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A theoretical perspective of consumers information search behaviour and role of psychological variables

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Abstract
Understanding the consumer search behaviour is the key for success in the growing consumer centric markets. The E-commerce has brought a number of drastic changes in the behaviour of the consumer and specifically the search behaviour. The changes are caused specifically because of the modification in the factors which influence the behaviour of the consumer in buying things online. Amongst several other factors, which play an important role in the behaviour of the consumer in online buying, here are a few characteristics, importance and specificity of the various psychological factors. This is mainly because of the significance of marketing research that has proved that experience of consumers in terms of online marketing generates mutation in the mental process, which in turn triggers the decision of making purchases online. Thus, it is important for the marketers to acknowledge the significance of study as well as influence of such factors because of the rising power of the online world. There is absolutely no doubt about the fact that this revolution of online marketing has exerted a powerful influence on the behaviour of the consumers and turning them into internet users. It is important to adapt to the ever-evolving marketing world. Kotler foresaw that consumers need to rethink about the processes which help them identify, communicate as well as offer value to the clients. It would help them in improving their capabilities of managing the individual as well as organisational consumers.

Keywords: consumer behaviour, search behaviour psychological factors, market research, branding strategies

1. Introduction

The information search behaviour is an area of study that has been extensively researched under consumer research. Researchers pay a lot of attention to information search consumer behaviour since it plays an important role in decision-making process of the consumers. Information search of consumers is the 2nd step next to recognition of need and at that stage, the users look for information from multiple sources. The information, which is gained by the users, helps in facilitating further evaluation as well as final buying of the products (Maity, Dass, & Malhotra, 2014) [1].

The daily buying decisions of consumers are undertaken with the help of the limited information that the consumer search for. However, when asked about ethical products, the consumers show more interest which ultimately results in an extensive information search. Row wise search for information by the characteristics of the product are preferred more over the info search by products alternatives. Thus, the information should be offered by the attributes. Most of the consumers employ selective or the simplifying information search strategies when they look for information about some particular product along with additional ethical characteristics. Consumers often start looking for information in top corner or left corner while presenting the information about different varieties of products. It has been seen that the pattern of searching information depends mainly on the socio demographic variables such as age and gender and to a less extent even on the attributes regarding the social and environmental aspects of the production of food. Therefore, the marketers, specifically the ones who use internet, should go through the system of provision of information again and focus all their energies on the needs of the consumers.

A number of reasons state that the conventional economic theories don't sufficiently explain the online information search behaviour of the consumer. Firstly, the fundamental base of the economic theory states that the information search would increase when the cost of search is reduced. However, empirical evidence do not show any such prediction (Johnson 2004).

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It was found that online search information is quite restrictive.

Even though the physical effort of consumers like visiting the stores have now reduced and converted to user clicks, it's still quite possible that cognitive challenges of interaction with the computer systems and information online exist that limit the online information search in internet marketplace.

2. Literature review

Information search of consumer is the stage where the consumers make the decision of buying a product. The consumers actively collect as well as use the information from the internal and the external sources for making better buying decisions. The internet information search happens when the consumers access the information that has been already stored in the memory. The primary source is used for restricted and habitual decision making process. On the contrary, the external search includes information search from different sources outside the memory of the consumer because the requisite information wasn't acquired previously or can't be recalled from the memory. Different sources like television advertisements, friends, magazines, etc. are used by the consumers for facilitating their decision making process. Lately, internet has also become a part of traditional media for becoming a prominent source for information for the products for consumers due to abundance of convenience as well as information. For explaining information search, information identified mainly 2 types of cost of search which influence the same. These are cognitive as well as external. The cost of resources that the consumers invest into like the monetary cost for attaining information or the cost of opportunity of time at the time of acquisition are the cost of external search. These kind of costs get influenced by the factors beyond the direct control of the consumer. They are endogenous and mainly depend on the situational factors. On the contrary, the cost of cognitive search are internal to consumers and they reflect cognitive efforts that the consumers should make for directing their information search queries, sorting the incoming information and integrating with the stored data for forming decision evaluation. They are mainly influenced by the ability of the consumers to process the incoming information effectively. Searching for the information on the internet demands the consumers to modify their conventional consumer buying behaviour. This behavioural change is not easy and often needs incentives like explicit savings in terms of cost or enhances convenience. Previous studies have also proved that convenience is one single benefit of buying things from the internet and the consumers always search for new ways of finding information and buying the products.

For the consumers to find information on the internet, cost of perceived external information search is much lower in the online environment as compared to the physical environment. In the online marketplace, the cost of external search has been reduced prominently to simple finger click. However, the information in this kind of an environment is perceptual as well as visual. It helps in increasing the cost of cognitive search which affects the consumer information search. Also, searching the information online is mainly characterised by manual interaction with the computer requiring consumer's knowledge as well as ability to attain information (Hodkison, 2000) [2].

For searching for information on the internet, the consumers should be able to find the websites that would help them and then they should also be able to easily move in between the websites and acquire the requisite information from these websites. There are a number of ways of identifying such websites. The consumer may find them through search engines, through manual entry of URL or through memory aid of the browser like bookmark. Since vast information is easily available on the web, these techniques of information search affect the way a consumers searches for information. Resultantly, internet imposes some kind of cost on cognitive search on the consumers which negatively impacts the information that the consumer searches for.

Along with the factors which have a direct influence on the behaviour of the consumer in general, all the relevant aspects which influence the online characteristics, the variables of seller of the products as well as the social context (Agarwal and Karahanna, 2000, Moon and Kim 2001, Torkzadeh and Dhillon, 2002).

Different products which are available for sale online have been identified by the researchers. These include books, musical instruments, software, etc. For buying them, the consumer doesn't need to personally check them. The primary characteristic could be reviews in the images of the products and the description given by the seller (Shun and Yunjie (2006) [4].

The consumers have been segregated into 4 main groups having different motivations as well as intentions, exploration, shopping, information and entertainment. The factors which influence the behaviour of the consumers for online marketing include the individual characteristics of consumers i.e. the behavioural variables and the endogenous variables, the influence exerted by environment like the structural influences the concurrence, uncertainty, concentration of the market and international and national market regulations, characteristics, restrictions of commerce and the juridical structure, characteristics of the products and service including the type, quality, knowledge, etc. about the product, the characteristics of online environment including the attributes of the consumers, etc. (Cheung M.K., 2005).

2.1 Psychological factors influencing consumer behaviour

Successful brands understand the right way of leveraging different factors influencing the buying behaviour of the consumers. It helps them in effectively marketing their products and services and maximising sales. Several studies have shown that there are certain important attributes which play an important role in the buying behaviour of the consumer. These include the social factors, cultural factors, psychological factors and personal factors. The psychological attributes influencing the decision of a consumer for making a purchase have been further segregated into motivation, perception, learning and beliefs of the consumer and his attitude.

Motivation can be defined as an active internal need which leads to a goal defined consumer behaviour for satisfying the particular need. Accordingly, motive can be termed as a relatively strong and enduring internal stimuli which influences the behaviour of the consumer towards a particular goal (Taylor, 2006) [6].

Perception is the process of selecting, organising and interpreting the attained information in such a way that it

generates a meaningful experience for the user. The consumer who makes the purchase decision based on his wants, needs or the previous experience (Rani, Pinki. 2014) [7].

Learning defines the changes in consumer behaviour which arise from their previous experience. The process of learning happens with the help of stimuli, drives, response as well as cues. The brands should first understand the whole process of learning and then strategize their marketing plans.

2.2 Consumer buying process
The point of starting of the process of buying is need recognition. Need is a lack of a product or a service which is useful. An individual maybe motivated for buying a product or a service for his convenience, for prestige, for the purpose of style, for improving his self-pride or simply for being at the same level as other (Thangasamy, E. Patikar, Gautam 2014).

During the process of buying a particular product or a service, the consumer even looks at analysis of cost benefit of that particular product or service.

1. Recognition of need- the decision for purchasing a particular product or a service begins with recognition of the need that needs to be satisfied by the consumer. The intensity with which the need exists states the list of priorities of the buyer. The buyer would make immediate purchase of the products that he required most urgently and postpones the ones, which he does not need so urgently (Jadhav, Harish. Chavan, Pravin 2019).
2. Searching information- the need which has been recognised maybe satisfied once the buyer understands what kind of product would help in satisfying his need in sync with the availability of the particular product or service. That is why the buyer undertakes information search from different sources like friends, family members, media, advertisements, etc.
3. Evaluating the alternatives- the buyer assesses different alternatives of product and service for satisfying the needs of the consumers. In the process of evaluation of the alternatives, the buyer looks at different features of the product or the service in terms of utility, characteristics, image of the brand as well as post purchase services. The basis for evaluation of the products and services differ from one situation to another and also ion terms of the buyer involvement. Sometimes, even the sales representative helps the consumer in evaluating the products and the services (Kumar, H. Hemanth, A. John, and S. Franklin, Senith, S. 2014) [10].
4. Buying decision- once all the alternatives have been evaluated, buying a particular product depends mainly on the criteria of ranking and evaluation. It even attributes to availability of that particular product and service as well as affordability of the buyer. The buyer is not sure of buying outcome because he hesitates in taking risks. The marketers need to help the users by working on reducing the risk factors and offering sufficient information regarding the commodities they offer so that it can help with the decision making.
5. Post purchase consumer behaviour- the buyer prefers evaluating the performance of a particular product and service. The buyer would either be happy or unhappy after evaluating a product or service. In case the performance of the product fulfils the expectations of the consumer, he would buy the same product again. The consumer would also talk positive things about that particular product. On the contrary, if the performance of a particular product or service would fail to fulfil the expectations of the individual, he would not buy the product ever again (Amit Kumar, 2019) [11].

3. Conclusion
For making a consumer-satisfying product or service, the service provider needs to work as a psychologist for gaining customers. By the actions which are performed by the customers while searching for products and services on the web trigger the behavioural attributes for making a comparison between commodities since the possibilities of buying things online are endless. Thus, it's become very important for the companies to develop the online marketing strategies constantly, use interactivity, and allow for bidirectional communication for successfully attaining customers for their products and services. A brand needs to develop a social media strategy since consumers these days are influences by social media promotions. It is important for a brand to develop its trust in the consumers.

In addition, the companies offering different products and services today offer the option of customising the same largely. They know that the buyers are becoming informed as well as pretentious about buying commodities. All the information is available on the internet today. Thus, in order to fulfil the needs of the clients as best as possible, the brands aim at creating a long lasting relationship with them. They implement consumer relationship management system and practice interactive marketing strategy for internet market.

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