

A Study on Information Search Behavior of Consumer towards Durable Products

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Abstract

Information seeking behavior refers to the way people search for and utilize information. The current 'information needs' was unhelpful as a basis for a research agenda, since 'need' could not be directly observed, while how people behaved in seeking information could be observed and investigated. However, there is increasing work in the information searching field that is relating behaviors to underlying needs. Wilson described information behavior as the totality of human behavior in relation to sources and channels of information, including both active and passive information-seeking, and information use. He described information seeking behavior as purposive seeking of information as a consequence of a need to satisfy some goal. Information seeking behavior is the micro-level of behavior employed by the searcher in interacting with information systems of all kinds, be it between the seeker and the system, or the pure method of creating and following up on a search. This paper tries to understand the information search behavior of the consumer towards durable products with respect to colour television.

Keywords: *Information, behavior, durable products, Goal*

Introduction

How do consumers make decisions? This question is at the core of much of marketing examination over the past 60 or 70 years. As marketers manipulate the various principles of marketing, so do the consumers they seek to reach - choosing which products and services to buy, and which not to buy, choosing which brands to use, and which brands to ignore. The focus is to understand the major decision-making models, strategies and theories that underlie the decision processes used by consumers and to provide some clarity for marketing executives attempting to find the right mix of variables for their products and services. Early Economists, led by Nicholas Bernoulli, John Von Neumann and Oskar Morgenstern, puzzled over this question. Beginning about 300 years ago, Bernoulli developed the first formal explanation of consumer decision making. It was later extended by Von Neumann and Morgenstern^{1,1} and called the Utility theory. This theory proposed that consumers make decisions based on the expected outcomes of their decisions. In this model consumers were viewed as rational actors who were able to estimate the probabilistic outcomes of uncertain decisions and select the outcome which maximized their well-being. However, as one might expect, consumers are typically not completely rational, or consistent or even aware of the various elements that enter into their decision making. In addition, though consumers are good at estimating relative frequencies of events, they typically have difficulty translating these frequencies into probabilities. This utility model, even though had been viewed as the dominant decision making paradigm, had serious shortcomings that could not be explained by the model.

Literature Review

Information search is a critical component of the purchase decision process for most consumer durables.

Girish N.Punj and Richard Staellin² postulate a descriptive model of information search. The model was tested using survey data obtained from a probabilistic sample of new automobile purchasers.

The results give credence to the hypothesis that there are at least two components of prior knowledge: specific product knowledge and general product class knowledge. The former knowledge search, while the later increase the perceived benefit to be derived from external search.

A second major result was the significant negative relationship between costs of search (both internal and external) and the amount of search, and the positive relationship between the amount of search activity and cost savings. Satisfaction was found to be related to cost savings but not to external search per se. such a finding is compatible with the view that search activity is not an end in itself but only a means for obtaining a good buy.

A third general conclusion concerns the relative influences of each of the factors on search behaviour. The analysis showed that prior relevant knowledge was the most important factor in search activity i.e. those who had the least need conducted the least amount of search. Next in importance was the personality constructs i.e the desire to seek information. The third most important factor was the size of the evoked set while cost of external search was the fourth. The degree to which a person possesses a frame- of – reference for evaluating new information is found to be the least influential factor in determining the amount of external search.

The pattern of external search activity across different product categories has been studied analytically by Sharon R. Beatty and Scott M.Smith³. They have utilized an involvement perspective and Punj and Stewart's interaction framework of decision making.

The relationship between external search effort and a number of motivating antecedents are studied and evaluated across five related consumer electronic products. The findings confirm four out of the five hypothesized relationships between total search effort and the variables studied. Purchase involvement, attitudes towards shopping and time availability is the variables which are positively related to external search. The relation between ego involvement and total search effort was not significant. The influences of these variables upon a number of sub-indices of external search, including retailer search, media search and neutral sources search are also investigated and reported.

Research Background

In a competitive marketing, marketers must try to understand the purchasing behavior of consumers for the purpose of preparing a good marketing strategy. This is very much essential for the growth and survival of the organization. A consumer while buying a consumers durable product, he faces the perceived risk of financial & functional for this purpose, he is cautious with reference to the purchase of consumer durable. He tries to collect deliberate information to minimize the risks of purchase. An extensive study of the nature & pattern of information search behavior exhibited by customers would definitely be helpful to a marketer in designing the marketing programme. This research work tries to explore the complex dimensions of consumer behavior.

Objectives of the Study:

The broad objective of the study is to understand the purchasing behaviors of the consumers with reference to the colour television.

The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

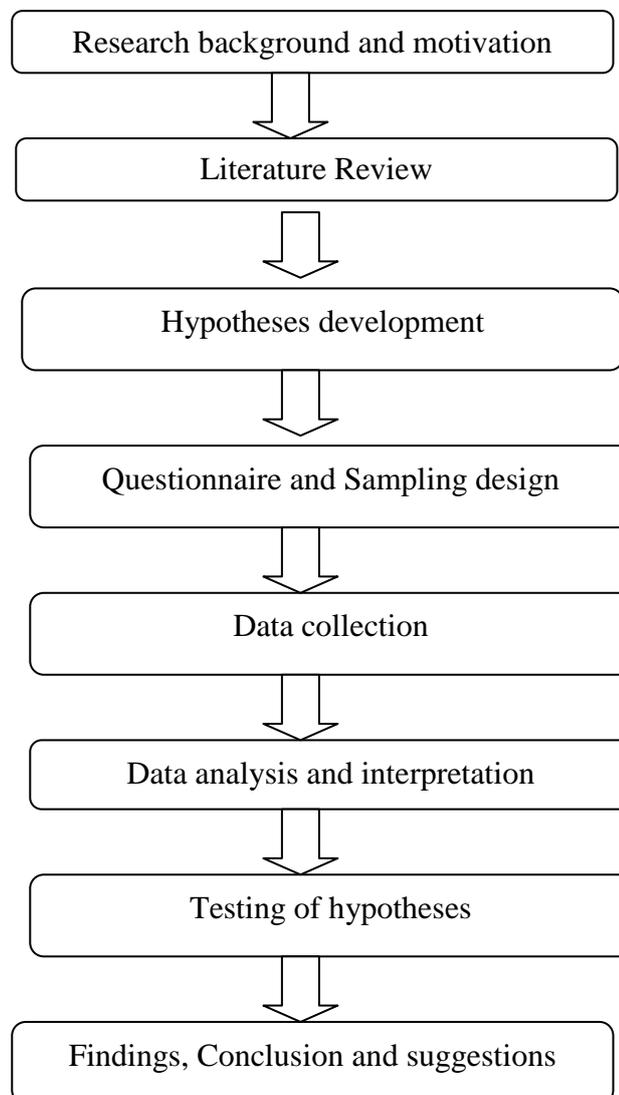
1. To what extent consumer beliefs affect their tendency to search?
2. To study the patterns of search strategies used by the consumers.
3. To understand the types of decision heuristics or rules of thumb used by the consumers while selecting a brand.
4. To find out the extent to which the socio-economic characteristics affect the buyer's tendency to search.
5. To find out the brand images of the dominant brands on various dimensions as perceived by the consumers.
6. To ascertain the possibility of dividing the target market into different segments taking search behavior of customers as a criterion.

Research design:

Here the research design falls into descriptive research category.

Research process:

The research process of the study flows in the following sequence.



Formulation of Hypotheses:

This study has been conducted by taking into the consideration on the following hypotheses. These hypotheses have really helped in clearly putting down the information requirements in the form of objectives.

These hypotheses are:

1. The purchasing behaviour of the consumers with reference to the information search depends upon the demographic characteristics of the customers.
2. The number of alternative brands taken into consideration for purchase influences the extent of information search behaviour exhibited by the consumer.
3. A close relationship exists between intensively of information seeking and introspection time.
4. The most used source of information is influenced by the demographic characteristic of the customers.

Sources of Information & Data Collection:

As the objective of the study is to understand the nature of information collection and usage during the purchase of a durable product, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected. The data collection has also been made from secondary sources available in the form of published materials such as journals, books, business magazine and newspapers covering the areas of models of buyer behaviour and information search and various empirical studies in the field of external information search. This is an attempt to know the purchasing behaviour of the consumers with reference to the information search. Therefore, the present study is made to focus on primary data collection for meeting the research objectives. The primary data collection consists of three separate but linked research approaches. In the first approach the present owners of color TVs are contacted through a semi-structured questionnaire. The questionnaire has been so designed to elicit responses regarding different dimensions of external information search activity. The items for inclusion in the questionnaire were selected after extensively survey of the published literature regarding external search and primary study of the local markets.

In the second approach, the researcher had to resort to un-obtrusive method of observational research by being personally present in the various outlets. This is adopted to gain a firsthand observation of how the potential customers really behave in the purchase stage.

Sampling:

The complete lists of buyers of all the brands of color TVs were obtained from retail showrooms. A random sample of color TV buyers was taken from the lists using random number table.

The population was defined as all those persons who had purchased color TV in the cities of Berhampur and Bhubaneswar in Orissa.

Sample size:

A total of 450 interviews were obtained from the population. The pre-tested semi-structured questionnaire was administered to them. After checking for consistency and accuracy, a total of 400 questionnaires were retained for the final data analysis. Thus the

sample size was fixed on a judge mental basis keeping in view the descriptive nature of the study.

3.5.6 Sampling unit:

The questionnaire was personally administered to individuals identified as the principle decision markers. In most of the cases, the main earning member is identified as the principle decision maker. However, in the households where the housewife is also employed and takes an active part in household decision making, she is identified as the sampling unit.

Places of investigation:

For the purpose of survey, two cities of Orissa, i.e., Berhampur and Bhubaneswar were identified keeping in view their commercial and trading importance in the state of Orissa.

Data analysis Techniques:

The data so collected through the semi- structured questionnaire was first of all transferred to a master table and then analysis was done. Sophisticated statistical techniques such as chi-square test, correlation, regression analysis, Likert scales, cluster analysis and semantic differential mapping were done for effective analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

Data Analysis and Interpretation

The demographic characteristics of the sample is given below.

Table 1

Demographic characteristics of the sample

SL. No.	Demographic variable	Size	Respondents (%)
1	Income		
	i.Lower middle class(Rs.5000-7500)	80	20
	ii.Upper middle class (Rs.7501-9000)	180	45
	iii.Upper class (>Rs.9000)	140	35
2	Education		
	i.Graduation or below	188	47
	ii.Post-graduation	108	27
	iii. Professional degree	104	26
3	Occupation		
	i.Govt./Private service	240	60
	ii. Traders/ Own business	80	20
	iii.Professional	80	20
4	Age		
	i.Less than 32 years	40	10
	ii. 32-60 years	240	60
	iii.More than 60 years	120	30
5	Sex		
	i. Male	360	90
	ii. Female	40	10

Source: Questionnaire.

Awareness about the market leader

Product knowledge and market awareness are the two important determinants which have significant bearing on the purchasing behavior of the consumer. Product knowledge tends to be generic i.e., it is more about the product category ,where as market awareness is more often than not tends to be brand specific.

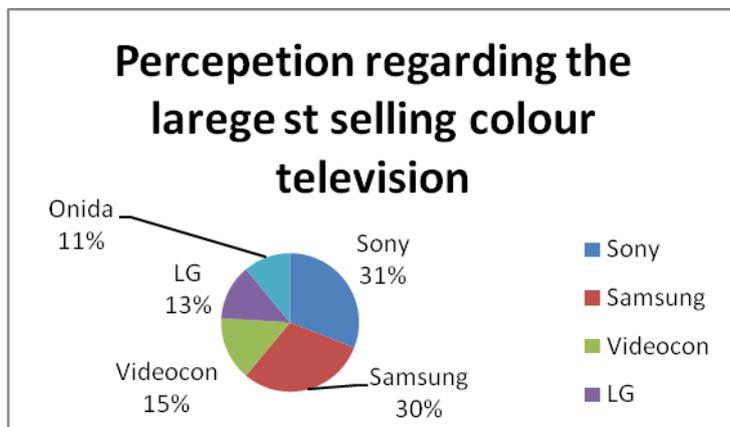
Interestingly, the purchase decision for a specific brand of colour television is significantly related to the consumer’s perception about the largest selling colour television. Most of the Samsung owners tend to think that Samsung is the largest selling colour television in India and the same holds good for other brands as well. Table 2 portrays the details of the respondent’s views.

Table-2 Perception regarding the largest selling Colour television

SL. NO.	Brands	Respondents aware
1	Sony	31
2	Samsung	30
3	Videocon	15
4	LG	13
5	Onida	11

Source: Questionnaire.

Graph-1



The titanic struggle between Sony and Samsung, for both claiming to be largest selling colour television, seems to have tremendous impact on the consumer’s perception about the no.1 colour television in India. Sony is voted as the best selling colour television by 31% of the respondents. Samsung is regarded as the best selling colour television by 30% of the respondents. The marginal presence to the other brands in the market is well borne out by response pattern. Only 11% of the respondents consider Onida to be the largest selling colour television in India. The narrow difference in margins between other brands is just a reflection of their market position in terms of sales.

Recall of different brands

According to the hierarchy of effects model of communication, there is sequential relationship between awareness, comprehension, attitude and action. Marketers always try to

improve the rate of top-of-mind (TOM) awareness among the target consumers. In the current scenario of high media spends and the attendant media clutter, awareness about the brand is a significant part of brand equity.

Table 3. Top of mind awareness and brands considered for purchase

SL. NO.	BRAND	RESPONDENTS (%)	
		Top Of Mind Awareness	Brand Considered As An Alternative
1	SONY	100	76
2	SAMSUNG	98	65
3	LG	72	44
4	VIDEOCON	35	37
5	ONIDA	29	24
6	OTHERS	12	4

Source: Questionnaire.

The brand recall for Sony is as high as 100 %. Samsung has an awareness level of 98% amongst the respondents. 72% of the respondents are aware of LG. Videocon enjoys an awareness level of 35% among the respondents. ONIDA has an awareness level of 29% among the respondents. Other brands of colour televisions like Sharp, Panasonic, Haier, Akai, BPL, Philips and TCL could not be recalled by more than 12% of the respondents. (Table.3)

Number of Alternatives Considered:

The concept of evoked set occupies a very prominent place in consumer behavior. All the brands in a product category push around to get into the evoked set of the consumer. If a consumer includes a brand in the evoked set, the probability of the brand being finally selected increases.

It has been found that there is a positive relationship between the number of alternatives considered and the extent of external information search activity. The present study reveals the Sony was considered as alternative by 76% of the respondents and 65% of the respondents have included Samsung in their evoked set. This, in turn, results in these two brands being finally chosen by a large segment of consumers. LG and Videocon were considered as an alternative in the brand choice by 44% and 37% of the respondents respectively. 24% of the respondents were considered ONIDA included in their evoked set. A very small group of respondents (4%) have taken Sharp, Panasonic, Haier, Akai, BPL, Philips and TCL as alternatives. The alternatives considered by the respondents are presented in Table 4.5.

Hypothesis testing indicated that there is a significant difference in the number of alternatives considered between the two cities of Berhampur and Bhubaneswar. The details of the hypothesis testing are given in Chapter-5.

Factors for Rejection of Other Brands:

A variety of factors acts and interacts in the consumer decision process especially while purchasing a durable product with a high level of financial commitment. In the process of acquiring a durable product like colour television, the consumer considers several brands in the brand evaluation stage. As the process is taken to its logical conclusion, several of the

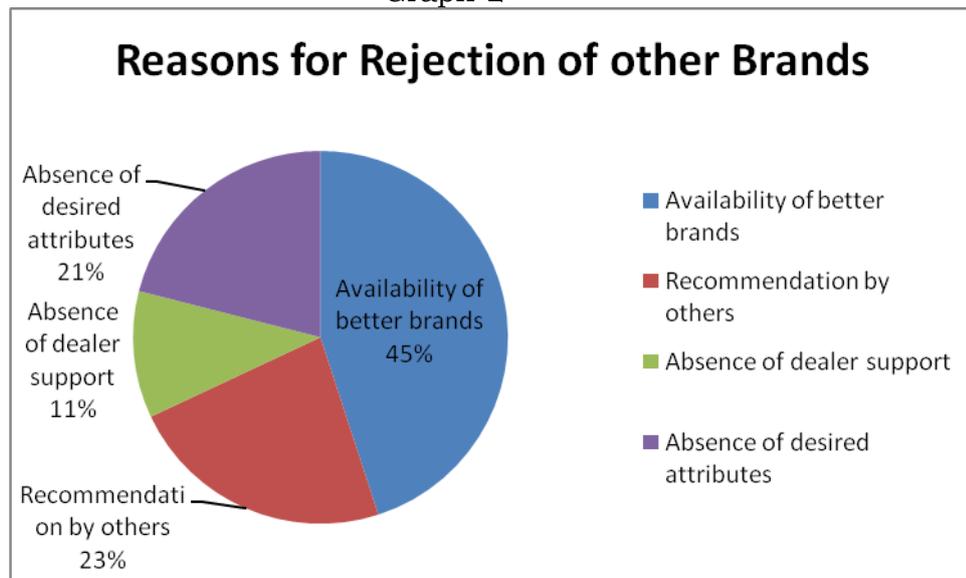
brands are rejected and only one brand is selected, one can find that there are numerous factors which come into play.

Table 4 Reasons for Rejection of other Brands

Sl No.	Factors considered for rejection of other brands	Respondents (%)
1	Availability of better brands	45
2	Recommendation by others	23
3	Absence of dealer support	11
4	Absence of desired attributes	21

Source: Questionnaire.

Graph-2



45% of the respondents reported that they have rejected other brands because the brand they have finally selected was comparatively better than the other brands. Only 23% respondents rejected other brands being influenced by recommendations of others. However, in 21% of the cases, other brands were not selected because they lacked one or more than one of the attributes like auto volume leader, woofer etc. but 11% respondents rejected other brands because those were not backed up by solid local dealer network support. It is not surprising to find that tangible features are the single most important factor, which decides the fate of a brand.

Factors influencing the Choice of a Brand

Consumer research demonstrates that a lot of factors go into choosing one brand from a handful of selected brands that have found a place in the evoked set of the consumer.

Surprisingly, the free response question to elicit the respondent’s views in this regard did bring about a variety of responses. Brand value is cited as the single most influential factor in the choice of purchasing a colour television by 37% of the respondents. The unpaid, non-commercial sources of product information i.e. friends and neighbours opinion influence the decision process in the purchase of an appliance to a significant extent. Friend’s and choice in case of 24% respondents. The reason for selection of a brand is presents in Table.5.

Table 5. Reasons Leading to the Selection of a Brand

Sl. No.	Factors considered for the selection of a brand	Respondents (%)
1	Good brand	37
2	Recommendation of Friends and relatives	14
3	Presence of attributes preferred	39
4	Availability of dealers support	10

Source: Questionnaire.

In spite of all the hype about brand-equity, marketers have come to realize that there is still a core group of “value for money” consumer segment who still the product attributes the primary role, in the purchase process. 39% of the respondents have chosen their brand because of the presence of product attributes. In the case of an appliances purchase, strong local after sales service by an extensive dealer network is very important. At the same instance, the dealers also a role in extending credit facilities for purchase. Around 10% of the respondents cited a strong dealer support and the main factor in the choice of a brand.

Introspection Time:

Introspection time plays an important role in the purchase of a colour television. Introspection time is the total time lag between the initial thinking of purchasing a colour television and its final purchase. It is an important determinant of external information search. To a certain extent, we can expect a positive relationship between the total time lag and the intensity of external information search. The greater the time lag, the greater is the opportunity of being exposed consciously to different types of product information in the mass media. On the other hand, if the rime lag is very short, it is possible that external sources of information may not be utilized to a significant extent by the consumers.

The present study reveals that the time lag comes out to be only one day in case of 12% and one week in case of 24% of the respondents. Around 28% of the respondents spent around 1-4 weeks between the initial thinking and the final purchase. Similarly, the time lag is 1-3 months for 23% of the respondents. Only 8% of the respondents have spent between 3-6 months before making the final purchase. Not surprisingly, the introspection time is reported to be more than 6 months only by 5% of the respondents. Thus, 87% of the respondents have purchased the colour televisions within three months of initial thinking for acquiring a colour television. The details of the time lag are presented in the Table 6.

Table 6 Distribution of introspection time.

Sl. No.	Time interval	Respondents (%)
1	Same day	12
2	One week	24
3	1-4 weeks	28
4	1-3 months	23
5	3-6 months	8
6	More than 6months	5

Source: Questionnaire.

Testing of Hypothesis

Hypothesis -1

Number of alternatives considered and the number of information sources consulted.

Null Hypothesis H_0 : The correlation between the number of information sources used and the number of alternatives considered is zero.

H_1 : The correlation between the number of information sources used and the number of alternatives considered is different from zero.

The Sample Pearson correlation co-efficient is (- 0.325).

$$T = \frac{-0.325 \sqrt{400-2}}{\sqrt{1-(-0.325)^2}} = 5.93.$$

The table value of T at 398 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance is 1.96. As the calculated T value is higher than the table value, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Conclusion: There is no significant relationship between the number of information sources used and the number of alternatives considered.

Hypothesis -2

Number of alternatives considered and the number of visits made to showrooms.

Null Hypothesis H_0 : The correlation between the number of alternatives considered and number of visits to the showrooms is zero.

H_1 : The correlation between the number of alternatives considered and number of visits to the showrooms is not zero.

The Sample Pearson correlation co-efficient is (- 0.331).

$$T = \frac{-0.331 \sqrt{400-2}}{\sqrt{1-(-0.331)^2}} = 6.05.$$

The table value of T at 398 degrees of freedom and at 0.05 level of significance is 1.96. As the calculated T value is higher than the table value, the null hypothesis is accepted.

Conclusion: There is some correlation between the number of alternatives considered and the number of visits to showrooms.

Hypothesis -3

Inter-city variations in the Number of alternatives Brands considered.

Null Hypothesis H_0 : There is no differences in the mean the number of alternatives considered in the cities of Berhampur and Bhubaneswar .

H_1 : Differences exists in the mean number of alternatives considered between the cities of Berhampur and Bhubaneswar.

Variations in the Alternatives considered

City	Mean no of Alternatives considered	Standard Deviation of sample	Variance	Size of sample
Berhampur	1.74	0.81	0.66	180
Bhubaneswar	2.43	1.14	1.3	220

Standard error of difference = $\sqrt{(0.66/180 + 1.3/220)} = 0.12$

$$Z = 1.74 - 2.43 / 0.12 = -5.75$$

As the calculated value of Z= -5.75 is greater than the table value of -1.96 the null hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 level of significance.

Conclusion : The two cities of Berhampur and Bhubaneswar differ with respect to the number of alternatives considered.

Hypothesis -4

Inter-city variations in the visits made to showrooms.

Null Hypothesis H_0 : There is no differences in the number of visits made to showrooms between the cities of Berhampur and Bhubaneswar .

H_1 : Differences exists in the mean number of visits to showrooms between the cities of Berhampur and Bhubaneswar.

Table 5.6: Inter –city Variations in the Number of visits to showrooms.

City	Mean no of Alternatives considered	Standard Deviation of sample	Variance	Size of sample
Berhampur	2.55	1.7	2.89	180
Bhubaneswar	3.5	2.87	8.25	220

Estimated Standard error of difference = $\sqrt{(2.89/180 + 8.25/220)} = 0.2911$.

$$Z = 2.55 - 3.5 / 2.911 = -3.26$$

As the calculated value of Z= - 3.26 is greater than the table value of -1.96 the null hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 level of significance.

Conclusion : The two cities of Berhampur and Bhubaneswar differ with respect to the mean number of visits made to showrooms.

Hypothesis -5

Inter-city variations in the number of information sources used.

Null Hypothesis H_0 : There is no differences in the number of information sources used between the cities of Berhampur and Bhubaneswar .

H_1 : Differences exists in the number of information sources used between the cities of Berhampur and Bhubaneswar.

The hypothesis is tested using the Z test for large samples.

Table 5.7: Inter –city Variations in the Number of visits to showrooms.

City	Mean no of Alternatives considered	Standard Deviation of sample	Variance	Size of sample
Berhampur	3.66	1.41	2	180
Bhubaneswar	4.18	1.96	3.84	220

Estimated Standard error of difference = $\sqrt{(2/180 + 3.84/220)} = 0.2076$.

$$Z = 3.66 - 4.18 / .2076 = -2.5.$$

As the calculated value of $Z = -2.5$ is greater than the table value of -1.96 the null hypothesis is rejected at 0.05 level of significance.

Conclusion: The mean number of information sources used in the two cities varies.

At the close of the study an attempt is made to summarise the scattered information to form a coherent picture of the purchasing behaviour with reference to the information search behaviour.

Findings of the study:

1. Degree of involvement exhibited by different family members:

The study indicates that the main earner of the household and the spouse are the two most important players with mean scores of 4.13 and 4.02 in a 1 to 5 point scale. They are followed by children with a mean score of 3.51. Being a consumer durable product the risk attached with a bad purchase is very high. This is one of the reasons for high involvement being exhibited while purchasing a colour television.

2. Exposure to media:

In a friendly competitive environment with large media spends customers are generally exposed to different types of advertisements of various products and services incidentally while watching television, reading newspapers and magazines or while listening to radio. It is observed that 73% of the respondents have seen advertisements in the television. 49% of the respondents have seen advertisements in the newspapers and magazines.

However, after being conscious of making the purchase in the near future, the customers while being engaged in deliberate information collection have turned mostly to sales personnel followed by magazines, friends, television and newspapers respectively.

3. Visits to showrooms:

In the external information search process, retail search occupies a very prominent and visible part. Visits made to the showrooms are one of the tangible steps being taken in the process of acquiring a durable product. The present study reveals that the main decision maker visits the showrooms in 95% of the cases, the other spouse in 75% of the cases and children in 22% of the cases.

The no. of hours spent inside the showrooms is a clear indicator of the customer's attitude towards shopping. The study reveals that 49% of the respondents spend 1 to 2 hours and 33% spend less than one hour in the showrooms. Thus, the potential buyers at a highly aroused state of buying much time in the showrooms.

4. Quantum of information collected from different showrooms:

Comparatively more information is collected from the bough brand's showrooms than that of the competitors' by 98% of the respondents. It reaffirms the fact that greater quantum of information are collected from the purchased brand's showrooms. These customers consult the sources such as sales personnel, point of sale displays, and company / brand literature in that order.

5. Perceived usefulness of the sources of information:

Friends and colleagues are considered useful sources of information by 86% of the respondents. Sales personnel are considered a useful source by 69% of the respondents and 46% of the respondents have viewed that sales literature is most useful. Television and magazines are perceived to be useful sources by 40% and 23% of the respondents respectively.

6. Most used source of information:

The source of information can take the form of interpersonal methods of communication like friends, neighbours or impersonal sources like the press, television, etc. Friends and colleagues are described as the most used source by 39% of the respondents. Sales personnel are stated as the most used source by 19% of the respondents. Thus, these two personal forms of communication are the most used sources in case of 58% of the respondents.

7. Influence of family members on different dimensions of the product:

The study indicates that different family members yield varying levels of influence on the different dimensions of the product. The design of the colour television is decided by the main earner and the spouse in case of 72% of the respondents. With regard to the choice of a particular brand, 49% of the respondents have selected it on their own without consulting any personal source. However, in 29% cases friends and colleagues have prevailed over the decision makers to go for a particular brand of colour television.

8. Perceived importance of different attributes:

In consumer research, finding out the crucial set of attributes for a product has been the concern of many and investigations. The knowledge about different attributes and the importance assigned to them is a major determinant of intensity of search for external information. Here the importance is determined using Likert's statements. From the study, sound output, picture standard and tuning facilities have emerged as the important features of the colour televisions with the mean scores of 4.18, 4.00 and 3.61 respectively.

9. Brand image :

A perceptual mapping of the different brands was done using semantic differential scaling technique. It reveals that Sony occupies a premier position by scoring over other brands on the attributes of tuning facilities, sound output and picture standard. Sony has attained the second best scores on most of the attributes listed.

10. Shopping attitude:

Consumer's attitudes and assumptions on the general marketing process and environment guide and shape his information search behaviour. The consumer's belief about the existence of significant differences between brands spurs him to enquire in details about the different brands. The mean score of 2.46 on this belief indicates that the respondents do not agree very strongly with the statement that there is much difference between the features of brands of colour televisions. The mean score of 2.76 on the sales personnel's ability to provide accurate and objective information is a moderately high figure. It shows that they do not take the words of the sales personnel at face value. They might be attributing the positive evaluation of a brand by a sales person to the obligation of his normal official duty.

11. Recall of advertisements:

Building up of awareness and comprehension is one of the basic aims of communication efforts. Brand recall precisely measures this. The stiff competition in this product category has moved colour television as one of the most spenders in the consumer durable segment.

12. Likeability of advertisements:

In order that the advertisements attain the long term goal of attitude change or reinforce existing brand loyalty, it is imperative that the advertisement is not only information but also touches the customers at an emotional level. LG's "sound master" campaign is regarded to be informative and enjoyable by 50 % of the respondents. The dramatic presentation of picture quality in the form of a superman seems to have captured the attention and admiration of the consumers.

13. Appropriate media for durable advertising :

The customer's perception about the most appropriate media for durable advertising is a reflection of their past usage of media and their present evaluation of the different types of media with regards to their capability as a suitable media vehicle. Reaffirming the people's obsession with television as an entertainment medium, 35% of the respondents consider television to be the best medium for brand specific information. Magazines are regarded as the most appropriate media for durable advertising by 32% of the respondents.

Consumers select few information dimensions from information array, with brand name and price being the most frequently selected information. Less information is collected when the brand name is available, perhaps because brand name serves as information chunks and facilitate consumer decision making. It is also observed that when a brand dominates over others in the preference structure, less time is taken for evaluation than near equal preferences for different brands. Though objective information strongly promotes rational choice, studies show that objective information does not eliminate sub-optimal choices.

One major concern of policy makers is the determination of the maximum amount of information that a consumer can effectively process for taking an appropriate choice decision the information load paradigm is based on the proposition that consumers have finite limits on the quantum of information they can assimilate and the process during any given unit of time. If these limits are exceeded, over-load occurs and consumers become confused and make poorer decisions. These findings really challenge the currently popular position among consumer advocates and public policy makers who believe that more product information is better. It is seen that consumers develop mechanisms for limiting their information intake. But their limited processing capacity can become cognitively overloaded if they attempt to process too much of information in a limited time.

Scope and directions for further research:

Few research works have been conducted to examine the impact of framed versus unframed advertisements. Specific studies on their influence in brand perception and attitude development need to be done for getting a clearer picture of consumer information processing. Studies have shown that processibility of information depends upon the presentation format. This suggests that regulatory agencies concerned about consumers' information environment should focus not only on the content and quality of information made available, but on the

format on which the information is structured and presented. Studies focusing on the impact of information presentation format on information processing need to be taken up.

In the light of the evidence for the differential sensitivity of elderly individuals in relation to younger adults, future research can focus on the efficacy of various marketing strategies in influencing the consumers belonging to different age groups. The present study is mostly relied upon the respondents self reports. A very useful extension of the current work would be to try to replicate the results using a less structured search task. A systematic analysis of longitudinal measures of search behaviour with as many measures as possible based on observation rather than respondent self report will bring out a more clear understanding of the search behaviour phenomenon.

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