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among Its Key Indicators**

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Estimating Level of Consumer Involvement and Relationship among Its Key Indicators

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The consumption rate of Indian customers has gone quite up since liberalization. With the international brands coming with many product categories and options to choose from the customers have started giving more importance to choosing from the various available products. The increase in number of malls with various retail outlets have also led to high involvement of consumers in the purchase process. The marketers nowadays have identified the importance of understanding their customers and thus if they come to know the level of involvement with various product options, they can plan the location of their resources accordingly. The present paper is an attempt to study whether consumer involvement varies with the type of product. For the academic community, this study would be a step further in validation of construct in a different cultural & temporal context. For the corporate community, study would be useful in designing appropriate marketing strategies.

Key Word: Consumer Involvement, Product knowledge, Product Association, Interest and Loyalty

Introduction

The concept of consumer involvement during the last decade has received intensive and growing attention in consumer behavior research. Involvement refers to the amount of time, thought, energy and other resources that customers

devote to the purchase process. Consumer involvement is one of the fundamental concepts used to explain the consumer buying process. Creighton (1981) explained consumer involvement as the process, or processes by which interested and affected individuals are consulted and included in the decision making of an agency, planning group or collaborative entity. The level of involvement affects the amount of efforts consumer put in learning about the products and brand related decisions. Consumer involvement is defined as the perceived personal importance or interest attached to the acquisition, consumption, and disposition of a good, service, or idea. Involvement is a state of motivation, excitement or interest and this state exists in a process. It is driven by current external variables like situation, product and communication and past internal variables like enduring ego and central values.

There are two types of consumer involvement namely involvement with the product and involvement in the purchase decision. Involvement with the product refers to queries related to the use, need, value, goal & features of the product while involvement in the purchase decision refers to issues related to price, amount of time spent or the number of stores visited during the pre-purchase process involving two major steps of identifying the need for the product and gathering information about the product.

The level of involvement in the purchase depends on mainly five factors i.e. previous experience, interest, perceived risk, situation, and social visibility. Consumer Involvement process can be categorized into four dimensions namely antecedents, moderating factor, involvement properties & response. Consumer involvement level varies with different products and also varies with demographic variables (Shridhar, 2006). The purchase decision is influenced by customer involvement in consideration of one's preference and product price and utility to

name a few. This study will help to marketing researcher to understand the relationship between the consumer involvement level and product choice. The study will assist corporate community to build marketing strategies for their products. For academicians this study would be useful in enhancing their body of knowledge related to the concept of consumer involvement.

Product knowledge refers to the level of understanding about the different dimensions related to the product consumption. The customer's level of information about the best use of the product, packaging details, storing requirements, is very important for an effective consumption. The level of consumer association reflects the degree to which the consumer identifies and equates the product attributes matching to his or her own attributes. While the concept of product importance originates from the need or drive level of the consumer. The higher is the need level of the customer for the product, more is the product important for the satisfaction achievement of the customer's need. With the increasing frequency of product usage, customer tends to become loyal to a particular brand of a product category. Higher is the brand loyalty of a product among the customer lower are the chances of switching the brands.

Review of Literature

Consumer involvement has received considerable attention among academicians as it is considered to have paradigmatic implications on the consumer decision-making. The present study basically involves the following variables viz., Consumer, involvement of consumer, product, and product choice and finally the involvement of consumer in product choice. Zaichkowsky & Sood (1989) in their research work relating consumer involvement levels between products and services suggested that there is 8 to 45 percent variation in involvement levels

across products and services like beer, blue jeans, hair shampoo, soft drinks, stereo sets, air travel, eating at a restaurant and going to the cinema .

There have been many studies exploring the relationship between the concept of consumer involvement and services. A research conducted in the area of service industry revealed that highly involved consumers perceive greater relational benefits when engaged in a high contact, customized service (i.e. hairdressers/stylists) versus a more standardized, moderate contact service (i.e. fast-food restaurant) (Brian, Kinard and Capella, 2006).

Further the authors have also identified relationship between the level of involvement and the customer's choice set, Belonax, Rajshekhar & Javalgi (1989) argued that the level of involvement whether it is high or low and the variability of product class quality, high versus moderate versus low, influences the size of the consumer's choice set. Also Mortimer, Kathleen (2005) has suggested that the type and level of involvement does vary across the consumer services spectrum and involvement can be utilized to identify four distinct types of services and the importance dimension of the involvement construct has a stronger impact on information search than the interest dimension.

The studies conducted among the different types of buyer have also suggested some interesting findings. Cardoso (2007) discussed in his study that children are strongly involved with clothing in the five dimensions namely, interest, pleasure, symbolism, perceived importance and subjective probability. They consider the functional aspects of clothing important and they think that the pretentious values are unimportant. But another stream of thought opposes the above finding as Chakrabarty, Conrad (2005) indicated that consumer's level of involvement in products does not moderate the effect of ethnocentrism on purchase intentions. Consumers have the same perception on their levels of involvement to purchase

product category (electronic goods, cars and garments). Supporting the findings of the study conducted by Jain and Sharma (2000) which suggested that consumer involvement differed across the different products but infrequently purchased durable products is more involving than frequently purchased non involving products.

Many studies have been conducted to find the relationship between consumer involvement and impact of various demographic variables. Sridhar (2006) indicated that demographics significantly influence high involvement products of the consumers. In case of low involved products, influence of demographics on consumer involvement has been found to be moderate. Another research study conducted by Mittal (1989) found that the behavioral inconsistency for enduring and situational types of involvement may be found to be contingent upon demographic. Another study found that consumer involvement to be related with the demographic variables, but in piecemeal manner Jain and Sharma (2002). With respect to life style factors the study finds level of involvement to be differing mainly for the products lying towards the higher end of involvement continuum and different demographic factors are found to be related with involvement for different products.

Relating the concept with the psychological dimensions of the individual studies have revealed that coping with potentially emotion laden choice trade off is one of factor influencing consumer choice strategies. Thus emotional trade off difficulty is a factor that marketers should consider when attempting to predict and explain consumer choice patterns. Greenwald and Leavitt (1984) said that Involvement is related to antecedents by means of the four principles of bottom-up processing, top-down processing, competence limitation, and capacity limitation; it is related

to consequences by the association of levels of involvement with an orderly series of cognitive and attitudinal effects.

Brennan and Mavondo (2000) examined the multi-dimensionality of the involvement construct and hypothesizes that involvement can also be conceptualized as a consumer's motivation to search for information. While another study was conducted on the involvement level of 332 respondents were categorized into various levels like family life cycle, age, sex, monthly family income, occupation etc. Many statistical tests like t test, cronbach alpha and ANOVA have been used to measure the consumer involvement in product choice.

Methodology

The Study:

The study is explanatory in nature and was organized in several stages. Questionnaires were sent to 115 consumers out of which 100 usable questionnaires were selected. The questions focused on the reasons for purchasing various products, choice of products, consumer involvement & consumer decision-making process. This helped us to understand the consumer decision-making process and the extent of involvement they underwent in the purchase decisions with respect to various products.

Measurement:

Lastovitka and Gardner's 7 point Likert scale was used to measure the responses. The traditional estimates of reliability (i.e. coefficient alpha, test- retest) were not reported by Lastovitka and Gardner (1979). However, the pattern of factor loadings suggests that three distinct orthogonal factors did exist. Though no formal statistical tests for validity were performed, it was also concluded that the

components of involvement possessed adequate levels of content, conversant and discriminant validity. Three products Toothpaste, Pharmaceutical products and Car were selected for the study. To study the significance among the three product categories and consumer involvement following hypothesis were formulated and test of significant has been done using t-tests. Second order partial correlation was used to explore the relationship between product knowledge, association, loyalty and product importance while controlling two of the indicators each time.

Hypothesis 01: The level of consumer involvement significantly differs for car, pharmaceutical products and toothpaste.

Hypothesis 02: The degree of correlation between product association, knowledge, importance and loyalty for car, pharmaceutical products and toothpaste significantly differs; taking two of the variables at a time and eliminating the effect of other two.

Statistical Analysis:

Significance Table

	Car				Toothpaste				Pharma products			
	mean of cons. invlmt	SD	t	p value	mean of cons. invlmt	SD	T	p value	mean of cons. invlmt	SD	t	p value
Car	4.752	0.82	~	~	~	~	7.2027	0.000*	~	~	5.597	0.000*
Toothpaste					3.636	0.727	~	~	~	~	2.214	0.000*
Pharma products									3.936	0.625	~	~

*sig at .05 level

Hypothesis one is rejected, as there is significant difference in the levels of involvement between cars, toothpaste and pharmaceutical products. The consumers perceive different levels of involvement for these three different products. The finding is supported by the study conducted by Shridhar (2006), whereby the study suggested that the level of consumer involvement differs from product to product.

Partial Correlation Analysis

Coefficient of Partial Correlation							
Controlling for	Partial Correlation between	Car	p-value	Toothpaste	p-value	Pharma Products	p-value
Loyal. Asso	Know. Imp	0.6375	0.200	0.2410	0.268	0.3072	0.154
Asso. Imp	Know.Loyal	0.0160	0.942	0.3762	0.077	0.0920	0.676
Know. Loyal	Asso. Imp	0.3085	0.152	0.4562*	0.029*	0.2987	0.166
Loyal. Imp	Know. Asso	0.1439	0.512	0.3871	0.068	0.1539	0.483
Know. Imp	Loyal. Asso	0.1342	0.542	0.0281	0.899	0.4213*	0.045*
Know. Asso	Loyal. Imp	0.1399	0.524	0.1092	0.620	0.6217	0.922

* sig at .05 level

The above table shows second order correlation coefficients for all the three products. The analysis of 'second order partial correlation' suggests that there is no linear relationship between association and importance while controlling knowledge and loyalty for toothpaste product category. The significance value also suggests that there is no linear relationship between loyalty and association while controlling knowledge and importance for the pharmaceutical product category.

Conclusion and Implications

Our objective was to identify the level of consumer involvement for the products taken under the study. It revealed that how consumer involvement varies with different products. Differences in the mean scores of consumer involvement

levels for various respondents within each product are significant. This implies that marketer can segment their markets on the basis of involvement levels and use different marketing strategies to attract the consumers.

Consumer involvement varies as the importance, usefulness, monetary risk and durability of the product varies. The results indicate that consumers are highly involved in car due to its high cost and being the product of durable product category. Consumers show moderate involvement in pharmaceutical products and low involvement in Toothpaste. Study identified four key variables Knowledge, Loyalty, Interest and Association as these are the indicators of consumer involvement. Relationship among these variables were also analyzed and found weak correlation among all the indicators for all the product categories. Significant correlation was found between Loyalty and Association while removing the effect of Knowledge and Importance for Pharmaceutical products. Similarly significant correlation was found in Importance and Association while removing the effect of Knowledge and Loyalty for Toothpaste.

The study can be used by the marketers of the three product category namely toothpaste, car & Pharmaceutical products to design and develop strategies related to pricing, promotion etc. taking care of the level of consumer involvement as the study reveals that product knowledge, interest, association and loyalty are not highly related. Similarly other marketers who are involved in marketing of different products of same nature may also use the concept of consumer involvement in the strategic planning of their product.

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