AN INVESTIGATION OF COGNITIVE DISSONANCE AMONGST CUSTOMERS VISITING SUPER MARKETS IN HYDERABAD CITY

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Abstract :

The theory of "cognitive dissonance" is of great importance in consumer behavior and Marketers have lots of interest in analyzing the post purchase behavior experienced by consumers. This paper has explored the presence of dissonance among the customers visiting super markets and analyzed the influence of super markets visited, frequency of purchase, expectations of customer, importance of the product being purchased, self confidence, sales persons persuasion and the cost of purchase on dissonance among the customers visiting super markets. Mean, Standard deviation and linear regression tools are being used in analyzing the data. Results show the presence of dissonance among the customers after the purchase.

Key Words: *Dissonance, frequency of purchase, self confidence, stores visited, sales persons persuasion*

Introduction:

People tend to seek consistency in their beliefs and perceptions. So what happens when one of our beliefs conflicts with another previously held belief? The term cognitive dissonance is used to describe the feeling of discomfort that results from holding two conflicting beliefs. When there is a discrepancy between beliefs and behaviors, something must change in order to eliminate or reduce the dissonance.

Cognitive dissonance is a discomfort caused by holding conflicting cognitions (e.g., ideas, beliefs, values, emotional reactions) simultaneously. In a state of dissonance, people may feel surprise, dread, guilt, anger, or embarrassment. The theory of cognitive dissonance in Social Psychology proposes that people have a motivational drive to reduce dissonance by altering existing cognitions, adding new ones to create a consistent belief system, or alternatively by reducing the importance of any one of the dissonant elements. An example of this would be the conflict between wanting to smoke and knowing that smoking is unhealthy; a person may try to change his feelings about the odds that he will actually suffer the consequences, or he might add the consonant element that the smoking is worth short term benefits. A general view of cognitive dissonance is when one is biased towards a certain decision even though other factors favor an alternative.

Cognitive dissonance can be defined as the uncomfortable tension or feelings that occur when we hold conflicting thoughts, attitudes or beliefs. Cognitive dissonance theory warns that people have a bias to seek consonance among their cognitions. According to Fastener, we engage in a process he termed "dissonance reduction", which he said could be achieved in one of three ways: lowering the importance of one of the discordant factors, adding consonant elements, or changing one of the dissonant factors. This bias gives the theory its predictive power, shedding light on otherwise puzzling irrational and even destructive behavior.

Cognitive dissonance is involved in shaping our views about people, as well as our own identities. For instance, Self-evaluation maintenance theory suggests that people feel

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dissonance when their cherished skills or traits are outmatched by close social ties (e.g. Jill, the painter feels dissonance because she is friendly with a master painter - Jill can either care less about painting, or justify her inferiority in some other way). Balance theory suggests that people have a general tendency to seek consonance between our views, and the views or characteristics of others (e.g. the religious believer feels dissonance because his partner does not believe the same thing - dissonance which the believer will be motivated to justify). People may self handicap so that any failures during an important task are easier to justify (e.g. the student who drinks the night before an important exam in response to his fear of performing poorly).

Review of literature:

Douglas R.Hausknecht and etal(2009, pg 1-9) differentiated the cognitive, emotional and behavioral aspects of dissonance and described the relationship with other purchase decisions.

Mohammed Ul Hassan khan and Muhammad Yusuf (2012, pg 1-10) said that consumer behavior can be reviewed in three phases: 1. Predecisional determinants of product preference 2. Post decisional determinants of product preference and 3. Information seeking behavior. The first two areas generally support the dissonance based predictions, while the third generally falls to support the predictions.

Mc.Guire (1996, pg 1-7)) in his study discussed six ways by which inconsistency in a customer can be created. They are: Simultaneous occupation of two or more conflicting social roles, job demands, leisure time, time for attending the other issues and search and comparison effects between two or more products.

Oliver, Richard.L (1997,1-15) reviewed the free choice version of dissonance, which he characterized as having lain dormant for some time. They said that dissonance concept is stretched to the two third of the satisfaction process. The cognitions and feelings mutate into true dissonance after the decision is made. With use and experience, the dissonance dissipates and yields satisfaction or dissatisfaction.

Oshikawa S (1969, pg 44-49) stated that dissonance exists under the following 3 conditions: 1. After making an important and difficult decision 2. After being coerced to say or do something, which is in contrary to private attitudes, opinions or beliefs. 3. After being exposed to discrepant information.

Shih Yung Chou (2012, pg 199-204) explored that consumers experience a greater inconsistency between their internal beliefs of an online retailer and online reviews about the online retailer that exists. A consumer will make the purchase decision based on his/her internal beliefs when a cognitive dissonance is experienced.

Tarun Kanthi Bose (2012, pg 1-31) explored the factors that create cognitive dissonance in consumer buying decision making particularly among the consumer goods purchasers. He said that several factors are influential in creating cognitive dissonance among the customers of consumer goods. Some of them are norms, family status, religious value, customs and beliefs.

Thomas Salzberger and Monika Koller (2010, pg 5-11) studied the relationship between dissonance and their impact on loyalty and consumer behavior. It is found that the two components of dissonance like cognitive components and emotional components are significant.

Uzma Hasan and Dr. Reshma Nasreen (2012, pg 7-12) explored the implications of cognitive dissonance on varied aspects of consumer buying behavior and the factors leading to dissonance and prior to it. They argued that higher the degree of purchase involvement the lesser would the dissonance level. The more time the consumer devotes to the purchase decision, the lesser would be the dissonance.

Statement of problem:

Understanding the behavior of consumers after they consume the product or services is a key to formulate strategies which help retain target consumers. One major reason for consumer defection is the dissonance formed among the consumers who purchase newly. More the intensity of dissonance, more are the chance for customer dissatisfaction. Hence, an understanding of how affirmative the customers are after they purchase a product or service is important to develop satisfied and loyal customers. Every organization has to have data about their customers' post purchase behavior. Hence, the present study is conducted for understanding the customers' post purchase dissonance levels among customers visiting supermarkets.

Objectives of the study:

1) To study the presence of dissonance among customers visiting super markets in Hyderabad.

2) To study the influence of stores visited, frequency of purchase, expectations, importance, self-confidence, sales person persuasion and cost of purchase on dissonance among customers visiting super markets.

Sample and data:

The location for the study is restricted to the selected super markets in Hyderabad city. The criteria for selection of the respondents for the study were the customers who visit the super markets to buy any of the products. The total sample size comprised 150 customers. For the purpose of this study, a quantitative non-probability convenience sampling design was used to assess the dissonance in the customers' minds. The customers who visit super markets in Hyderabad city such as Mart super market, Spencer's super market, Ration wala, More for you and Reliance fresh are considered for data collection.

Data collection was carried out with the prior permission from the customers, to spend few minutes of time with the questionnaire. Some of the respondents were interviewed by asking the questions while they were purchasing the products. Good rapport with the customers visiting the super markets was established by giving introduction about the objective of the study, importance of their co-operation and sincere responses before administrating the questionnaire. The tool used for the primary data collection is a structured questionnaire which consists of 18 questions designed to identify the cognitive dissonance. All the questions are closed ended. Questionnaire is an agreement-disagreement scale carrying 18 statements on a 5 point likert type scale.

Data analysis and discussions:

Table: 1: Sample demographics (Page No. 62)

Table: 2: Perception of post purchase dissonance (Page No. 63)

Table: 3: Customers concern about purchase decision (Page No. 64)

Table: 4: Presence of post purchase dissonance (Page No. 65)

From the above table we can identify the presence of dissonance among customers at three instances :

1. Even though the customers are comfortable with the purchase decision they have made, there is uneasiness among customers with regard to their purchase decision.
2. The customers are seeking support by talking to their friends and family about their purchase decision.
3. Customers are also seeking support from published data about the purchased brand.

Factors influencing post purchase dissonance:

In order to study the factors which have influence on post purchase dissonance, stores visited, frequency of purchase, expectations, importance, self-confidence, salesperson's persuasion and cost of purchase are considered

as independent variables. A score of post purchase dissonance is calculated for individual cases in the sample. This score of post purchase dissonance is considered as the dependent variable. A Linear regression analysis is carried out to study the changes in influencing intensity of the independent variables on dependent variables.

Linear Regression analysis:

Model Summary

The standard approach for describing the relationships in this problem is linear regression. The most common measure of how well a regression model fits the data is R2. This statistic represents how much of the variance in the response is explained by the weighted combination of predictors like support of the respondent, uncertainty of the respondent, expected satisfaction anxiety of the respondent and forced compilation. The closer R2 is to 1, the better the model fits. Regressing consumer dissonance on the five predictors' results in an R2 of 0.528, indicating that the approximately 52% of the variance in the consumer dissonance rankings is explained by the predictor variables in the linear regression (Table 5, Page No. 66)

ANOVA

There is a good association between consumer dissonance and the various aspects like support of the respondents, uncertainty of the respondent, expected satisfaction, anxiety of the respondent and forced compilation (Table 6, Page No. 66)

Coefficients

The values of coefficients reflect the amount of change in the predicted preference ranking. Using standard coefficients, interpretations are based on the standard deviation of the variables. Each coefficient indicates the number of standard deviations that the consumer dissonance changes for a one degree change in predictor, while all other predictors are kept constant (Table 7, Page No. 66)

Suggestions:

1. Even though the customers are comfortable with the purchase decision they have made, there is uneasiness among customers with regard to their purchase decision. Such uneasiness among customers can be reduced by providing testimonials of the purchased products.

2. The customers are seeking support by talking to their friends and family about their purchase decision. This means that customers visiting and purchasing products have doubts about their purchase decisions. Such doubts can be reduced by showing advertisements wherein the friends and family members of the customer are assuring the customer about his/her choice of selecting the super market when purchase decision has to be made.

3. Customers are also seeking support from published data about the purchased brand. Hence, provide such information by way of third party certifications about the quality of the products/services from the super market and assure the customer that only quality products and quality brands are sold in the super market.

4. It was found that, as customer expectations increase, there are higher chances of dissonance among them. Hence, set up a customer feedback system that provides data about customer expectations which can be helpful in fulfilling those expectations.

5. It was also found that persuasion by salespeople has negative impact on dissonance. Hence, it is important that sales people do the sales probing in such a way that assures customers of their purchase decisions.

Conclusion:

Cognitive dissonance with regard to consumers

is showing a greater role especially with regard to the Super markets. As more number of super markets are being established throughout the city a keen observation and competitive marketing strategies have to be designed in order to retain the customers. The value to researchers interested in exploring post purchase phenomena such as dissatisfaction, complaint behavior and negative word of mouth, helps in getting more satisfied customers. Researchers interested in modeling the consumer dissatisfaction process may place greater value.

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List of Tables:

Table: 1: Sample demographics

Particulars	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Female	64	42.7
	Male	86	57.3
Age	Less than 25 years	16	10.7
	25-34 years	32	21.3
	35-44 years	50	33.3
	45-55 years	29	19.3
	55 years and above	23	15.3
Education	Illiterate	3	2.0
	Below matriculate	6	4.0
	Matriculate	43	28.7
	Graduation	72	48.0
	Post graduation	26	17.3
Employment	Private sector	72	48.0
	Government sector	43	28.7
	Self employment	35	23.3

Table: 2 : Perception of post purchase dissonance:

Particulars	Attributes	Frequency	Percentage	Mean	Standard deviation
Perception of purchase outcome	Strongly disagree	3	2.0	3.626	0.823
	Disagree	1	0.7		
	Neutral	68	45.3		
	Agree	55	36.7		
	Strongly agree	23	15.3		
Pleased with the way product is purchased	Neutral	45	30.0	3.9400	0.7348
	Agree	69	46.0		
	Strongly agree	36	24.0		
Comfortablility with the purchase decision	Neutral	48	32.0	4.020	0.814
	Agree	51	34.0		
	Strongly agree	51	34.0		
Uneasy about the purchase decision	Disagree	2	1.3	4.033	0.8388
	Neutral	44	29.3		
	Agree	51	34.0		
	Strongly agree	53	35.3		
Right choice when I purchased this product	Strongly disagree	1	0.7	4.0133	0.785
	Neutral	39	26.0		
	Agree	66	44.0		
	Strongly agree	44	29.3		
Probably purchase this product again	Disagree	1	0.7	3.906	0.780
	Neutral	50	33.3		
	Agree	61	40.7		
	Strongly agree	38	25.3		
Good deal when I purchased this product	Disagree	1	0.7	3.853	0.736
	Neutral	50	33.3		
	Agree	69	46.0		
	Strongly agree	30	20.0		
Do a good job of meeting important needs	Neutral	54	36.0	3.846	0.739
	Agree	65	43.3		
	Strongly agree	31	20.7		
I have made a wise choice in my purchase	Strongly disagree	1	0.7	3.833	0.78
	Disagree	4	2.7		
	Neutral	42	28.0		
	Agree	75	50.0		
	Strongly agree	28	18.7		
Probably pick up a consumer product to make sure of the product	Strongly disagree	2	1.3	3.893	0.828
	Disagree	2	1.3		
	Neutral	42	28.0		
	Agree	68	45.3		
	Strongly agree	36	24.0		

Table: 3: Customers concern about purchase decision:

Particulars	Attributes	frequency	Percentage
Stores visited before visiting this Super market	None	31	20.7
	1 to 4	66	44.0
	3 to 4	34	22.7
	More than 4	19	12.7
Frequency of purchase	Once or twice a week	24	16
	Once or twice a month	88	58.7
	Once a year	24	16
	Less than one year	14	9.3
Expectations on retailer	Below average	13	8.7
	Average	53	35.3
	Higher than average	62	41.3
	Very high	22	14.7
Product importance	Not very	26	17.3
	Slightly	57	38.0
	Very	34	22.7
	extremely	33	22.0
Stores visited after visiting this Super market	One	36	24.0
	2 or 3	53	35.3
	4 or 5	41	27.3
	More than 5	20	13.3
Sales persons persuasion	Not easily at all	13	8.7
	Slightly	43	28.7
	Very easily	61	40.7
	Extremely	33	22.0
Confidence about the product	Not very	11	7.3
	Slightly confident	51	33.8
	Average	53	35.1
	Very confident	35	23.2

Table: 4: Presence of post purchase dissonance:

	Statement	Mean	Dissonance
Expected satisfaction	1. I feel that I will be happy with the purchase I have just made from this Super market.	3.62	Absent
	2. I'm sure that I'll be pleased with the way product purchased from this Super Market performs well.	3.94	Absent
Anxiety	3. I'm comfortable with the purchase decision from this Super market I've just made.	4.02	Absent
	4. I'm uneasy about the purchase decision from this Super market that I just made.	4.03	Present
Uncertainty	5. I'm confident that I've made the "right" choice when I purchased this product from this Super market.	4.01	Absent
	6. I would probably purchase this product again in the future from this Super market only.	3.90	Absent
	7. I feel that I got a "good deal" when I purchased this product from this Super market.	3.85	Absent
Forced Compliance	8. This Super market and its products will probably do a good job of meeting my important needs.	3.84	Absent
Support	9. I'll probably talk to my friends or family to ask them if they think I've made a wise choice with my purchase from this Super market.	3.83	Present
	10. I would probably pick up a copy of	3.89	Present
	Consumer Reports to make sure the product or brand I just bought from this Super market received high ratings.		

Table: 5 : Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.727[a]	.528	.512	.33212

Predictors: (Constant), support of the respondent, uncertainty of the respondent, expected satisfaction, anxiety of the respondent, forced compilation.

Table: 6: ANOVA

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	17.777	5	3.555	32.233	.000[b]
	Residual	15.883	144	.110		
	Total	33.660	149			

a. Dependent Variable: consumer dissonance

b. Predictors: (Constant), support of the respondent, uncertainty of the respondent, expected satisfaction, anxiety of the respondent, forced compilation

Table: 7: Coefficients

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	-2.215	.454		-4.875	.000
Expected satisfaction	.299	.050	.353	5.955	.000
Anxiety of the respondent	.355	.053	.401	6.681	.000
uncertainty of the respondent	.251	.064	.230	3.951	.000
forced compilation	.281	.062	.315	4.531	.000
support from the others	.240	.058	.286	4.141	.000