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**‘CATEGORISATION OF PRODUCTS ON BASIS OF THEIR IMPACT ON
THE INDIVIDUAL CONSUMPTION PROCESS’**

Name of Author: - Prof. Milind Fadnavis , (Associate Professor)

City: - NAGPUR

Country: - INDIA

INSTITUTE of MANAGEMENT TECHNOLOGY, NAGPUR

35 Km milestone, Katol Road, Nagpur .INDIA 441 502

+91-712-280 5000 (30 lines) mobile – 9923594802, 9422145775

E-mail:- milind.fadnavis@gmail.com , mmfadnavis@imtnag.ac.in

CATEGORISATION OF PRODUCTS ON BASIS OF THEIR IMPACT ON THE INDIVIDUAL CONSUMPTION PROCESS

Abstract

Marketers in general and Marketing pundits in particular focus on customer satisfaction – the ultimate objective – importantly after purchase. They want to reduce cognitive dissonance if any – in different ways but in the process give lesser consideration to the fact that satisfaction after consumption of a product / service is more important than one derived by mere acquisition of same. Also the words CUSTOMER and CONSUMER are used interchangeably which might not always be correct. A term **CONSTMER** is suggested in the paper – in situations where the customer himself is a consumer.

The moment paradigm shifts from buying of products/services to consumption of the same in context of customer, one gets feeling that large number of them in **consumption basket** are consumed not alone but in a group – mostly family and derive different kinds of satisfaction. And when we appreciate in an Indian cultural backdrop where family is still a strong consumption unit – one gets a feeling that this consumption process either in isolation or in a group either make family bonding strong or weak. This results in categorization of products – as **unifier, individual satisfier, divider and destroyer**.

As a marketer one needs to understand the process/channel of consumption apart from channel of distribution. This helps us in better understanding of what is the fate of goods/services sold to customers and the types of consumption behavior and various roles played by members in context of an individual and also family as a consumption unit.

The consumption process gets either accelerated or slows down depending upon a new product added to the consumption basket or removal of other from the same. The changes are either in form of an addition, deduction, multiplication or division.

As a marketer if one develops insight in these changes, long-term marketing strategies can better be formulated to ensure profit for organization on one side and customer satisfaction after consumption on other. Appreciation of such changes shall give a marketer better perspective on

how a product produced by him is interrelated to large number of other products and how the PLC (product life cycle) of a product can suddenly be shortened/lengthened due to changes in technology or sudden change in buying/consumption patterns of customer/consumer .

Also the terms customer consumer are discussed in the paper and an effort is made to understand the channel of consumption which has direct bearing on the composition of consumption basket .

Key words – constmer , unifier , individual satisfier , divider , destroyer

“CATEGORISATION OF PRODUCTS ON BASIS OF THEIR IMPACT ON THE INDIVIDUAL CONSUMPTION PROCESS”

Milind Fadnavis

Institute of Management Technology –Nagpur-India

milind.fadnavis@gmail.com

1. Introduction

Marketers in general and the marketing pundits in particular have been defining and redefining the philosophy of marketing from viewpoint of a typical Marketer/Seller. While there cannot be any disagreement that focal point of Marketing is customer, fact remains that he is a neglected lot in some cases and the concepts are being developed taking into consideration HE as the focal point but from view point of the marketer. Dr. Philip Kotler defines Marketing Management as ‘the art and science of choosing target markets and getting, keeping and growing customers through creating, delivering and communicating superior customer value’. The definition is heavily organization orientated rather than customer oriented. What we need to appreciate is- understanding of customer of marketing programs of various operators is different hence a shift in paradigm to look to the principles and processes from viewpoint of customer. The shift opens a Pandora box where we find that a customer is no more a passive recipient of all kinds of marketing communication but an active player in the field. However the question is – if marketers define a customer a KING – is he allowed to enjoy his kingdom? Is he calling the shots?

Larger number of academicians focus on the buying process which is only tip of the total consumption process, and come to conclusion that the customer is either happy or unhappy lot after the transaction, which may not be necessarily true. The focus in such case is on satisfaction out of acquisition of product rather than usage of same either immediately or at a later date. The satisfaction out of purchase is temporal and focus on removal of cognitive dissonance by marketers is like claiming to have won WAR when they might have won a battle.

If focal point of marketer and end is again customer and his satisfaction –then emphasis should be on consumption process which shall generate either satisfaction or dissatisfaction. Another

important issue is the use of two words interchangeably – customer and consumer .While both roles might be combined in one person in case of impulse buy – where a person buys a product and may instantly consume also .Fact remains that they are on many occasions two different entities .While this aspect is well highlighted in case of Industrial Marketing – ambiguity continues in case of marketing of consumer goods and services .To better appreciate the consumption process to gain insight in categorization of products , one needs to understand similarities/differences between customer / consumer .Before this , one needs to wear an Indian Hat .

2 . Indian Context

INDIAN HAT – With a billion plus consumers , India is one of the largest ,most varied and stratified markets in world today .With rising incomes of families due to multiple members working ,exposure to OTHER world due to electronic media ,it has started its consumption journey .MNCs from all parts of world from Honda to Hyundai ,Coke to Carrefour ,from Rolex to Rolls Royce ,all want to have a share of this pie .It is not only the population but also the composition of population that makes India an attractive proposition – 50% population below 24 years is certainly a powerful magnet attracting one and all .

The market however is unpredictable .A large number of MNCs without doing their homework properly and replicating the practices of west have achieved mediocre success .Coupled with this is the mindset of Indian customer –“value for money’ . In fact famous novelist Arundhati Roy has described- ‘India lives across simultaneously across 400 years’ . While Sir Winston Churchill described the then India as merely a geographic expression ;things are pretty different now . Large number of middle class , huge potential at BOP , and equally large in absolute number of upper classes with direct exposure to western world characterize the Indian market .To better understand the categorization of products as unifiers , individual satisfiers , dividers ,destroyers ,we have to understand the consumption process in Indian context where the consumption of various goodies might be an individual and also a family affair.

3. Review of Literature

The importance of individual consumption process is well recognized by many marketing authors and the various issues as customer satisfaction, consumption basket ,cognitive dissonance are discussed at length in various books on Marketing in general and on Consumer Behavior in particular .However the words consumer and customer are used interchangeably in some cases .

Studies by the Center for Monitoring Indian Economy (CMIE) reveal that structural shifts have been taking place in the consumption pattern of Indian consumers in recent past and shifts have gained momentum since the launch of economic reforms .As far as customer satisfaction index is concerned ,in India it is regularly conducted in a sector- automobile – by J D Power & Associates ,Maruti Udyog ltd has been topping for quite some time .

Dr Philip Kotler in his pioneer book “Principles of Marketing” states that customer satisfaction depends upon relationship between (consumer) expectations and product’s perceived performance .Product falling short of expectations , he is disappointed ; if it meets expectations ,he is satisfied ;if exceeds expectations , he is delighted’ . Monitoring of customer satisfaction can be done by complaint and suggestion system , customer surveys ,comparison shopping .

4. Research Methodology

Focused group technique was used to understand the various issues – confusion between consumer/customer ;issue of satisfaction on purchase vis-a-vis satisfaction on consumption coupled with other issues of customer/consumer satisfaction, role of an individual in actual consumption process ,issue of moderation in consumption .

Probing was also done on which products were consumed individually compared to others by family as a consumption unit. The impact of consumption process on family bonding , and its impact on composition of consumption basket was discussed .

Issue of impact of each new addition on other products in consumption basket was first explained with a simple example of a commonly used product today in India –mobile .The

respondents were encouraged to plot their responses in form of mathematical signs + .- x and division .

Sample size :- 30 No – 10 each from teaching side (professors , lecturers ,)10 from administrative staff (middle level officers and supervisors) 10 from lower level administration staff (clerical and peon grade).This ensured two things – age profile variation and income variation . With some respondents from non-English speaking background , the medium of discussion was HINDI only .

5. Discussions & Findings

Customer vis-à-vis consumer

1-Customer and consumer as referred earlier might be same ,they in other cases may be different entities .When both roles are in one person – I preferred to use a new term –CONSTMER .This helped in reducing ambiguity and appreciate different roles played by both .

2-When customer and consumer are different – one needs to understand the CHANNEL OF CONSUMPTION also .This means a product bought by customer may be used by other consumers which may include – family members , members of an organization .A toy bought by parents for an infant or a laptop bought by Materials Manager for staff working in Administration department – both fall in this category .

3-Larger the distance between customer and consumer ,complex is understanding of consumption process and its impact on the ultimate aim of marketing – satisfaction of customer (not consumer) .It is because of this Dr Philip Kotler refers to the term –CONSUMPTION CHAIN METHOD –wherein he emphasizes on asking consumers to chart their steps in acquiring ,using and disposing of a product .

4-Marketers need to develop 360 degrees view of channel of consumption apart from channel of distribution .While channel of distribution is a highly stable P of marketing mix vis-à-vis other 3 Ps ,channel of consumption is really dynamic – depending upon the nature of product ,number of

consumers of same ,environmental factors and so on .We also need to understand the SATISFACTION of consumers apart from that of customers .

- a) Satisfaction on acquisition-
- b) Satisfaction on consumption-
- c) Satisfaction on exhibition-
- d) Satisfaction on emergency usage-
- e) Satisfaction on deprivation-
- f) Satisfaction on salvage –
- g) Satisfaction on acknowledgement
- h) Satisfaction on up-dation
- i) Satisfaction on distribution

Satisfaction on acquisition - This stage might not last long even in case of durables or purchases of long-cherished items .However there were cases in India where customers bought TV in mid-eighties when even the low-powered transmission center was not established in their local area .Have money – will buy was the case then and a positive attitude to future that the product would be used once the service was made available triggered such purchases .

Satisfaction on consumption - Majority of the FMCGs give satisfaction only when they are consumed .The satisfaction on consumption can be instant or delayed depending upon the kind of product .A food item after consumption gives instant satisfaction whereas a fairness cream shall give delayed satisfaction after many uses .In case of durables, the satisfaction on usage be a right term than consumption .

Satisfaction on exhibition – Those products which enjoy STATUS symbol in society can provide such satisfaction .Exhibition of possessions in public can give satisfaction to owner/exhibitor .Common in case of antique items .To derive satisfaction , it is not necessary that others acknowledge such possession .It can be a one –way process also where one flashes his possession and is happy .Authors on Consumer Behavior (Del I Hawkins ,Roger J Best ,Kenneth A Coney and Amit Mookerjee) have categorized such products into private luxuries

and public luxuries (also private necessities and public necessities) where reference group is likely to influence product and brand usage .

Satisfaction on emergency usage – Emergency lamps , smoke detectors , fire extinguishers ,band-aid are few products which give satisfaction because they are used in emergency only .Past experiences , company policy on safety and other hazards , own attitude to life all play important role in acquisition and usage of such products .

Satisfaction on deprivation –This is common only in country like India where the philosophy is –Deprive yourself for some time and then resume consumption and such intervals shall actually add value to both consumption and satisfaction on usage after deprivation .Food consumed by a Muslim during Ramzan is a case to prove the point .

Satisfaction on salvage – The phenomenon is common in case of products which have become obsolete/redundant may be due to changes in technology but still functional .While a typical customer/consumer in developed world might discard the product ,same may not be situation in developing world . A customer might be interested in salvage and get some value either thru exchange scheme or buy-back offer .

Satisfaction on acknowledgement –The phenomenon is very similar to the EXHIBITION – only difference is as an exhibitor – you receive a positive stroke-comment from others .The result – satisfaction on acknowledgement .If the positive stroke does not come from others , the exhibitor may initiate probing and ask directly the comments from others .

Satisfaction on up-dation - Remaining loyal to a product/brand , a customer may up-date the product and derive satisfaction .Up-gradation might be in any one of the forms – quality ,quantity , service dimension ,new usage .The reasons for up-gradation might be different ranging from rise in income to need to keep pace with technological changes or even a sales promotional scheme from a marketer .This point was well-explained by young respondents using various gadgets and commonly go for up-gradation

Satisfaction on distribution –As mentioned earlier, a buyer (customer) may not necessarily be an actual consumer of product .A toy gifted to child on birthday by father or a bike presented to a

graduate by his grandparent provide satisfaction to the giver –apart from satisfaction to the receiver/user .

5-Involvement of more than one person in consumption process makes the dynamics more complex and understanding of categorization of products on basis of their impact on individual/family consumption process becomes critical .

6- Subtle changes in consumption habits/process have a snowballing effect and are like an epicenter of an earthquake .Impact can be found on a much larger distant area.

Shift in paradigm from channel of distribution to channel of consumption

One needs to appreciate that the phenomenon of CONSUMER can be found commonly in FMCGs , not so commonly in durables .

The nature of family purchase roles are described in the book titled Consumer Behavior (Hawkins ,Best ,Coney , Mookerjee) as under –

- ✓ Initiator
- ✓ Information Gatherer(s)
- ✓ Influencer(s)
- ✓ Decision maker(s)
- ✓ Purchaser(s)
- ✓ User(s)

The roles and the functions performed in these roles are self-explanatory .We need to add few more to the above roles which are as under –

Gatekeeper –Term used commonly by Dr Philip Kotler in book Marketing Management (13th edition) in context of B2B markets . The term can also be used in individual/family consumption process and the role is deprive consumer from consumption for legitimate reasons .Example – advice from doctor to patient on diet ; use of child lock by parent of TV

Moderator – One who decides either on his own or on instructions from decider expert, how much to be consumed and by whom and when .Example – A housewife distributing a food item among family members on regular basis .Just as we refer to two bean consumption in a typical industry unit , similarly the item bought in bulk for family consumption is being moderately distributed and the person who does is the moderator . A moderator might be from within or outside family also .

Evaluator –Self-evaluation in case of CONSTMER; may be done by a moderator or even an outside agency

Passive consumer – Commonly found in case of both FMCGs and durables .Example – Passive smoking , Involuntary viewing of TV program in a group

Spectator – Dormant consumer : deprived of consumption process. They provide a backdrop to the consumption process .They may in future be consumers for such products .

Channel of consumption

Zero level - Customer as consumer – (CONSTMER)

One level –Customer – consumer

Two level – Customer – moderator – consumer

Customer-gatekeeper – (deprived consumer)

Three level – Customer – decider-moderator -consumer

Four level- Customer –moderator –consumer-passive consumer/evaluator-dormant consumer

Consumption basket -categorization of products

The consumption basket consists of different goodies which can be categorized as under depending upon who consumes (an individual or family as a unit) and what purpose it serves (does it satisfy an individual need or of entire family)

- ✓ **UNIFIERS**
- ✓ **INDIVIDUAL SATISFIERS**
- ✓ **DIVIDERS**
- ✓ **DESTROYERS**

Destroyer	Divider
Unifier	Individual satisfier

Before we understand the categorization , it is important to wear an Indian Hat – understand the consumption basket in Indian context .

Unifier –These are products consumed by an entire family as one unit .Some FMCGs and many durables fall in this category .While TV – the modern fireplace in house is a unifier in middle class family and BOP customer ;in case of poor families there might be only one brand of toothpaste available in family pack for consumption .These products unify the family as a consumption unit .

Individual satisfier – These products satisfy an individual need of the family members .With mass customization process on ,we have more durable products falling in this category now ;however in case of FMCGs ,it is a common phenomenon to have different brands of tooth pastes for each member .The reason for wearing of an Indian hat is clear here . A product like car is a unifier in India but an individual satisfier in USA ,with each adult member of family owning a car .In consumption basket of an upwardly mobile Indian family , there shall be small % of unifiers ,and a large number of individual satisfiers .

Divider- When more than one unit of durable is bought in family , it may initially act as an individual satisfier ;however with excessive consumption tend to divide family and move product in to divider quadrant .Normally a TV should act as a Unifier – a gadget in drawing room where entire family gather together ; with another one in bedroom ,it gives individual members a choice and act as individual satisfier. But with excessive usage divides the family .The snowballing effect of dividers is dangerous to the composition of a family as a consumption unit .

Destroyer- Excessive consumption by an individual member of a family either of a consumable or a durable can put products from any of the three quadrants in destroyer category .It is also important to know that some products which by their nature themselves fall under destroyer category – such as drugs , tobacco products and so on which are counter marketed .Presence of such destroyers in consumption basket damage family as a consumption unit .It is important to note that a product falling under divider/destroyer is not a result of marketing program (barring exception as tobacco and drugs) ;the product move to destroyer category due to excessive consumption which might be a result of change in income .

Composition of consumption basket and changes therein

Consumption basket of an individual/family comprises of FMCGs ,durables and services . While daily needed FMCGs form a major chunk of consumption basket of a BOP customer ,it is the durables and services that shall occupy a major portion of the basket of an upper class of customer .The absolute number of FMCGs in case of basket of upper class might be large (individual satisfiers) their % in terms of monetary value shall be miniscule .It is the middle class which has the right combination of FMCGs (individual satisfiers) ,some durables (unifiers) and a few services .

It is pertinent to note that buying power being normally limited and lot of changes on supply side due to technological revolution ,new products/services entering the consumption basket tend to replace some existing one and in other cases making few others redundant .Even when the buying power shows a temporal rise –either thru increased income or borrowings –it has a delayed impact of sacrificing future buying power for present day comfort .From viewpoint of the marketer ,gaining insight in understanding which product replaces whom and why shall give a cutting edge in formulation of marketing strategies .The inclusion and displacement is in four forms namely –**Addition ,Deduction ,Multiplication and Division**

Addition-Income driving consumption is true in such a case .The products falling in such category are either supplementing or complimenting consumption of other products .The situation might either be by design or by default .In some cases products are bundled and hence a typical consumer does not realize the addition part .A gas lighter with an LPG stove or a charger

with mobile are classic examples of addition .It is not necessary that both the products be durables .It can be a matrix of consumables/durables –one time/ repeated use ,depending either on buying pattern or consumption process .

In case of GIVE AWAY THE LAMP AND SELL THE OIL (Rockfeller principle) type situation ;addition is created by marketer .However it is the consumer who depending upon his own perception may add on a product or two .Buying of voltage stabilizer for freeze in spite smooth supply of electricity or purchase of an additional charger for mobile (to be kept in office) are few examples of such addition .If marketers correctly understand the logic of buyer behind such decisions ,strategies can be modified .

Deduction –With limited buying power /temporarily augmented with loan ,opposite of addition is a natural phenomenon .The moment the limited purchasing power is spent on till now new, unwanted products ;some existing items from consumption basket are going to be displaced either in form of reduced consumption or complete elimination .Deduction may be a result of changes in technology also .Pagers with short PLC after launch of mobiles ,obsolescence of typewriters due to desktops are few cases of deduction due to technology .Deduction is common in FMCGs ; only difference is – the process is subtle –toothpaste replacing toothpowder ,and also by design – a man deciding to grow beard does not need a razor .While additions are active , deduction may be a passive process ;similar to dependant variable .As said earlier ,deduction – temporal in nature actually adds value to consumption-by deprivation .Classic case DEDUCTION in Indian context is impact of introduction of mosquito repellent matt (electrically operated) on leno netting , mosquito coils , ointment and so on.

Multiplication –This is by far the most crucial of the four quadrants from view point of the marketer affecting the consumption basket .In fact due to sheer magnitude it may even change the size of the basket and not only the shape and composition of products within .So important is the impact created-typically by a durable on the consumption process .Northwestern University's Mohan Sawhney has proposed concept of METAMARKET –a cluster of complementary **products and services that are closely related in minds of consumers ,but may be spread across a diverse set of industries** .The mobile metamarket consists of handsets , sim cards ,repairs ,service providers ,and a host of other services provided thru it .

While money put on purchase of car may alter consumption and deduct few products from basket ;one needs to understand the MULTIPLIER effect created on overall consumption of the family members –status elevation et al .The buyer might buy a car perfume ,napkin box ,go to a costlier food joint ,buy movie ticket in a multiplex purchase better quality clothing for family .Marketers and advertisers do understand this – if life-style advertising is any indication .**Multiplication cuts across categories ,brings large products in the gamut and have a longer term impact on consumption habits of an individual/family.**

It is important to note that **consumption drives income** holds true in case of multiplication Acquisition of a product satisfying status/self-actualization need can trigger purchases of large number of products .Multiplication process can alter the consumption basket dramatically and deduction of some items and up-gradation of others along with additions of few is a common feature of multiplication .

Division –While discussing this factor , one need to appreciate that this phenomenon is more common to the durables category than FMCGs .Mobile – a hybrid product is a case to prove point .With launch of Nokia N-96 , apple i-pod ,the long term impact on the market for watches , camera , calculator and music system need to be seen .More hybrid products commonly found in mega polis to save space as-sofa-cum bed do have a similar effect replacing a bunch of products .As a marketer , one needs to understand both the short-term and long-term aspect of division factor .In short-term , we may witness a division of attention of customer between i-pod and other products satisfying one of the needs served by the former (i-pod).In long term however we see elimination of the old goodies made obsolete by the acquisition of the new ,state art products .Marketers of such discarded products are left with no option but to improve products , change positioning or find new segments/ niches .We already witness some watches in India repositioned as jewelry by Titan

It is also important to note that acquisition of service may trigger deduction ,division process and in some cases multiplication also .This is similar to the MAKE OR BUY decision in industry .In case of a straight buy of service , few products get eliminated automatically .Example – ironing of cloths displacing electric iron ,use of services of beauty parlor removing few cosmetics from dressing table .

Another aspect of DIVISION is the usage by consumer of different products satisfying same need gets divided .For example need for listening to music may be fulfilled by music system , an i-pod ,walkman and even a TV or radio .This phenomenon takes to the PUC- product usage cycle on the lines of PLC – product life cycle and various stages (applicable to durables) therein –

PUC-Product usage cycle - stages

- ✓ Honeymoon Stage
- ✓ Exhibition & heavy usage stage
- ✓ Part of life stage
- ✓ Redundancy stage
- ✓ Storage and salvage stage

Honeymoon stage- A typical customer while acquiring a long cherished durable/specialist product goes thru this stage which may start before actual shopping and end after acquisition and few usages .In some cases, the product category might be in the consumption basket and customer might be going for elevation/up-gradation purchase

Exhibition and heavy usage stage - This stage is common in case of all consumers who intend to use the newly bought product heavily and would even in some cases create an opportunity to use the same .However like honeymoon, the stage does not last longer .Experiences and feelings of customer in this stage are cleverly used by the advertisers for emotional appeals .MULTIPLIER situation is common here and few other products may be bought or services utilized in this stage

Part of life stage - After initial euphoria is over , the product becomes part of life .Now it gets lesser attention and some other products get more attention –bringing in the DIVISION phenomenon in picture .

Redundancy stage – In this stage product becomes redundant either because of too much usage or because of technology which is engaged in creative destruction .Product may still be a part of consumption basket but not at top of mind of customer .

Storage and salvage stage - At this stage , consumer does not want the product any more for consumption purpose .However it may still be lying in storage (unlike developed countries where it may be simply discarded or taken to recycling plant).There exists a huge market in big countries like India where many customers are at BOP , few others want maximum value for limited money and they are normally customers for such types of products .Unlike developed world , there exists a huge second-hand car market in India and the largest Indian Auto manufacturer Maruti Udyog ltd has a successful venture for the second-hand (pre-owned)car dealings – under banner Maruti- Truvalue .

Coming back to DIVISION , product continues to occupy place in consumption basket and if the marketer offers any buyback or exchange scheme , it may continue its place with the upgraded product .

6 .Limitations

The main limitation of the paper is the Indian context and the concepts developed may not be true in other countries where cultural backdrop might be different .

Some of the members of group called for discussion were not conversant in English language and hence vernacular language was being used.

Sample size limited However the respondents were from different parts of India ,there was an all India character to the group.

7. Conclusion

The conclusion is discussed in form of take away for marketers in particular .They are as under –

- 1- Many books, articles use the words –customer and consumer interchangeably, which is correct mostly in impulse buy but may not hold true in many cases .
- 2- Tracking of product after purchased by customer shall go a long way in better understanding of channel of consumption which is equally important as channel of distribution.

- 3- Satisfaction of customer/consumer might be instant on purchase or delayed after use/salvage .
- 4- Role of moderator is very important in Indian context. Marketers in India do realize this and Nestle has successfully promoted Maggie noodles in India by targeting the communication to the mother-customer apart from the child consumer.
- 5- Products are consumed individually in isolation or by family as a unit .
- 6- Depending upon the usage of product, it moves from one category – unifier to any of the other three quadrants.
- 7- Composition of consumption basket of different groups are different and the composition changes with change in income /number of family members and inclusion or expulsion of a product.
- 8- Marketers need to understand the Add effect so that bundling of products can be done ; also Multiply effect so that either Metamarkets can be developed or some strategic alliances can be formed with unrelated product/service marketers .

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