



GLOBAL JOURNAL OF MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS RESEARCH
Volume 12 Issue 20 Version 1.0 Year 2012
Type: Double Blind Peer Reviewed International Research Journal
Publisher: Global Journals Inc. (USA)
Online ISSN: 2249-4588 & Print ISSN: 0975-5853

An Indepth Analysis of Variables Affecting Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance

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Abstract - The research paper emphasizes on the need of assessing those variables which are responsible for affecting the levels of cognitive dissonance in the consumer behaviour. The paper signifies the impact that the family and friends have in the post purchase dissonance levels of the consumer. The results revealed that more the influence of family and friends in the decision making process, more degrees of dissonance will be felt by the consumer. The paper also depicts that the personality of the shopper would also affect the levels of dissonance. The confident shopper would experience lesser level of dissonance whereas a confused shopper would experience lower level of dissonance. Likewise, the purpose for which the product is to be used will also have an impact on the levels of dissonance. If the product is being purchased for some special purpose, then the dissonance level would be higher.

GJMBR-A Classification : JEL Code : D11



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An Indepth Analysis of Variables Affecting Post Purchase Cognitive Dissonance

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Abstract - The research paper emphasizes on the need of assessing those variables which are responsible for affecting the levels of cognitive dissonance in the consumer behaviour. The paper signifies the impact that the family and friends have in the post purchase dissonance levels of the consumer. The results revealed that more the influence of family and friends in the decision making process, more degrees of dissonance will be felt by the consumer. The paper also depicts that the personality of the shopper would also affect the levels of dissonance. The confident shopper would experience lesser level of dissonance whereas a confused shopper would experience lower level of dissonance. Likewise, the purpose for which the product is to be used will also have an impact on the levels of dissonance. If the product is being purchased for some special purpose, then the dissonance level would be higher.

For ages, consumer behaviour has been analysed and studied in great detail to understand and assess the minds of the consumers as they embark on to purchase goods for their consumption. Companies world over have been spending million of rupees on advertising and other promotional strategies to lure the undecided customers towards themselves. The whole consumer decision making process is quite complex for the companies to comprehend and each of them tries to lay down a structural pattern which they feel the consumers follow while deciding which product to purchase. However, for the companies the first task always remain to inform their customers about their products and to keep the information interesting and attractive enough to make them purchase the product.

As the customers are targeted by the producers educating them about the positive qualities of their products, they get confused about which producer to follow and which not to follow. This confusion about making a right purchase decision and deciding the right product to buy has been defined as 'cognitive dissonance' by the researchers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Cognitive dissonance is being defined as the result of the tension which occurs when there is found to be a discrepancy between what the consumer believes in and information which contradicts that belief (Festinger, 1957). The review of the merits and demerits of the product post its purchase is a natural phenomena of human buying behaviour. Hence once the goods are purchased and if they don't adhere to the satisfaction

levels the consumers had expected from them that would create contradictory thoughts in the minds of the consumer regarding the performance of the products leading to dissonance. A consumer is bound to be dissonant if there is a discrepancy between the satisfaction levels he had expected from a product and between the satisfactions; he actually received from the product. It has also been argued that cognitive dissonance not only comprises of cognitive elements but emotional elements as well (Sweeney, Hausknecht and Soutar, 2000). The consumers can find themselves to be emotionally dissonant as well if they are emotionally connected to the product. Many researchers have argued that cognitive dissonance is mainly experienced through psychological discomfort (Elliot and Devine, 1994). After the purchase gets completed, the consumer might feel that he didn't require the product in the first stage and he could have done without purchasing it (Sweeney, Hausknecht and Soutar, 2000). This thought arises when the consumer starts questioning his own wisdom that whether or not he made the right decision by purchasing the product. The entire process will end up with the consumer feeling dissonant over his purchase. However, it has also been noted by many researchers that when the purchase gets completed and the consumer starts assessing the negative attributes he purchased along with buying the product and positive attributes which he forgo of the products he dint purchase create dissonance in his mind (Kassarjian and Cohen ,1965). Many consumers are also supposed to be susceptible to the feelings of post purchase dissonance if they feel that their purchase decisions have been influenced by the arguments given by the salespersons which made them buy the product (Cummings & Venkatesan, 1976). If the consumers have a certain preconceived notions about a product and if they come back home after buying a product which they feel was entrusted upon them by the salesperson, their level of dissonance felt might be higher. However, a number of researchers argued against this and stated that ultimately it is a buyer's decision to make the final purchase, so claiming that a consumer's purchase decision which gets influenced by salespeople creates more dissonance cannot be correct in a long run (Oshikawa, 1970). It has also been studied that the greater the number of alternatives available with the consumer where he can weigh the positive and the negative attributes of the products, the greater the

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dissonance experienced. Once the consumer starts experiencing the pangs of cognitive dissonance, he tries to reduce it by providing himself with such information which can be used to reducing dissonance, e.g. a dissonant consumer can approach his friends and family to get assured that the purchase he has made is indeed the correct purchase.

Many researchers have also claimed the presence of the cognitive dissonance not only in the post purchase stage but in the pre purchase stage as well where the myriad of product options which are provided to the customer through the various advertising tools and promotional strategies instill confusion in him regarding which product to purchase and which not to purchase (Koller and Salzberger, 2007). Cognitive dissonance has proved to be a major marketing obstacle for the marketers all over the world as well. They seem to be having difficult time coping with the changing variations in the degree of dissonance felt by the consumers as they move from the pre purchase stage to the post purchase stage. Keeping a tab on the dissonance levels of the consumers remain a prerogative of the marketers as they feel that they can lose their loyal clientele to the effects of dissonance. The companies need to assure their customers that they have indeed made the right purchase from time to time to avoid the risk of them doubting their decisions. One of the most imperative tasks being hurled at the after sales team of any company is to keep the dissonance levels of the consumers in control so that they don't switch to other brands.

II. THE HYPOTHESES

A number of researches have been conducted by researchers worldwide to analyze the impact of cognitive dissonance on the decision making behaviour of the consumers. This paper will also try to identify those variables through constructive hypotheses which affect the variations of dissonance felt by the consumers.

Many a times consumers complain that post purchase of their buying transactions, they might feel higher levels of dissonance if their peer group i.e. family and friends don't approve of their purchases. If the family or friends suggest that the purchase made by the said customer is not up to the mark, then the consumer might feel that he has made the wrong purchase. However, there have been contradictions in this claim as well and many researchers have also observed that many a times the consumers don't get suspicious about the purchases they have made even if their peer group doesn't approve of their purchases.

H₁ : If my family and friends influence my purchase, I would experience lower levels of post purchase dissonance

Cognitive dissonance has always been linked with the psychological complexities being faced in the consumer behaviour. Although, the personality trait of the shopper is also linked with the fact that whether or not, he experiences dissonance post his purchase transaction. A number of researches have observed that the level of cognitive dissonance is also based upon the type of a shopper, the consumer is. As per the researchers working on the topic of cognitive dissonance, it has been claimed that a confident shopper won't doubt his choice of purchase post transaction as well as he would remain confident of the prior interrogation he has conducted before buying the product whereas, a confused shopper will experience higher levels of post purchase dissonance and would keep on questioning his decision. However, studies also prove that personality of a shopper cannot be linked with the variations of cognitive dissonance felt by him.

H₂ : A confused shopper remains confident about his purchase post transaction and experiences lower degree of cognitive dissonance

Utility of the product also plays a significant role when it comes to affecting the dissonance levels of a consumer. The purpose for that the product is used for has an influence on the levels of dissonance being felt by the consumer. If the product bought is to be used for some significant usage, the dissatisfaction arising from its non performance would be very difficult to overcome whereas if the purpose attached with the usage of the product is not very significant then the feeling of dissatisfaction arising from its non performance would be controllable. E.g. a commodity like a saree bought for mother would give more dissonance than an expensive watch which was bought to be gifted to a colleague in an office. Though saree would cost less than the watch but its value increases due to the purpose it is being used for. However, many researchers don't go by this logic as well, hence this hypotheses is being tested in this paper.

H₃ : The product purchased for significant purpose is likely to give lower levels of dissonance to the consumer

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted with the help of the questionnaire. Around 120 respondents were surveyed from New Delhi who were asked various questions regarding the levels of cognitive dissonance they go through. The sample size was selected using the non probability sampling technique known as Quota sampling. The questionnaires were distributed among the respondents and they were explained the proper procedure of getting the questionnaires filled. The respondents were given adequate time to fill the questionnaires and any confusion pertaining to a question was solved on the spot for them. Hence the

following quotas were made on the basis of gender, age, education and income to authenticate the research.

Gender Quota	Age Quota	Education Quota	Income (p.a.) Quota
Male	18-25 years	Undergraduate	Less than 1,00,000
Female	26-30 years	Graduate	1,00,000 - 3,00,000
	31-40 years	Postgraduate	4,00,000 - 6,00,000
	41-50 years		More than 6,00,000
	More than 50 years		

The data collected from the respondents was checked twice in order to discard any incomplete forms. In order to make sure that the results obtained from the research are accurate to the maximum possible level, SPSS 16 Software package was used to derive the main values so as to accept or reject the formed hypotheses.

IV. ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

The above hypotheses were tested with the help of the questions framed in the questionnaire. The first hypothesis was upright rejected. The survey conducted revealed that those consumers who get influenced from their family and friends while making the purchase decision experience higher levels of post purchase dissonance.

Kruskal Wallis test was conducted and the hypothesis that when consumers make decision under the influence of their family and friends, they feel lower levels of cognitive dissonance has been rejected. The Table 1 shows that there is a direct correlation between the consumers getting influenced from their family and friends during decision making process and them feeling higher levels of cognitive dissonance. Since the value of p was found to be less than .05, it could be rightly stated that post purchase dissonance is highly linked to the fact that whether the consumer made the decision on his own or under the influence of somebody else.

Table 1

Kruskal-Wallis Test

Test Statistics^{a,b}

	i get most influenced from family & friends
Chi-Square	13.755
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.003

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: think more about my purchase post transaction

The above table shows that the hypothesis which says that consumers who get influenced by family and friends don't think more about purchase post transaction has been rejected.

H₁ : if my family and friends influence my purchase, I would experience lower levels of post purchase dissonance

Dissonance has always been a significant part of assessing consumer behaviour. The survey

conducted revealed that the personality of the consumer is also responsible for experiencing varied degrees of post purchase cognitive dissonance. The hypothesis that the confused shopper experiences lesser levels of post purchase dissonance has been uprightly rejected. The Table 2 establishes with the help of the Kruskal Wallis test that the confused shopper is likely to experience higher levels of post purchase dissonance.

Table 2

Kruskal-Wallis Test

Test Statistics^{a,b}

	confused type of shopper
Chi-Square	11.499
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.009

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: think more about my purchase post transaction

Since the value of p is found to be less than .05, it can be rightly established that the confused shoppers think more about their purchase decision post transaction and are supposed to experience higher levels of dissonance.

H₂ : a confused shopper remains confident about his purchase post transaction and experiences lower degree of cognitive dissonance

It has also been observed by many researchers that the varied degrees of post purchase dissonance felt are also related to the purpose for which the product is to be used. The utility of the product affects the level of post purchase dissonance to be felt by the consumer. The survey conducted revealed that if the product is purchased to be used for some special and significant purpose, then its purchase would infuse higher levels of dissonance in the consumer as against a product whose purchase doesn't accompany any special reason along with it. Hence the hypothesis that if the product is purchased for special purpose, it would give lower levels of post purchase dissonance has been rejected. The mentioned hypothesis was checked using the Kruskal Wallis test, where it was observed that the value of p was found to be less than .05 and it could be established that if the product is purchased for some special purpose, then the consumers are likely to feel higher levels of dissonance.

Table 3

Kruskal-Wallis Test

Test Statistics^{a,b}

	Special purpose of purchase
Chi-Square	8.984
Df	3
Asymp. Sig.	.029

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: think more about my purchase post transaction

H_3 : The product purchased for significant purpose is likely to give lower levels of dissonance to the consumer

V. CONCLUSION

The survey conducted revealed that cognitive dissonance remains to be a significant aspect of consumer behaviour affecting the way a consumer decides on to his decision process of buying a certain product. The results from the survey conducted revealed that the cognitive levels of the consumer after the purchase can get increased if the family and friends of the consumer don't approve by it. Moreover, if the goods are purchased under the influence of family and friends, then the consumer would keep on thinking about his purchase and would remain constantly worried that if he made the right purchase since the purchase is made as per the suggestions given by the family and friends of the consumer. Personality of the consumer is also supposed to play a significant role while he experiences the pangs of cognitive dissonance. A confident shopper would remain confident about his purchase post his buying transaction as well and would not experience post purchase dissonance as much as a confused shopper would. A confused shopper would experience higher levels of post purchase dissonance as it his personality trait to remain confused about purchase afterwards as well. Cognitive dissonance is also related with the purpose for which the product is to be used. If the product is being bought for some significant and special purpose, then the consumer would attach more importance to it and would experience higher levels of post purchase dissonance. If the product is being bought for some special purpose and it is to be used for some special reason, then the consumer would feel higher levels of dissonance post his purchase transaction. Likewise, if the product is being purchased for not so special reason and the consumer doesn't attach much importance to it, then the consumer will not experience higher levels of post purchase dissonance. Cognitive dissonance is closely related to the way a consumer plans his purchase behaviour and accordingly post purchase behaviour.

VI. FUTURE RESEARCH

Cognitive dissonance in marketing has got immense scope and depth. Many interesting researches have been done on cognitive dissonance but there are still a good number of topics being left which can be studied so that more constructive results could come out of the studies on dissonance. This research paper has tried to analyze the various variables which are responsible for causing cognitive dissonance among the consumers. The paper has identified that the consumer's family and friends have an influence on the levels of cognitive dissonance being felt by the consumers, the future researchers can study that in what degree does the family and friends affects the levels of dissonance being felt on part of the consumers.

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