

DETERMINING ANTECEDENTS OF INVOLVEMENT OF YOUTH FOR PRODUCT VARIANTS

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ABSTRACT

Involvement has been well documented in marketing literature. Zaichkowsky, (1986) wrote the seminal paper wherein he first presented the construct of involvement wherein he discussed the antecedents of involvement that is personal characteristics, object characteristics and situational characteristics. Involvement has been one of the determinants in variant choice decisions; however antecedents of involvement need to explore to understand the influence of other variables. Earlier studies have investigated the role of involvement in product choice decisions. Involvement also influences loyalty decisions. There has been considerable level in terms of products that are classified in terms of high and low involvement product category. Antecedents of involvement are definitely varied for different products. Present research attempted to investigate antecedents of involvement for product variants of buyers in western zone of India. Western zone of India represents cities with a high economic growth rate and also youth consisting of more than 50% of population. The relationship was explored through regression analysis and a regression model was proposed through automatic linear modeling. It was found that out of eight product variants i.e. 4 formula/ content based product variants and 4 pack size based product variants, only one product variant i.e. soft drink bottle size has a significant relationship. Product variant experience and pleasure were the principal antecedents of involvement for bottle size soft drink. Pack based product variant were intuitively believed in terms of convenience and it was more aligned for bottom of pyramid buyers. Present research has explored a new dimension of pleasure which was sought by buyers through bottle size soft drink. Also, the role of variant experience played a significant role in determining the role of involvement. The findings may be interpreted for determining the level of involvement in variant choice decisions.

Keywords: Involvement, Product Variant, Variant Choice, Bottle size soft drink, Regression Analysis

1 INTRODUCTION

Involvement has been well documented in marketing literature. Various forms of involvements have been documented viz., ego involvement (Sheriff and Cantril, 1947), advertising involvement (Krugman, 1966), purchase involvement (Slama

and Tashchian, 1985). Also an inclusive list of 23 major involvement instruments has been provided by O’Cass (2000) for a period of 40 years from 1960s to 1990s. Zaichkowsky, (1986) wrote the seminal paper wherein he first presented the construct of involvement wherein he discussed the antecedents of involvement that is personal characteristics, object characteristics and situational characteristics. Involvement has been one of the determinants in variant choice decisions; however antecedents of involvement need to explore to understand the influence of other variables. The present research is investigating the antecedents of purchase involvement of youth for product variants. Product variant is “a distinct unit within a brand or product line that is distinguishable by size, price or appearance” (Kotler, 1997). A product variant is either formula (content) based or package size based or form based.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Variety Seeking

In 50s and 60s there have been studies in the related areas using descriptors like: “activity seeking” and “curiosity drive” (Fowler 1967), “novelty-seeking” (Finger and Mook 1971), “sensation-seeking” (Zuckerman, Kolin, Price, and Zoub (1964), “exploratory drive” (Nissen 1951), spontaneous alternation (Hosada 1964), optimal stimulation level (Hebb and Thompson 1954), incongruity seeking (Hunt 1963), innovative proneness (Rogers,1957), exploration erg (Cattell 1957), venture someness (Robertson 1970), variety position (Maddi 1968), optimistic behavior, and collative stimulus properties (Berlyne 1968).

The interdisciplinary review provided by McAlister and Pessemier (1982) explored various psychological explanations for variety seeking behavior. To minimize the discrepancies in the meaning of the term “variety” , they have included switching among product variants, switching among service alternatives, switching among various activities, and so forth under the umbrella of "varied behaviors" and prepared a taxonomy.

Various researches have neglected the product category specific phenomenon and its effect on variety seeking behavior. It is observed that in addition to need for variety, the importance or meaningfulness of the task (i.e. product specific phenomenon) sometimes provide stimulation (Berlyne 1967). It means that though need for variety is an important factor; the role of and meaning of the task is vital in providing stimulation. Fiske and Maddi (1961) have provided the theoretical framework for the exploration of the product category differences in variety seeking behavior intensity.

2.2 Product Variants

Product variant is “a distinct unit within a brand or product line that is distinguishable by size, price or appearance” (Kotler, 1997, p 432 cited by Govers et al, 2005). Some researchers have used SKU and product variants as synonymous terms (Giang et al, 2009, Fader and Hardie, 1996). A product variant is either formula (content) based or package size based or form based.

The significance of product variants for manufacturers, marketers, retailers and buyers is large. Most of the variant that are introduced in the product line is to tap new buyer base and satisfy heterogeneous buyer needs. Some of the important points of introducing product variants are:

Wider needs satisfaction, influences buyers’ choice, increased brand choice, frame of reference and higher perceived quality.

2.3 Involvement

Zaichkowsky, (1986) wrote the seminal paper wherein he first presented the construct of involvement. In this paper he discussed the antecedents of involvement that is personal characteristics, object characteristics and situational characteristics. A buyer can be involved in various objects or stimuli, including for example, products, advertisements of products, purchase decisions and/or consumption of products (O’Cass, 2000) and brand decisions (Mittal, 1989) cited by O’Cass and Choy, (2008). Purchase decision related to a product or service for a buyer implies the need for buyer involvement. A buyer while products and services get involved in various objects or stimuli. Involvement is not related with one dimension for a buyer. A buyer is involved in number of instances. In fact the buyer involvement may be subjective driven.

Muncy and Hunt, (1984) have found buyer involvement to be engaged with a buyer’s value system. The value system works at the back of the buyers’ mind. It is the value system that defines the buyer perception towards product attributes related stimuli and brand related stimuli. The involvement of the buyer is therefore driven by the value system.

Different Conceptualization of Involvement

According to Houston and Rothschild (1978) and Rothschild (1979) there are three forms or types of involvement, viz, a) Enduring b) Situational and c) Response.

Research under involvement is based on above classification made by Houston and Rothschild (1978) and Rothschild (1979). Richins and Bloch (1986) have further expanded the classification by explaining the differences between enduring and situational types of involvement. Richins and Bloch (1986) proposed that enduring involvement includes all those long association of buyer with product class that

may be reflected through extensive information search, brand knowledge and brand commitment. According to Mittal (1989) situational involvement is a temporary association that allows the buyer to be associated with a situation. When the excitement of such occasion recedes situational involvement also recedes. The third form of involvement that was described by Richins and Bloch (1986) is the response involvement. Response involvement is confined to paying attention, price conscious and awareness about brand difference (Kassarjian, 1981; Stone, 1984 cited by Michaelidou et al, (2008)).

In summary, literatures stressed on the importance on the role of involvement in purchase decisions however, the antecedents of involvement especially in a variant choice decisions has not been explored.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research attempts to identify antecedents of involvement for variant choice decisions. The research was descriptive in nature. The scope of study was restricted to youth in Pune city. Youth were identified in the age group of 16 to 25 years. The researcher had followed the process stated by Ajzen and Fishbein (1975 & 1980) in the 'theory of reasoned action'. The components of 'Theory of Reasoned Action' are three general constructs.

- **Behavioral intentions**
- **Attitude**
- **Subjective norm**

The researcher conducted a survey on the listed variables through five points Likert scale. Further, the constructs were identified i.e. product variant experience, product personality similarity, pleasure, benefit convenience.

Product categories were chosen on the basis of variant availability (multiple formulations, package sizes) and popularity amongst young buyers. The choice was validated through the young buyers (business school students). The scope of the study was restricted to four product categories: Toothpaste, Ice cream, Biscuit and Soft drink. Only formula (content) based variant and package based variant were studied.

Comparison with each sub variants with content based and packaged based variants will have few respondents for each sub variants and number of variants and also the large number of attributes can explode to an unmanageable size.

Structured questionnaire - self-administered, and interviews were used to gather sufficient data from an adequately large number of respondents (435). Involvement was measured with two item statements (for toothpaste content based product

variant):

- I have a strong interest in content of my toothpaste
- I would choose my content of my toothpaste very carefully

The questions in the questionnaire were structured. Purposeful Non probability sampling plan was adopted. Purposeful non probability sampling is undertaken in non-experimental (non-interventionist – use of random selections) (Chris Hart, 2005). Under purposeful non probability sampling units are hand – picked on the basis of how they represent a population or category to which they belong.

The survey was undertaken for eight product variants with eight versions of questionnaire. The key concepts were described. Vignette approach, wherein short consumption stories are narrated so as to relate with the purpose of the research, was used. Vignette approach originates from the quantitative research tradition (Alexander and Becker, 1978) and is used by researchers to administer the survey research and also its variants are used in qualitative research while conducting personal interviews.

4 DATA ANALYSIS

The relationship was investigated through automatic linear modeling on SPSS 20. It was found that out of eight product variants i.e. 4 formula/ content based product variants and 4 pack size based product variants, only one product variant i.e. soft drink bottle size has a significant relationship.

Variable involvement was computed to log for normalizing. The model is 75% accurate and it is reliable for its accuracy. Automatic linear modeling is preferred to identify variables in terms of choosing best subset model on the basis on adjusted R2. It was found that product variant experience, pleasure and benefit convenience are significant in the model.

Product Variant: Bottle Size Soft Drink

Table 1: Model Summary

Target	log involvement
Automatic Data Preparation	On
Model Selection Method	Best Subsets
Information Criterion	-184.646

The information criterion is used to compare to models. Models with smaller information criterion values fit better.

Table 2: Model Building Summary

Target: loginvolvement

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Adjusted R Square	0.747	0.741	0.724	0.722	0.68	0.677	0.667	0.645	0.563	0.562
Product Variant Experience transformed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes		
Pleasure transformed	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes					Yes	Yes
Benefit Convenience transformed	Yes	Yes			Yes		Yes			Yes
Product Personality Similarity transformed		Yes	Yes		Yes	Yes				

The model building method is Best Subsets using the Adjusted R Square criterion. A checkmark means the effect is in the model.

Table 3: Regression Analysis for Involvement of buyers for soft drink bottle size

Independent variables	Dependent variable		Beta	t-value	p-value*
Product variant experience	Involvement		.583	5.420	.000
Product personality similarity			.049	.502	.618
Pleasure			.349	3.053	.004
Benefit convenience			-.119	-1.377	-.176

Notes: *p<= .005; Adjusted R2 = .730; Standard error of estimate = .13770

5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Earlier studies have investigated the role of involvement in product choice decisions. The product choice decision helps in understanding the choice decision employed by the buyer during the purchase decision. The role of involvement has been underlined in the literature review especially in the context of product choice decisions and reinforcement behavior. Involvement also influences loyalty decisions. Present research attempted to investigate antecedents of involvement for product variants. The relationship was explored through regression analysis and model was proposed through automatic linear modeling. It was found that there is a significant relationship for bottle size soft drink. Product variant experience and pleasure were the principal antecedents of involvement for bottle size soft drink.

Pack based product variant were intuitively believed in terms of convenience and it was more aligned for bottom of pyramid buyers. Present research has explored a

new dimension of pleasure which was seek by buyers through bottle size soft drink. The finding seems to be effective the role of bottle shape in choice decision amongst youth. Also, the role of variant experience played a significant role in determining the role of involvement. The findings may be interpreted for determining the level of involvement. Hence, the pleasure and product variant experience act as antecedents for the involvement decisions of the buyers. Role of the involvement has already been detailed by the researcher in its role in influencing loyalty or buyer reinforcement behavior.

According to Giang et al, (2009) large size variants appeal more to the older buyer segment and small size variant appeal more to a young buyer segment. The present research has contributed in identifying the pleasure appeal of young buyers towards bottle size soft drink. It has also demonstrated in identifying the antecedents of involvement i.e. the role of pleasure and product variant experience in product variant choice decisions. The marketers and practicers may adopt suitable policy with respect to pleasure and variant experience to increase the level of involvement.

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