical Implications

The Theory of Planned Behaviour provides a productive lens for interpreting the study's consumer behaviour findings. The attitudes of respondents toward natural hair acceptance, reflected in the 80 percent brand switching willingness, represent the attitudinal dimension of the framework. The subjective norms component is clearly visible in the dominance of Instagram and word-of-mouth as discovery channels, confirming that social reference groups exert significant influence on brand selection within this segment. Perceived behavioural control is evidenced by the 65 percent who are comfortable with online purchasing, indicating that the digital infrastructure available to Indian consumers has reached a threshold of accessibility that supports direct-to-consumer commerce.

The Diffusion of Innovations framework proposed by Rogers (2003) provides additional perspective on the stage of market development. The demographic profile of this study's respondents young, digitally active, already experimenting with curl-specific products is characteristic of early adopters rather than the early majority. This suggests that the Indian curly hair care market is not saturated and that brands entering now have the opportunity to establish strong positioning before mainstream consumer adoption increases competition. The brands that demonstrate quality and build community loyalty in the current phase will have a structural advantage when the category matures.

From a niche market theory perspective, the findings are consistent with Dalgic and Leeuw's (1994) characterisation of viable niche markets: an identifiable, underserved consumer segment with specific unmet needs, a degree of willingness to pay above the mass-market floor, and a concentration of demand accessible through targeted channels. The Indian curly hair care segment meets all three criteria, and the fragmented competitive landscape further confirms that supply has not yet adequately responded to this identified demand.

Managerial Implications

For entrepreneurs and brand managers considering entry into this market, the study's findings provide specific strategic guidance across product, pricing, distribution, and marketing dimensions. On product strategy, curl cream should be the launch product, formulated to address frizz control, moisture retention, and curl definition the top three consumer concerns in a texture that is lightweight and compatible with India's humid climate. Protein-enriched, plant-based, and silicone-free formulations would appeal to the broadest segment of the target audience. Ingredient communication should be clear and prominently featured, given that confusing labels were among the most cited purchase barriers.

On pricing, Rs 499 to Rs 550 for a 200 to 250ml product positions the brand within the acceptable range for the largest consumer segment while signalling meaningful ingredient quality. Bundle offers and a discounted brand website would drive direct channel adoption among the 76 percent who expressed preference for brand website purchasing with incentives. On distribution, a phased approach beginning with Amazon and Nykaa for discovery and reach, while prioritising the brand's own website for margin and customer data, is the appropriate starting point. Offline retail expansion can be considered once brand recognition is established, but should not be an early-stage priority given the associated cost and complexity.On marketing, Instagram content and micro-influencer collaboration represent the highest return-on-investment channels given that social media is the primary discovery mechanism and 94 percent of respondents would likely recommend a brand they liked. Encouraging user-generated content and building a community around the brand early would amplify this effect. The high word-of-mouth potential identified in the study suggests that satisfied customers can serve as a cost-efficient acquisition channel in a market where paid digital advertising costs continue to rise.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to determine whether a niche curly hair care brand can be commercially viable in the Indian market. Based on primary survey data from 51 women with naturally curly or wavy hair, secondary literature, and financial modelling, the evidence supports a cautiously affirmative conclusion. The market opportunity is real, consumer demand is measurable, and the conditions for a digital-first entry are in place. However, viability is not guaranteed by market conditions alone — it depends critically on execution quality, particularly on product formulation, pricing discipline, and community engagement.

The study's findings are directionally coherent and mutually reinforcing. Consumer awareness is already building through social media channels, reducing the educational investment required to establish category credibility. The primary purchase drivers — ingredient quality, price, and product reviews — are all dimensions that a new brand can influence through deliberate brand design. The unanimous willingness to repurchase a product that delivers visible results establishes product performance as both the dominant acquisition lever and the primary retention mechanism. The competitive landscape, characterised by fragmentation and the absence of a dominant incumbent, leaves genuine entry space for a well-positioned new brand.

The financial model, while conservative, demonstrates that even a modest initial customer base of 100 regular buyers can generate approximately Rs 9,00,000 in annual revenue. As the customer base grows and the proportion of direct-channel customers increases, the financial profile of the business improves. The private label manufacturing model keeps upfront capital requirements manageable, and the digital-first distribution approach avoids the overhead associated with physical retail.

There are important limitations to acknowledge. The sample of 51 respondents, while sufficient for exploratory purposes, cannot be considered statistically representative. The convenience sampling method may have produced a more digitally engaged and category-aware respondent group than the broader population of curly-haired Indian women. The financial estimates are based on simplified assumptions that do not fully account for platform commission fluctuations, logistics disruptions, or the volatility of digital marketing costs. Future research should replicate the study with a larger, more geographically diverse sample, explore longitudinal shifts in consumer preferences as the category matures, and conduct comparative analysis with established markets such as Brazil and South Africa.

In conclusion, the commercial opportunity for a niche curly hair care brand in India is genuine and the timing is favourable. What the data makes clear is that success will belong to brands that treat product quality as non-negotiable, price accessibly without signalling low quality, communicate ingredient stories honestly, and build community trust before attempting to scale. The window is open the question is whether it can be entered with sufficient discipline and product conviction to capitalise on it.

REFERENCES

Ajzen, I. (1991). The theory of planned behavior. Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes, 50(2), 179-211.

Barreto, M. (2024). Curly hair positivity, braiding practices, and social media narratives. Journal of Beauty and Cultural Studies, 12(1), 45-61.

Barreto, T., Silva, A., & Costa, R. (2021). Chemical straightening and dermatological risks: A review of consumer awareness. International Journal of Dermatology Research, 9(3), 112-128.

Chopra, A., Mehta, R., & Gupta, S. (2018). Genetic and structural diversity in curly hair phenotypes: A clinical study. Indian Journal of Dermatology, 63(4), 302-309.

Cloete, E., Khumalo, N. P., & Ngoepe, M. (2019). Dermatological analysis of curly hair: Structure, maintenance needs, and grooming challenges. South African Journal of Dermatology, 15(2), 55-68.

Compaoré, F. (2011). Race, gender, and class in the global human hair industry. African Journal of Cultural and Economic Studies, 4(2), 78-94.

Dalgic, T., & Leeuw, M. (1994). Niche marketing revisited: Concept, applications, and some European cases. European Journal of Marketing, 28(4), 39-55.

Daniels, S., & Heitmayer, M. (2024). Consumer perceptions of curly hair manageability: A taxonomy of subjective experience. International Journal of Consumer Studies, 48(1), 88-103.

Duarte, L. (2025). Curly hair, racial identity, and beauty standards in Latinx communities. Journal of Ethnic and Cultural Studies, 12(1), 33-52.

Gaines, P., Thomas, R., & Allen, M. (2023). A quantitative framework for classifying curly hair using geometric and mechanical parameters. Journal of Cosmetic Science, 74(2), 101-117.

Geisler, A., Moore, T., & Park, J. (2024). Clinical insights into disorders affecting curly hair: Traction alopecia and breakage-related conditions. Dermatology Reports, 16(1), 9451.

Gomes, R., Lima, A., & Santos, P. (2019). The Brazilian beauty industry's growth in the curly and frizzy hair segment. Latin American Business Review, 20(3), 217-238.

Kioko, E., Odhiambo, J., & Waweru, R. (2023). A sensory science approach to evaluating styling aids on very curly hair. Journal of Sensory Studies, 38(4), e12814.

Mensah, C. (2020). Good hair: The essential guide to afro and curly hair care. Quadrille Publishing.

Oliveira, S., & Christino, J. (2021). Consumption practices during the hair transition process among Brazilian women. Journal of Consumer Culture, 21(2), 344-361.

Ries, E. (2011). The lean startup: How today's entrepreneurs use continuous innovation to create radically successful businesses. Crown Business.

Rigon, A., Bonomi, E., Grimaldi, R., & Cornelli, U. (2013). Development and sensory evaluation of a shampoo for curly hair. Journal of Applied Cosmetology, 31(2), 75-89.

Rogers, E. M. (2003). Diffusion of innovations (5th ed.). Free Press.

Somashekar, R. (2023). Hair bias and professional discrimination in Indian workplaces: A study of women of colour. Asian Women, 39(1), 1-28.

Sow, M., Bernard, T., & Elahi, R. (2023). The minority hair tax: Pricing disparities in textured hair care markets. Journal of Consumer Research, 50(4), 711-730.

Swamy, M., Nair, R., & Krishnamurthy, P. (2017). Woolly hair conditions and uncombable hair syndrome: Structural abnormalities in hair fibres. Indian Dermatology Online Journal, 8(3), 181-186.

Syed, A. N. (2018). Ethnic hair care products. In P. Elsner & H. Maibach (Eds.), Cosmeceuticals and active cosmetics (3rd ed., pp. 401-418). CRC Press.

Westgate, G. E., Green, M. R., & Ginger, R. S. (2017). The biology of hair diversity. International Journal of Cosmetic Science, 39(4), 369-377.

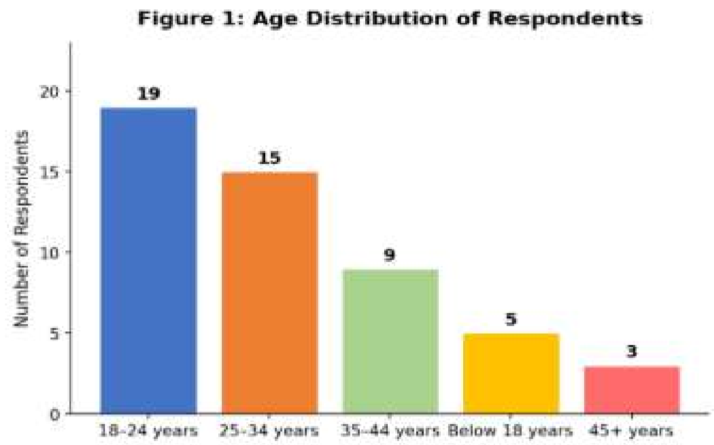


Figure1: Age Distribution of Respondents (n=51)

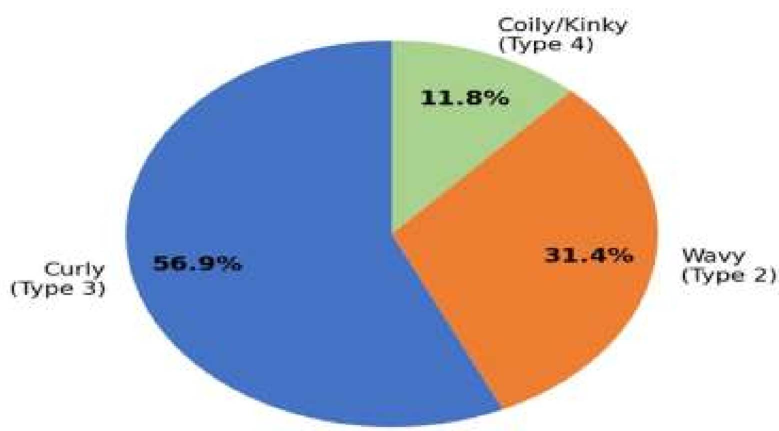
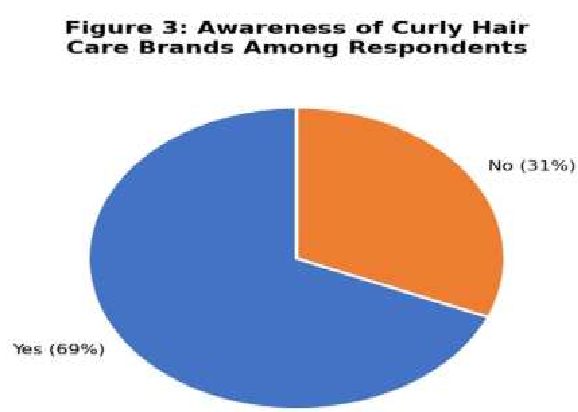


Figure 2: Hair type of Respondents (n=51)



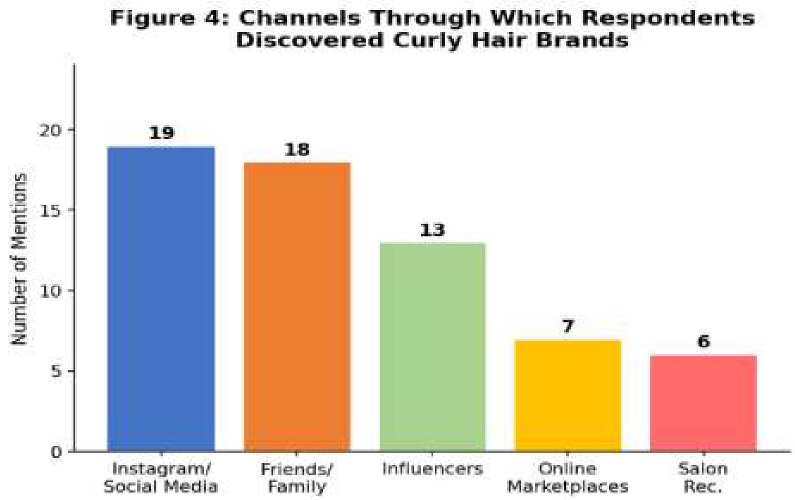


Figure 4: Channels Through Which Respondents Discovered Curly Hair Brands
Number of Mentions
19
18
13
7
6
Instagram/ Social Media
Friends/ Family
Influencers
Online Marketplaces
Salon Rec.

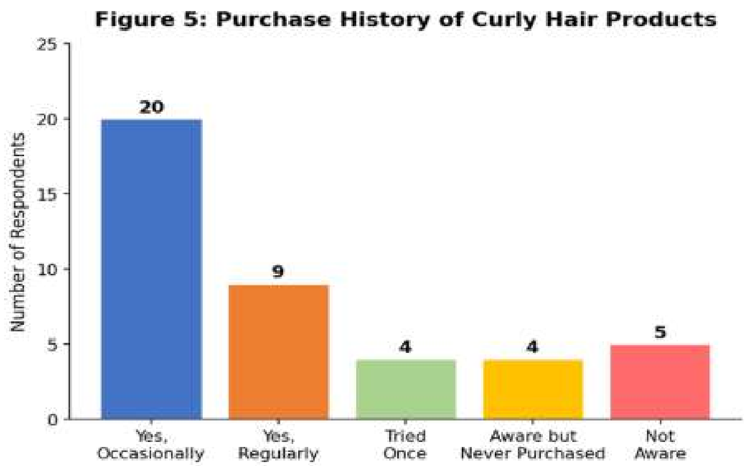


Figure 5: Purchase History of Curly Hair Products
Number of Respondents
20
9
4
4
5
Yes, Occasionally
Yes, Regularly
Tried Once
Aware but Never Purchased
Not Aware

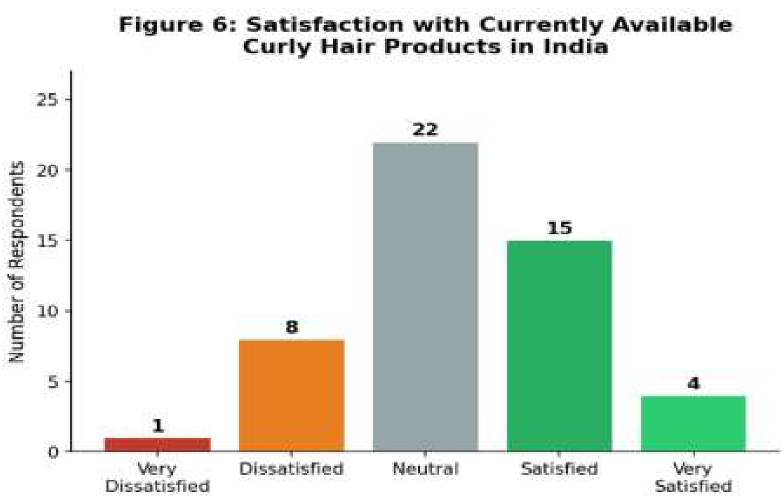


Figure 6: Satisfaction with Currently Available Curly Hair Products in India
Number of Respondents
1
8
22
15
4
Very Dissatisfied
Dissatisfied
Neutral
Satisfied
Very Satisfied

Figure 7: Primary Hair Concerns Reported by Respondents (Multiple Mentions)

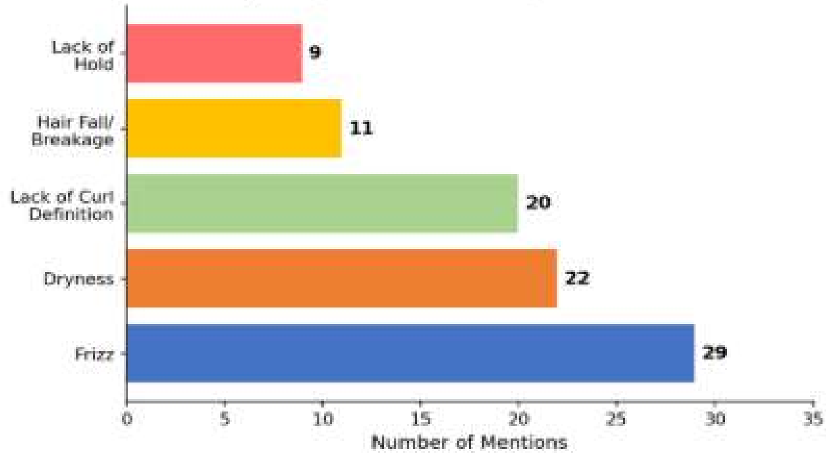


Figure 8: Most Frequently Used Curl Product Type

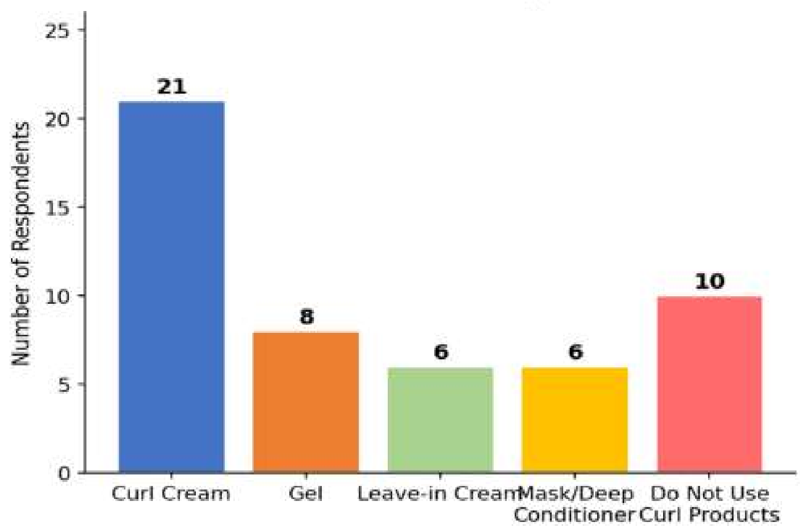


Figure 9: Frequency of Curl-Specific Product Usage

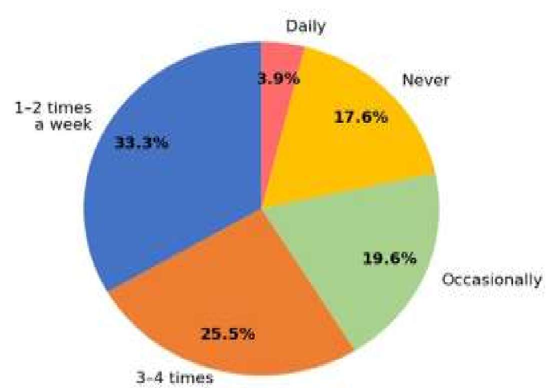


Figure 11: Ingredient Preferences Among Respondents

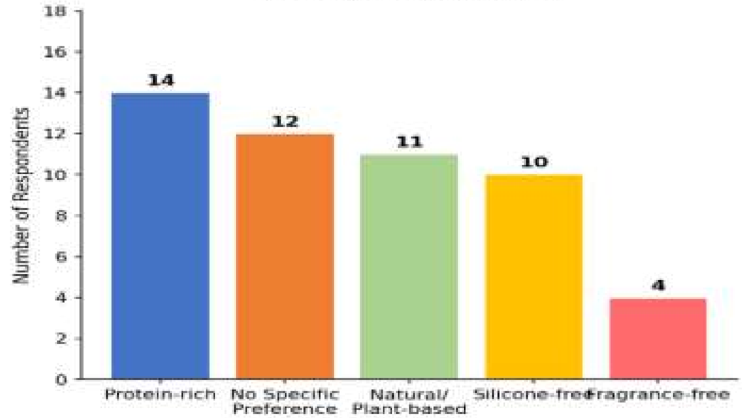


Figure 12: Comfort Level with Online Purchasing of Curly Hair Products

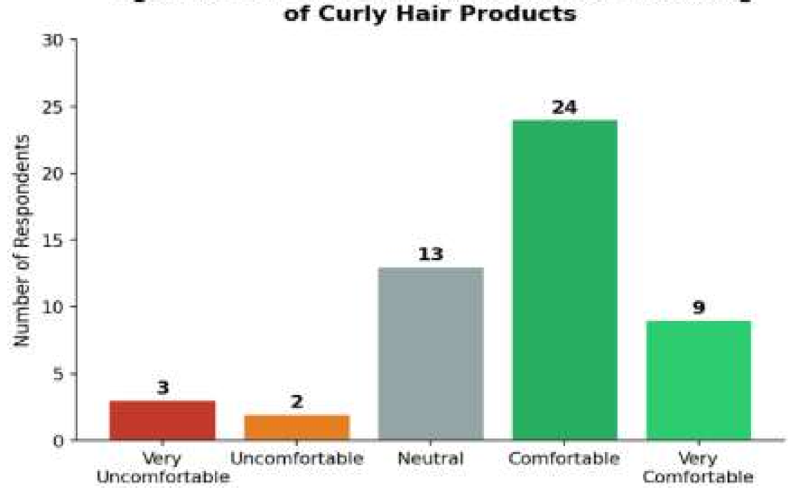


Figure 13: Preferred Price Range for Curl Cream / Leave-in (200–250ml)

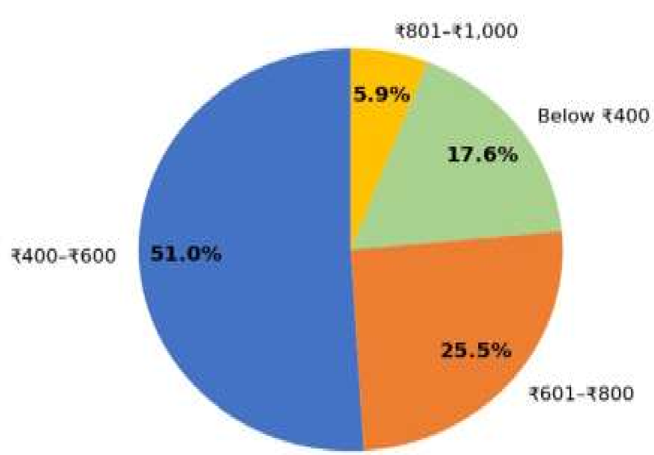


Figure 14: Monthly Spending on Curly Hair Products

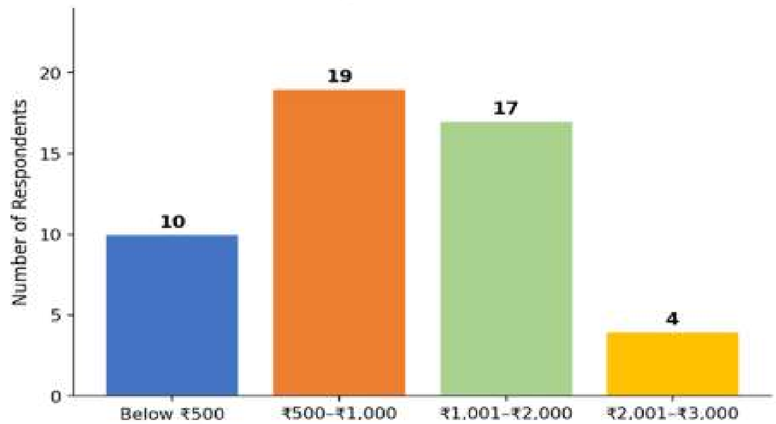


Figure 15: Willingness to Repurchase if Product Delivers Visible Results

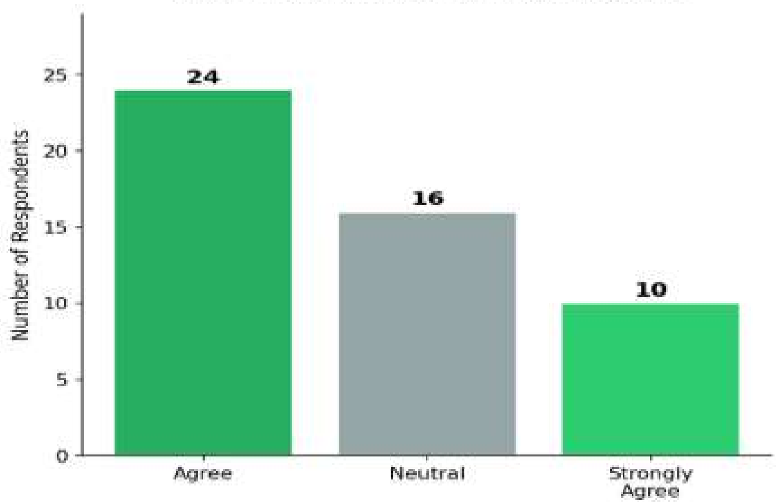


Figure 18: Likelihood to Recommend a Good Curly Hair Brand to Others

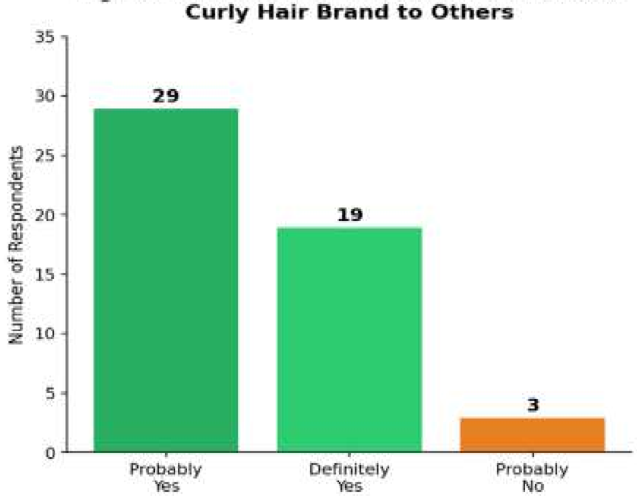


Table 1: Summary of Hypothesis Testing Results

Hypothisis	Key Finding
H1: Women with higher hair management challenges show greater willingness to purchase specialised products	Frizz cited by 29 of 51; 80% expressed definite or probable brand switching intent
H2: Consumers aware of curl routines prefer niche brands over general products	69% aware; aware respondents demonstrated higher specific product usage and preference
H3: Majority prefer online purchasing over offline retail	65% comfortable buying online; 76% would prefer brand website with bundle incentives
H4: Perceived quality relates positively to mid-to-premium price acceptance	100% open to repurchase if product works; 76% accept Rs 400-800 range
H5: Regular users of curl products show stronger repurchase intent	30 of 51 use products 1-4 times/week; these respondents showed highest agree/strongly agree on repurchase