A Study of the Factors Impacting the Buying Decision Process vis-à-vis Specified Consumer Durables in NOIDA

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Abstract

This study seeks to determine the factors impacting shopper decision making in three stages of the Buying Decision Process – Introduction, Influencing and Decision Making in respect of certain consumer durables. The results of the study indicate that while Advertising plays a predominant role during the introduction stage, in introducing the brand to the consumer, family members play the most important role in stages, influencing the choice of the brand pre-store and in the decision making as regards the brand choice. The study also shows that for home appliances, the spouse is the pre-dominating influencing element whereas children are the dominating factor in the family as regards electronic goods. Further study is advised especially to consider factors impacting choice of shopping formats, specific stores, and whether income plays a determining role in the decision making as regards the same.

INTRODUCTION

It is said that India's consumer market is riding the crest of the Country's economic growth. Driven by a young population with access to disposable incomes and easy finance options, the consumer market has been showing (CCI report, March 2012 – www.cci.in). The major target of the MNCs is the growing middle class of India. MNCs have been offering superior technology to the consumers, whereas Indian companies have been operating mainly on their firm grasp and understanding of local markets, well established brands, and access to existing distribution networks.

Marketers in India classify population in to 5 groups, based on annual Household Income (based on 1995–96 indices). These groups are: Lower Income, three sub-groups of Middle Income and Higher Income. Household Income in the top 20 boom cities of India is projected to grow at 10 percent annually over the next eight years. This coupled with continuous shift towards urbanization, growing nuclear families, shortage of domestic help, double income families, and constraints on time is likely to increase consumer spending on durables. With the emergence of concepts of easy finance options, zero Equated Monthly Installments (EMI) charges, loans through credit cards, etc., it has become easier for consumers to purchase durables without

saving for the same first. Key Industry Dynamics as stated by Corporate Catalyst India, a New Delhi based research firm, can be summarized as under:

Table 1. Consumer Durable Industry Dynamics

Industry size	Approximately Rs. 35,000 crores
Key categories	White Goods, Brown goods and consumer electronics
Competitive landscape	Dominated by Korean majors, e.g. Samsung, LG in most segments
Margin profile	Low margin, Volume dependent
Growth opportunities	Lower penetration coupled with growing disposable incomes

Even discounting the Purchase power parity factor, income classification may not serve as an effective indicator of ownership and consumer trends in the economy. Accordingly, the National Council for Applied Economic Research (NCAER) has released an alternative classification system based on consumption indicators, which could be more relevant for ascertaining

consumption patterns of various classes of goods. These have been divided into 5 classifications, which differ considerably in their consumption behaviour and ownership patterns across various categories of goods. These classed exist in urban as well as rural households, but consumption trends may differ significantly between similar income households in urban and rural areas.

Consumer durables are broadly segmented into the following groups:

Table 2. Segmentation of Certain Durables

Home Appliances		Electronic Goods
White Goods	*Brown Goods*	*Consumer Electronics*
Air conditioners	Microwave ovens	Television sets
Refrigerators	Cooking ranges	Audio-visual equipment
Washing machines	Chimneys	Electronic accessories
Sewing machines	Mixer and grinders	Personal computers
Watches and clocks	Electric fans	Mobile phones
Cleaning equipment	Irons	Digital cameras/camcorders/DVDs
Other domestic appliances		

This study focuses mainly on the decision process in respect of home appliances and home electronic appliances, and is based on research done in NOIDA. This study is restricted to the study of the Buying Decision Process in respect of some select durables out of the above. This study seeks to analyze what factors impact the purchase of these select durables and play a major role in the three stages of the Buying Decision Process: Introduction, Influencing and Decision Making. This study focusses on 2 product categories: Home Appliances and Electronic Goods only.

LITERATURE REVIEW

According to Engel, James F., Kollat, David T. and Blackwell, Rodger D. (Consumer Behavior, 1st ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1968), A *buying decision process* (or *cost-benefit analysis*) describes the process a customer goes through when buying a product. This buying decision model has gone through lots of interpretation by scholars.

These stages were first introduced by John Dewey [Dewey, John (2007). *How We Think*. New York: Cosimo. ISBN: 9781605200996]

The stages are:

1. Problem/need recognition

2. Information search

3. Evaluation of alternatives

4. Purchase decision

5. Post-purchase behavior

These five stages are a good framework to evaluate customers' buying decision process. However, it is not necessary that customers get through every stage, nor is it necessary that they proceed in any particular order. For example, if a customer feels the urge to buy chocolate, he or she might go straight to the purchase decision stage, skipping information search and evaluation [Kotler, Keller, Koshy and Jha (2009)].

Problem/need-recognition is the first and most important step in the buying decision. Without the recognition of the need, a purchase cannot take place. The

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need can be triggered by internal stimuli (e.g. hunger, thirst) or external stimuli (e.g. advertising) [Kotler, Keller, Koshy and Jha (2009)]. Maslow held that needs are arranged in a hierarchy. According to Maslow›s hierarchy, only when a person has fulfilled the needs at a certain stage, can he or she move to the next stage. The problem must be addressed through the products or services available. It›s how the problem must be recognized.

The information search stage is the next step that the customers may take after they have recognized the problem or need in order to find out what they feel is the best solution. This is the buyers' effort at searching the internal and external business environments to identify and observe sources of information related to the focal buying decision [Bunn, Michele D. (January 1993). 'Taxonomy of Buying Decision Approaches'. *Journal of Marketing* (American Marketing Association) 57(1): 38–56. Retrieved 9 February 2013]. Consumers can rely on print, visual, and/or voice media for getting information.

Consumers evaluate different products/brands on the basis of varying product attributes, and whether these can deliver the benefits that the customers are seeking [Kotler, Keller, Koshy and Jha (2009)]. This stage is heavily influenced by one's attitude, as 'attitude puts one in a frame of mind: liking or disliking an object, moving towards or away from it'. Another factor that influences the evaluation process is the degree of involvement. For example, if the customer involvement is high,

then he/she will evaluate a number of brands; whereas if it is low, only one brand will be evaluated.

This is the fourth stage, where the purchase takes place. According to Kotler, Keller, Koshy and Jha (2009), the final purchase decision can be disrupted by two factors: negative feedback from other customers and the level of motivation to comply or accept the feedback. For example, after going through the above three stages, a customer chooses to buy a Nikon D80 DSLR camera. However, because his good friend, who is also a photographer, gives him negative feedback, he will then be bound to change his preference. Secondly, the decision may be disrupted due to unanticipated situations such as a sudden job loss or the closing of a retail store. These stages are critical to retain customers. In short, customers compare products with their expectations and are either satisfied or dissatisfied. This can then greatly affect the decision process for a similar purchase from the same company in the future [Blythe, Jim (2008) Consumer Behavior. U.K., Thompson Learning, 2008], mainly at the information search stage and evaluation of alternatives stage. If customers are satisfied, this results in brand loyalty, and the information search and evaluation of alternative stages are often fast-tracked or skipped completely. As a result, brand loyalty is the ultimate aim of many companies.

On the basis of either being satisfied or dissatisfied, a customer will spread either positive or negative feedback about the product. At this stage, companies should

carefully create positive post-purchase communication to engage the customers.

Also, cognitive dissonance (consumer confusion in marketing terms) is common at this stage; customers often go through the feelings of post-purchase psychological tension or anxiety. Questions include: 'Have I made the right decision?', 'Is it a good choice?', etc.

We can define the Buyer decision processes are the decision making processes undertaken by consumers in regard to a potential market transaction before, during, and after the purchase of a product or service.

More generally, decision making is the cognitive process of selecting a course of action from among multiple alternatives. Common examples include shopping and deciding what to eat. Decision making is said to be a psychological construct. This means that although we can never 'see' a decision, we can infer from observable behaviour that a decision has been made. Therefore we conclude that a psychological event that we call 'decision making' has occurred. It is a construction that imputes commitment to action. That is, based on observable actions, we assume that people have made a commitment to effect the action.

In general there are three ways of analyzing consumer buying decisions. They are:

- *Economic models* – These models are largely quantitative and are based on the assumptions of rationality and near perfect knowledge. The consumer is seen

to maximize their utility. See consumer theory. Game theory can also be used in some circumstances.

- *Psychological models* – These models concentrate on psychological and cognitive processes such as motivation and need recognition. They are qualitative rather than quantitative and build on sociological factors like cultural influences and family influences.

- *Consumer behaviour models* – These are practical models used by marketers. They typically blend both economic and psychological models.

Neuroscience has become both a useful tool and a source of theory development and testing in buyer decision-making research, and using neuroimaging devices in order to investigate consumer behavior developed under the name of Neuromarketing. What is going on inside the head of the consumer as measured by various neuroimaging and biological correlates like genes and hormones can provide new insights and new ways to test theory, so this is a great opportunity for the decision-making researcher [Engel, James F., Kollat, David T. and Blackwell, Rodger D. (1968) Consumer Behavior, 1st ed. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston 1968].

Dewey sees economic decision making as a vain attempt to be rational. He claims (in 1947 and 1957) that if a complete analysis is to be done, a decision will be immensely complex. He also says that peoples' information processing ability is very limited. The assumption of a perfectly rational economic

actor is unrealistic. Often we are influenced by emotional and non-rational considerations. When we try to be rational we are at best only partially successful.

In an early study of the buyer decision process literature, Frank Nicosia (Nicosia, F. 1966; pp. 9–21) identified three types of buyer decision making models. They are the univariate model (he called it the 'simple scheme') in which only one behavioral determinant was allowed in a stimulus-response type of relationship; the multi-variate model (he called it a 'reduced form scheme') in which numerous independent variables were assumed to determine buyer behaviour; and finally the 'system of equations' model (he called it a 'structural scheme' or 'process scheme') in which numerous functional relations (either univariate or multi-variate) interact in a complex system of equations. He concluded that only this third type of model is capable of expressing the complexity of buyer decision processes. In chapter 7, Nicosia builds a comprehensive model involving five modules. The encoding module includes determinants like 'attributes of the brand', 'environmental factors', 'consumer's attributes', 'attributes of the organization', and 'attributes of the message'. Other modules in the system include, consumer decoding, search and evaluation, decision, and consumption.

Some neuromarketing research papers examined how approach motivation as indexed by electroencephalographic (EEG) asymmetry over the prefrontal cortex predicts purchase decision when brand and price are varied. In a within-subjects design, the participants were presented purchase decision trials with 14 different grocery products (seven private label and seven national brand products) whose prices were increased and decreased while their EEG activity was recorded. The results showed that relatively greater left frontal activation (i.e., higher approach motivation) during the pre -decision period predicted an affirmative purchase decision. The relationship of frontal EEG asymmetry with purchase decision was stronger for national brand products compared with private label products and when the price of a product was below a normal price (i.e., implicit reference price) compared with when it was above a normal price. Higher perceived need for a product and higher perceived product quality were associated with greater relative left frontal activation [Nicosia, Francesco M. (1966) Consumer Decision Process. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice Hall, 1966].

The aim of the study is to get a clearer understand on what factors influence a shopper/consumer in the purchase of a particular brand in the different levels of the Buying Decision Process. Accordingly, the following objectives were laid down for the study:

OBJECTIVES

- To explore the factors which play a major role in the Introduction Stage of the Buying Decision Process in the purchase of Consumer Durables.

- To explore the factors which play a major role in the Influencing stage of the Buying Decision Process in the purchase of Consumer Durables.

- To explore the factors which play a major role in the Decision Making stage of the Buying Decision Process in the purchase of Consumer Durables.

Based on the objectives, the following hypotheses were laid down for this study:

Table 3. Hypotheses Statement

No.	*Hypothesis*
H – 1A	There are significant differences in the roles of different factors in the introduction stage in the buying decision process in the purchase of Home Appliances.
H – 1B	There are significant differences in the roles of different factors the introduction stage in the buying decision process in the purchase of Electronic Goods.
H – 2A	There are significant differences in the roles of different factors in the influencing stage of the Buying Decision process in the purchase of Home Appliances.
H – 2B	There are significant differences in the roles of different factors in the influencing stage of the Buying Decision process in the purchase of Electronic Goods.
H – 3A	There are significant differences in the roles of different factors in the decision making stage of the Buying Decision Process in the Purchase of Home Appliances.
H – 3B	There are significant differences in the roles of different factors in the decision making stage of the Buying Decision Process in the Purchase of Electronic Goods.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

NOIDA was chosen as the sample area for the study. NOIDA is a hub of ideas and has people from different states. It has people from extreme North to Extreme south to East and West. The population can be a good representation of the entire country.

Convenience sampling technique was used. Selection of sample is left primarily to the researcher. It is least expensive and least time consuming of all the techniques. But is a not representative of any definable population. It is used for generating insights.

250 adults were given questionnaires outside malls and shopping places. Out of 250 only 109 answered and out of that 100 were fully filled. Hence this study is based on the 100 fully filled and completed questionnaires.

RESULTS

See Tables 4, 5 and 6 on next page.

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Table 4. Introducing Factors

Introducing Factors		No. of Respondents (for home appliances)	% of Respondents (for home appliances)	No. of Respondents (for electronic goods)	% of Respondents (for electronic goods)	Total
Advertising	Print	8	4	11	5.5	19
	Electronic	19	9.5	14	7	33
	Others (hoardings/ display boards, etc.)	2	1	3	1.5	5
Family members	Spouse	9	4.5	6	3	15
	Parents	3	1.5	1	0.5	4
	Children (above 15 yrs)	1	0.5	4	2	5
Friends and relatives	Friends and relatives	8	4	11	5.5	19
Total		50		50		100

P Value (for home appliances)   6.12398E-26
P Value (for electronic goods)   8.77768E-26

Table 5. Influencing Factors

Influencing Factors		No. of Respondents (for home appliances)	% of Respondents (for home appliances)	No. of Respondents (for electronic goods)	% of Respondents (for electronic goods)	Total
Family members	Spouse	18	9	9	4.5	27
	Parents	5	2.5	8	4	13
	Children (above 15 yrs)	6	3	13	6.5	19
Friends and relatives		17	8.5	17	8.5	34
Financing agency		4	2	3	1.5	7
Total		50		50		100

P Value (for home appliances)   3.56874E-26
P Value (for electronic goods)   2.41624E-26

Table 6. Deciding Factors

Influencing Factors		No. of Respondents (for home appliances)	% of Respondents (for home appliances)	No. of Respondents (for electronic goods)	% of Respondents (for electronic goods)	Total
		Deciding Factors				
Family members	Spouse	26	13	25	12.5	51
	Parents	13	6.5	10	5	23
	Children (above 15 yrs)	8	4	13	6.5	21
Friends and relatives		2	1	1	0.5	3
Financing Agency		1	0.5	1	0.5	2
Total		50		50		100

P Value (for home appliances)   1.18527E-29
P Value (for electronic goods)   1.88433E-42

Inferences

There is an association between 'Introducing factors' and the decision to shop home appliances.

There is an association between 'Introducing factors' and the decision to shop electronic goods.

P value obtained (for home appliances) is less than 0.05 indicating that H1A is accepted at 5% level of significance, i.e. 'There is an association between "Introducing factors" and the decision to shop home appliances'.

P value obtained (for electronic goods) is less than 0.05 indicating that H1B is accepted at 5% level of significance, i.e. 'There is an association between "Introducing factors" and the decision to shop electronic goods'.

There is an association between 'Influencing factors' and the decision to shop home appliances.

There is an association between 'Influencing factors' and the decision to shop electronic goods.

P value obtained (for home appliances) is less than 0.05 indicating that H2A is accepted at 5% level of significance, i.e. 'There is an association between "Influencing factors" and the decision to shop home appliances'.

P value obtained (for electronic goods) is less than 0.05 indicating that H2B is accepted at 5% level of significance, i.e. 'There is an association between "Influencing factors" and the decision to shop electronic goods'.

There is an association between 'Deciding factors' and the decision to shop home appliances.

There is an association between 'Deciding factors' and the decision to shop electronic goods.

P value obtained (for home appliances) is less than 0.05 indicating that H3A is accepted at 5% level of significance, i.e. 'There is an association between "Deciding factors" and the decision to shop home appliances'.

P value obtained (for electronic goods) is less than 0.05 indicating that H3B is accepted at 5% level of significance, i.e. 'There is an association between "Deciding factors" and the decision to shop electronic goods'.

FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

On the basis of the analysis, it can be seen that Advertising (58% for Home Appliances and 56% for Electronic Goods) plays a key role in the 1st 2 stages, followed by family members (26% for Home Appliances and 22% for Electronic Goods). Use of Media – Electronic, Print, and Social plays a more crucial role than the tradition referrals (Table 4).

Access to media, both print and electronic is a key factor in the Advertising playing the role of the Introducer.

We can see that Family members again play a crucial role in the role of the 'Influencer in the Introducer – Influencer – Decision Maker – Buyer – End User' – Decision Making Roles model (58% for Home Appliances and 60% for Electronic Goods). This is followed by friend and relatives (34% for Home Appliances and 34% for Electronic goods), as

consumers would seek actual user experience/ knowledge about products too (Table 5).

The inference that can be drawn from here that access to media, implying that access to information, is available to consumers today. Consumer durables are expected to last long; they are also expected to be handled, especially for home appliances, by the end users who would be in the family itself. Further by nature both electronic goods and home appliances come in a price band which cannot be discounted easily, end users (family members) are the major influencing factor, followed by friends and relatives. This is because the consumer prefers first-hand feedback about a product that is likely to stay in the family for long.

From our available data and subsequent analysis, we see that Family plays a predominant role in the final decision making stage (94% in case of Home Appliances and 96% in case of electronic Goods). Again, the spouse is the most influential factor (52% for Home Appliances and 50% for Electronic Goods). Parents are the next influential factor for Home Appliances (26%) and Children (16% for Home Appliances). However, in Electronic Goods children are however more influential than parents (26% as against 20% for parents) (Table 6).

The conclusion arrived at for Objective No. 2 is further substantiated for home appliances as the end user definitely would logically impact the final choice of brand. The spouse being the end user impacts the final purchase decision. The roles of the second most impacting

factors get interchanged between home appliances and electronic goods. A younger, technology savvy generation influences purchase decisions in the case of electronic goods whereas parents who have been end users of home appliances are the second most impacting factor as far as home appliances are concerned.

IMPLICATIONS

1. Our study suggests that it is the shopper himself/herself who comes in the knowledge of the product through direct media, while family members are the second strongest introducers. It is recommended that marketers plan their advertising and sales promotional strategies to directly reach the shoppers through relevant media.

2. From our study, we see that in the Influencing Stage (role of the Influencer) which can be linked to the Desire Creation stage of the AIDA model, Family members again play a crucial role in the role of the 'Influencer in the Introducer – Influencer – Decision Maker – Buyer – End User' – Decision Making Roles model, as consumers would seek actual user experience/knowledge about products too. The inference that can be drawn from here that access to media, implying that access to information, is available to consumers today. Consumer durables are expected to last long; they are also expected to be handled, especially for home appliances, by the

end users who would be in the family itself. Further by nature both electronic goods and home appliances come in a price band which cannot be discounted easily, end users (family members) are the major influencing factor, followed by friends and relatives. This is because the consumer prefers first-hand feedback about a product that is likely to stay in the family for long. Our study shows that Family members play a crucial role in the role of the 'Influencer in the Introducer – Influencer – Decision Maker – Buyer – End User' – Decision Making Roles model followed by friend and relatives. This would imply that consumers would seek actual user experience/knowledge about products too. Addressing the correct influencing group would play a key role in attracting consumers in store. This is true for both home appliances as well as electronic goods. We see the fact that opinion leaders generally can sway even elections and are targeted accordingly; in a similar way marketers would need to determine who is more likely to influence the purchase of the brand in preference over others, and plan their strategies accordingly.

3. What we notice from our study is that Family again plays a crucial role in the final decision. The spouseis the most influential factor, followed by parents and children in their late teens. This is a little more pronounced for home appliances as the end user definitely decides the final choice of brand.

Promotional activities both at-home and pre-store, and in-store activations and activities would need to be geared up accordingly. The spouse being the end user impacts the final purchase decision. The roles of the second most impacting factors get interchanged between home appliances and electronic goods. A younger, technology savvy generation influences purchase decisions in the case of electronic goods whereas parents who have been end users of home appliances are the second most impacting factor as far as home appliances are concerned. Hence marketers would be advised to concentrate on the decision makers who will make the final brand choice and plan their strategies accordingly, based on the factors which will ultimately influence the choice of brand. For Home Appliances this could be daily newspapers, Home maker specific magazines, daily soaps or reality shows on television, etc. Electronic goods could see a focus on media likely to target the younger decision makers.

LIMITATIONS

1. This study is restricted to NOIDA which though having demographic differentia would still qualify as a Metro/Tier 1 geography. This can be further expanded to research into Tier II and Tier III towns. With rural India expected to play a major role in driving economic growth, and with rapid urbanization of mofussil areas, this could be expanded on a zonal and later national scale to make it an enabler for corporate strategy. The study and its conclusions would thus have validity only for the Delhi NCR region which would limit the usefulness of the findings and the conclusions to this particular region only.

2. The sample size was determined based on the fact that the study was based in NOIDA only. Hence the conclusions drawn on the basis of this sample may not be applicable, or may become less relevant if the same are sought to be applied to a larger population.

3. This study is based on the data collected in a limited time frame. Being a dynamic sector, and further with rapid advances in technology, product obsolescence, and information availability, the roles themselves may change in the future especially in the case of electronic goods. The conclusions drawn thus would begin to decrease in validity in future due to the above.

SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

1. To make the study even more relevant, it could extended to all the districts making up the NCR.

2. Further study is advised especially to consider factors impacting choice of shopping formats, specific stores, and whether income plays a determining role in the decision making as regards the same.

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