

FACTORS INFLUENCING CONSUMER CHOICES**Srishti Sharma****Abstract:**

“Consumer decision-making style has to do with the mental orientation or approach a consumer has towards making choices” (Sproles & Kendall, 1986).

In today’s scenario, consumer is the king as he plays an important role of a user and buyer. Globalization has made geographical boundaries insignificant. The target group of a brand is not only limited to a specific set of people but is aimed at people living in different regions and continents. For a business to be successful, it is important to take into account the needs and preferences of consumers. Due to additional pressure from the global brands, it has become imperative for the organisations to stay ahead of the emerging trends and develop an understanding of consumer buying behavior.

The study of consumer behavior focuses on how an individual makes a decision to spend the resources available to him/her i.e. time, money and efforts on consumption related products. Consumer satisfaction is of vital importance for the success of a product. Study will help the marketers to create a product and plan a marketing strategy in accordance with the tastes, preferences, mindset and the cultural sentiments of the consumers

The aim of the study is to identify different factors which influence the consumer buying decisions. We shall try to develop an understanding about their cultures, social norms and beliefs which determine the consumer choices. The research was primarily accomplished through quantitative studies like surveys that were based on the group interviews between the age group of 20-60 from the New Delhi (India) region. There were 50 voluntary participants. As cross-cultural study is a difficult task, qualitative research was also undertaken by reviewing and analyzing the articles, research papers, journals and other published information in order to gain a deeper understanding of the prevailing scenario.

The research led to the conclusion that following major factors are responsible for the choices made by consumers:

1. Culture :

“The culture is accepted by marketing researchers as one of the most important underlying determinants of consumer behaviour”. (de Mooij, 2010). Companies which act so on a global basis will find it easier to attain competitive advantage over those that do not (Hofstede, Steenkamp and Wedel, 1999).

Culture is crucial for understanding the needs and behaviors of people who share the same values system or a similar lifestyle. For a brand, it is important to understand and take into account the cultural factors inherent to each market in order to adapt its product and its marketing strategy. McDonald’s is an excellent example of adaptation. For example it has special aloo tiki burger (with Indian spices) and it does not sell beef keeping the religious sentiments of Indian people in mind.

Brands often make specific changes for the same type of product in order to target a sub-culture. Consumers are usually more receptive to the products which specially target them.

2. Society :

The society is generally divided in three social classes: lower class, middle class and upper class. People belonging to different social strata tend to have different choices and consumption patterns. For example, while choosing a food product consumers belonging to middle class and upper class generally focus more on balance and healthy food products but a consumer from the lower class will be more focused on price. Poor people will only go for necessity items while their rich counterparts will go for luxury and comfort. For example, a consumer may buy luxury brands like Dior or Fendi as a mark of their social status.

3. Social groups :

The social groups to which a consumer belongs also influence his choices. A consumer plays different roles within their social groups; such as:

- The initiator: the person who suggests buying a product or brand
- The influencer: the person whose point of view or advice will influence the buying decision of other people. It may be a celebrity who is hired by as brand ambassador to promote a certain product.
- The decision-maker: the person who will choose which product to buy. For example in a family wife may be a decision maker for buying household goods.
- The buyer: the person who will buy the product i.e. the consumer.

4. Family :

“Family as a consuming and decision making unit is a central phenomenon in marketing and consumer behavior” (Commuri and Gentry). Family is the most influencing factor for an individual. It is here a person acquires values and develops attitudes and opinions on various things. For example in a conservative family drinking may be considered a vice but in some it is a norm. Some parents teach their children how aerated drinks are harmful for them thereby inculcating the importance of making healthy choices. Hence, it is important for the brands to be seen as a family brand. “Children automatically learn by observing the consumption patterns of their parents and will have the similar consumption behavior in the future” (Lamb et al).

5. Age :

Tastes in apparels, eateries, household goods and recreational activities are generally age related that changes over a period of time. Age is an important factor that influences the buying behavior of customers. A family having young children will go for healthy and child friendly products. Young people will buy products for their brand value or innovative technology. According to Lamb et al, “The family life cycle (FLC) is a series of stages determined by a combination of age, marital status, and the presence or absence of the children”.

6. Purchasing power :

The purchasing power of an individual has a decisive influence on their purchasing decisions which are based on income and capital. If the income and savings of a customer are high then they will go for luxury brands and products whereas a person with low income and savings will purchase inexpensive and necessity products. “The super rich can afford any luxury branded product they desire. But what adds greatly to the desirability of that brand or product is not being able to get it. Genuine rarity and unattainability has a particular appeal for this group” (Margaret Johnson).

7. Lifestyle:

According to Kotler et al, “Lifestyle is a person’s pattern of living as expressed in his or her activities, interests and opinions”. “Lifestyle captures a person’s whole pattern of acting or interacting in the world more than profiling a person’s social class or personality” (Kotler). Lifestyle refers to the way a person lives in a society and is expressed by the things in his/her surrounding. The lifestyle of an individual includes interests, values and opinions which influence his purchasing decisions. For example, a consumer with a healthy and balanced lifestyle will prefer to eat organic products. They will tend to buy products such as exercise equipment, sports shoes, track suits etc.

8. Occupation:

“A person normally buys goods that suit his occupation” (Jain). The nature of job of a buyer has direct influence on the products and brands that he/she chooses for him or her. The occupation of a person has significant impact on his buying behavior. For example a marketing manager of an organization will always prefer the premium brands that are compatible with his designation like business suits, luxury

cars; whereas a low level worker in the same organization will purchase working clothes and an affordable vehicle. A student will go for casual clothes while a person teaching in a school/college will go for formal clothes.

9. Brand loyalty:

“If beauty is in the eyes of the beholder, value is in the mind of the consumer” (Michele Jennae). Some brands have a loyalty base. They have earned the trust of the consumer and are popular generation after generation thereby keeping a customer base. For example in India Maruti-Suzuki has been able to win the trust of customers and has been the first choice for many consumers, despite having various competitive choices in the market. Some brands are able to develop an emotional connect with the consumers.

10. Accessibility:

Certain products are user friendly and despite having a higher price; consumer chose this product for their convenience. I phone is one such example. Despite being priced very high, it is considered user friendly and consumer are ready to pay a price for their convenience.

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