

Analysis of factors influencing consumer engagement in retail in rural and urban areas of Rajasthan**Himanshu Mahobia****Research Scholar, Suresh Gyan Vihar University, Jaipur****Dr. Trilok Kumar Jain****Professor, Suresh Gyan Vihar University, Jaipur****Address: Dr. T.K. Jain, Suresh Gyan Vihar University, Mahal, Jagatpura, Jaipur****Abstract****Background**

Consumer Engagement is the recent phenomenon in retail as the concept is being extended from the area of online marketing to retail market. This is also an emerging concept which needs to be developed as few researches have attempted to identify consumer engagement in retail. A research study has been conducted by the authors on identification of major dimensions of consumer engagement and the factors that influencing consumer engagement as well as these dimensions in retail stores.

Research Objective

The research objective of the study was to identify the major factors influencing consumer engagement in retail in rural and urban areas of Rajasthan.

Research Methodology

An elicitation study was conducted initially to identify the major factors that are likely to influence consumer behavior in retail stores and 13 major factors were identified as a result of these elicitation studies. A sample size of 720 respondents were chosen with 360 respondents from six major cities of Rajasthan and 360 respondents from rural areas nearby these six cities. Regression Analysis and Anova Test was conducted to assess the impact of these factors on consumer engagement and its four major constructs/dimensions

Findings and Results

The researcher attempted to identify whether these factors have a significant influence on consumer engagement in rural and urban areas of Rajasthan. A regression analysis was conducted to assess the significance of impact of these factors on consumer engagement and its dimensions and as a result, the major factors identified to have a significant impact on consumer engagement in urban areas are Product Variety, Discounts, Air-conditioning facilities, Music and Product Displays and the factors that were identified to have a significant impact on consumer engagement in rural areas are Product Display, Discounts, Credit/Debit card facility and Fun and Entertainment.

Conclusion

Therefore, the common factors that influence consumer engagement in rural as well as urban areas are discounts and product displays which depicts that consumers in the state of Rajasthan in India are more price sensitive and are more value conscious for the product to be displayed depicting a higher value for money.

Keywords: *Engagement, Involvement, Interaction, Intimacy, Experience.*

Introduction

Consumer Engagement has been used as a tool of promoting websites like yahoo, rediff etc. and in simpler terms, it means that how much a consumer is involved in surfing at the same website. This can be measured in terms of time spent by the consumer busy with that website. Various definitions exist for consumer engagement. Some scholars even describe it in terms of consumer participation in developing the policies and services for the organization. "Consumer engagement is the process of involving consumers in the planning and development of policies and services." (Gregory, 2007). "Consumer Engagement is the turning on of a prospect to a brand idea that is enhanced by the surrounding context" (Advertising Research Foundation, 2010). Consumer Engagement is a new phenomenon in retail wherein marketers can make an assessment of the level of engagement in different retail stores and factors that affect this measure of consumer engagement significantly and capitalize on the factors that can increase consumer engagement inside the retail stores. These marketers include i) vendors of products supplying the products to the retail stores, ii) the retailer companies who produce or market their own product, and iii) the advertisers who are going for in-store advertising inside the retail outlets to create awareness and encourage impulse buying within the retail stores. Consumer engagement has been used extensively in the field of web marketing but the concept is still in the stage of infancy in area of retail management as very few researches have been conducted in this area in retail marketing.

Literature Review

Consumer engagement has been considered to be the process of involving consumers in the planning and development of policies and services (Gregory, 2007). Further Forrester (2007) has described that "Engagement theory comprises of four dimensions which include involvement, Interaction, Intimacy and Influence" as in the text of Ahuja & Medury (2010: 23 March). Involvement has been found to be a measurable aspect of the relationship between individual and the brand (Haven, 2007: Aug. 8). Zaichkowsky (1994) has defined consumer involvement as "perceived relevance of the object based on inherent needs, values, and interests". This suggests that consumer involvement is high when a consumer is aware, developing emotional bonding and is influenced and motivated by the object of consumer involvement. Customer engagement has also been described by Bingham (2014, March 28) as "the extent of customer's willingness to invest his or her discretionary time with a company for mutual benefit." (Dasteel, 2014: Mar. 28). Bingham further describes that customer engagement can be measured by "the sum of activities that build positive connections between a company and its customers, which results in greater involvement that positively impacts revenues." (Dasteel, 2014: Mar. 28). This specifies that the consumer has a higher interest in what he or she is engaged with and he or she spreads a positive word of mouth and becomes the advocate to others to use the brand or object of engagement. Supporting these facts, Myles (2011) has described customer engagement as comprising of the 4I – Involvement, Interaction, Influence and Intimacy who also describes how Forrester research identifies the difference between Customer Relationship Management (CRM) as distinct from consumer engagement is the presence of two additional areas of Customer Intimacy and Customer Influence. Goodson (2012, Dec. 14), the founder of Strawberry Frog and the author of Uprising believes that one of the most important drivers of consumer engagement is the brand trust and this is the reason that Google tops the consumer engagement index. The importance of consumer involvement as an essential element of consumer engagement is also supported by Advocacy Tasmania (2011) which describes consumer engagement as consumer involvement with a process which is active. This means that there should be a process with which consumer is involved and the process is not passive and if the process is passive, consumer engagement cannot exist (Advocacy Tasmania, 2011). Ron Faris, Head of Brand

Marketing at Virgin Mobile is of the view that the quality of the content can deepen the level of customer engagement (Gutman, 2012, Nov. 27). Wirtz et al. (2013) have referred online brand consumer engagement to the “positive influence” of consumers with online brand community Health Consumers Queensland (2012) identifies the following five elements of consumer engagement : information, consultation, involvement, collaboration and empowerment. Consumer Involvement has different interpretations and types. Rothschild (1979) proposed that involvement has three types – enduring, situational and response. Enduring involvement is a long term attachment to the product and is characterized by:

- a) Extensive Information Search (Rothschild, 1979)
- b) Brand Knowledge (Rothschild, 1979)
- c) Brand Commitment (Rothschild, 1979)

Situational Involvement is considered with as a short-term decision making process for purchase which is based on the situational factors and it subsides once a purchase is made (Rothschild, 1979). Response involvement is concerned with the consumer’s behavioral aspect and it involves both enduring and situational involvement (Rothschild, 1979). “Engagement is an estimate of the degree and depth of visitor interaction on the site against a clearly defined set of goals” (Peterson & Carrabis, 2008: Sept. 7). Consumer interaction has been further identified to be associated with interaction as John Livingston, a senior partner at Mckinsey spoke in a presentation on consumer engagement at Kellogg’s Marketing Leadership summit in November 2013 that consumer engagement is being influenced by the interaction between consumer and the organization and therefore, Chief Marketing Officers need to be replaced by Chief Engagement Officers (McKinsey & Co., 2013: n.d). This interaction becomes prominent with the increased adoption and usage of the technology. To support this fact, Anurag Banerjee, Head of Sales and Managing Director, APAC Jana, a mobile rewards firm opines that technology is having a strong impact on consumer engagement as interaction with the consumer is important part of engagement and for which a two way communication channels such as use of smartphones helps in consumer engagement and with faster adoption of these devices even in rural areas, the consumers in villages are also able to connect extremely well with the brands (Banerjee, A., 2013: Oct. 10). Since social media is a new marketing and promotion tool with increased usage of websites like facebook, twitter and linkedin, Lea (2012, Apr. 5) states that the brands engaging with the customers through social media have more loyal customers and they spend 20% to 40% more on the brand. Pine and Gilmore (1998) identified the concept of customer experience which they state in their book titled “Welcome to Experience Economy”. They stated that “as the work becomes a theater the business becomes a stage.” They identified that as the services are becoming more of a commodity the leading companies who develop a competitive advantage are focusing on developing their competencies in creating superior customer experiences (Pine and Gilmore, 1998). Further studies have identified that the creation of consumer experience by the companies is leading to stronger customer loyalty (Yu and Dean, 2001; Pullman and Gross, 2004). Some researchers link it to internal marketing wherein the companies who are able to engage the hearts and minds of the employees are able to create an experience to live with the brand thereby employees creating a greater consumer engagement (Mitchell, 2012: Jan. 30). Creating a differentiated consumer experience in a physical retail store environment and integration of this experience with the other channels through which consumer purchases leads to enhanced consumer engagement (RIS, 2011). Experiences of consumer may be positive, negative or holistic. Companies continuously try to create competitive advantage by incorporating functional and affective attributes in the product so that it creates strong and sustainable consumer preferences (Haeckel et al., 2003). These

experiences may be at the following levels: emotional, intellectual, physical and spiritual (Jain and Bagdare, 2009). Pine and Gilbert (2000) have suggested that the experiences which are considered to be great experience are engaging, robust, compelling and memorable. Forrester (2007) has described that “Engagement theory comprises of four dimensions which include involvement, Interaction, Intimacy and Influence” as in the text of Ahuja & Medury (2010: 23 March).

Therefore, as a result of this literature review, the following dimensions of consumer engagement have been isolated and studied:

- 1) Consumer Involvement
- 2) Consumer Interaction
- 3) Consumer Intimacy
- 4) Consumer Influence

Research Methodology

1) Type of Research Design: An initial elicitation study was conducted to isolate various factors that would influence consumer behavior in retail store. Thereafter, descriptive research was carried out to assess the significance of these factors on consumer engagement and its dimensions.

2) Methodology of Data Collection: Personal in-depth interviews of the respondents visiting any retail outlet in the six urban cities of Rajasthan.

3) Universe: The entire population of the six major cities of Rajasthan – Jaipur, Jodhpur, Udaipur, Bikaner, Kota and Ajmer and the nearby rural areas will be considered as a sampling frame out of which sample was drawn.

4) Sample Size: A minimum sample size of 720 respondents was gathered for the purpose of the research study so that it is representative enough of the differing socio-economic classes residing in urban areas and nearby rural areas. The reason for choosing the sample size is that for each homogeneous segment of population, the sample size of 30 is enough to represent a normal distribution and therefore from each city and nearby rural areas for each socio-economic class of the two socio-economic classes – SEC A and SEC B class being considered, this sample size sums up to 720 for the six cities and six rural areas which were equally considered for the purpose of the study and a sample size of 60 respondents were considered from each city and each of nearby rural area.

5) Analytical Tools used: Regression Analysis and ANOVA test was conducted to assess the impact of each of 13 factors isolated as a result of elicitation studies on consumer engagement and its four isolated constructs/dimensions.

Results and Discussion

The results of regression analysis for Urban and Rural Consumers are as given below:

Regression Analysis for Urban Consumers

Table 1 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.876 ^a	.767	.759	.13236

a. Predictors: (Constant), Creditanddebit, Airconditioning, Discounts, Employeebehavior, Ambience, Productvariety, Sittingandrelaxing, Productdisplay, Music, Pricedisplay, Odor, Signssymbols

The model shows that there is a stronger relation between the factors and consumer engagement as R square > 0.700 which means that the model is fitting.

Table 2: ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	20.027	12	1.669	95.268	.000 ^b
	Residual	6.079	347	.018		
	Total	26.106	359			

a. Dependent Variable: EngageT

b. Predictors: (Constant), Creditanddebit, Airconditioning, Discounts, Employeebehavior, Ambience, Productvariety, Sittingandrelaxing, Productdisplay, Music, Pricedisplay, Odor, Signssymbols

Table 3 Regression Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	2.927	1.062		2.756	.006
	Productvariety	-.116	.024	-.362	-4.878	.000
	Employeebehavior	.029	.096	.142	.303	.762
	Airconditioning	-.005	.008	-.024	-.600	.007
	Productdisplay	.087	.026	.501	3.299	.001
	Pricedisplay	-.026	.096	-.128	-.268	.789
	Ambience	-.020	.077	-.050	-.257	.798
	Discounts	.057	.034	.192	1.679	.046
	Music	-.371	.116	-1.934	-3.206	.001
	Odor	.164	.133	.885	1.226	.221
	Sittingandrelaxing	-.013	.200	-.079	-.066	.947
	Signssymbols	.344	.426	1.356	.807	.420
	Creditanddebit	-.045	.029	-.305	-1.538	.125

a. Dependent Variable: EngageT

Table 4 Excluded Variables^a

Model	Beta In	T	Sig.	Partial Correlation	Collinearity Statistics
					Tolerance
1 Funandentertainme t	b000

a. Dependent Variable: EngageT

b. Predictors in the Model: (Constant), Creditanddebit, Airconditioning, Discounts, Employeebehavior, Ambience, Productvariety, Sittingandrelaxing, Productdisplay, Music, Pricedisplay, Odor, Signssymbols

The results depict that since the pvalue<0.05 for the factors – product variety, air-conditioning facilities, product display, discounts and music, these factors are found to have significant influence on consumer engagement

Regression Analysis for Rural Consumers

The results of regression analysis for rural consumers in Rajasthan were as follows:

Table 5 Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.339 ^a	.115	.081	.44749

a. Predictors: (Constant), Creditanddebit, Airconditioning, Employeebehavior, Discounts, Ambience, Productvariety, Signssymbols, Pricedisplay, Productdisplay, Funandentertainmet, Music, Sittingandrelaxing, Odor

Table 6 ANOVA^a

Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	8.976	13	.690	3.448	.000 ^b
	Residual	69.285	346	.200		
	Total	78.261	359			

a. Dependent Variable: EngageT

b. Predictors: (Constant), Creditanddebit, Airconditioning, Employeebehavior, Discounts, Ambience, Productvariety, Signssymbols, Pricedisplay, Productdisplay, Funandentertainmet, Music, Sittingandrelaxing, Odor

Table 7: Coefficients^a

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	2.551	.205		12.438	.000
Productvariety	-.005	.025	-.012	-.201	.841
Employeebehavior	.033	.020	.099	1.690	.092
Airconditioning	-.061	.022	-.161	-2.795	.245
Productdisplay	.084	.020	.265	4.238	.000
Pricedisplay	-.014	.023	-.035	-.580	.562
Ambience	.066	.029	.128	2.275	.249
Discounts	.038	.027	.073	1.371	.001
Music	-.014	.029	-.035	-.480	.632
Odor	.033	.030	.088	1.106	.269
Sittingandrelaxing	.019	.025	.055	.764	.445
Signssymbols	.018	.026	.044	.701	.483
Funandentertainmet	-.093	.027	-.237	-3.457	.001
Creditanddebit	.039	.020	.134	1.991	.047

a. Dependent Variable: EngageT

The above results show that the factors that have pvalue<0.05 in rural areas of Rajasthan are product displays, discounts, fun and entertainment, music and credit and debit card facilities.

Model of Consumer Engagement

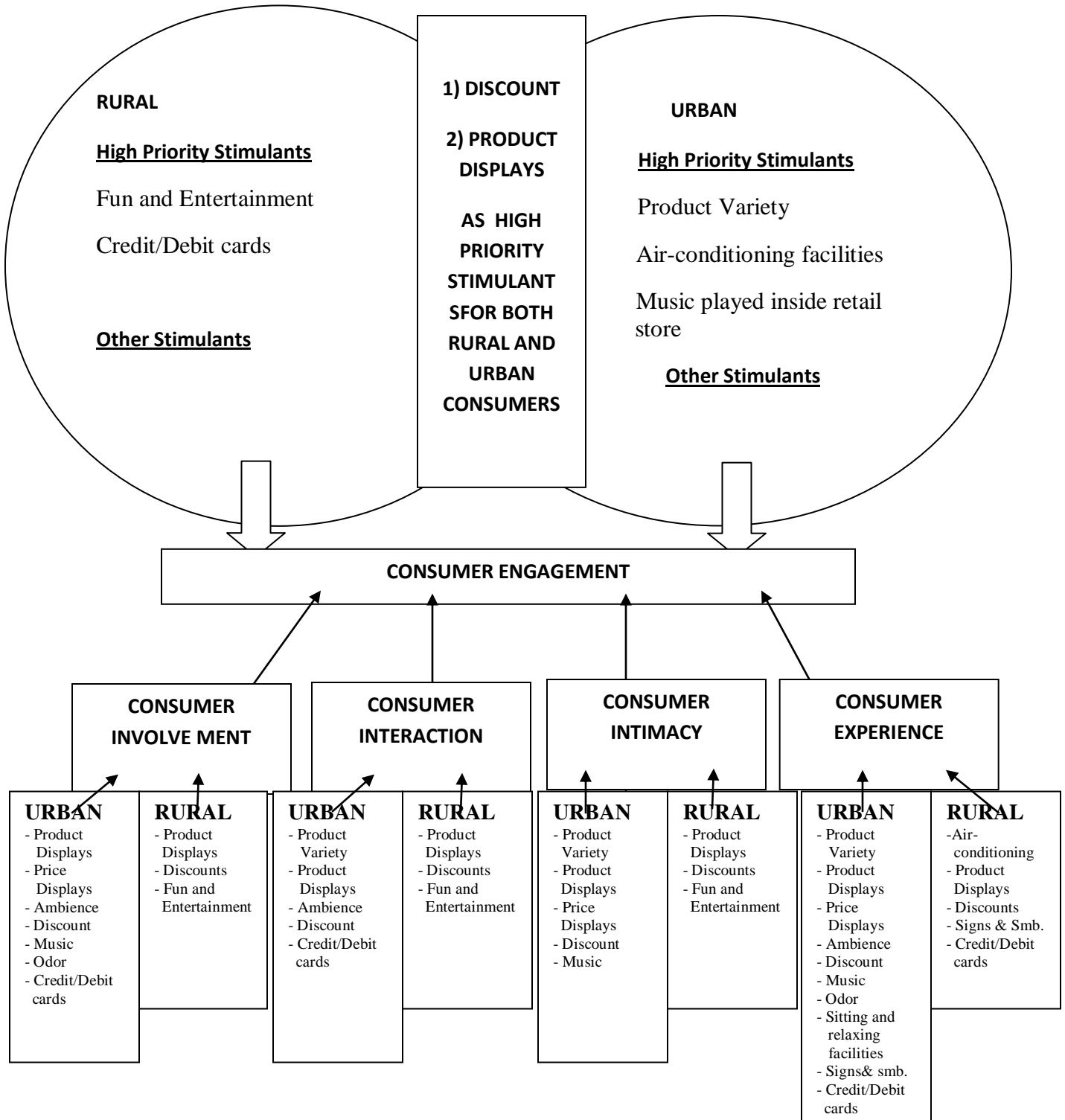
Based on the analysis, a conceptual model is proposed for the consumer engagement wherein the retailers can establish a retail store and build its reputation by engaging the consumers. The model shall be based on the following assumptions:

- 1) This model of consumer engagement is applicable only to mass merchandise retailers although the retail store may sell some products at premium prices but is not for the exclusive, specialty or luxury retail stores.
- 2) It is assumed that the consumer is a rational being and is not irrational.
- 3) The model assumes that the factors stimulating consumer engagement may not be limited to the high priority stimulators or stimulating factors and the high priority factors acting as tools of consumer engagement may change from time to time.
- 4) This model assumes that all other environmental factors are constant and there will be no change in the politico-legal environment and socio-cultural environment.

This model states that there are external stimulating factors that are related to physical evidence of the retail store that may act as tools of consumer engagement differentiating between stimulating factors in urban areas and stimulating factors in rural areas resulting in stimulation of four dimensions of consumer involvement, interaction, intimacy and experience which together cause consumer engagement specifying high priority stimulants for these dimensions and for the overall consumer engagement. The model can be diagrammatically be represented as given below:

MODEL OF CONSUMER ENGAGEMENT

STIMULATING FACTORS



Conclusion

Consumer Engagement concept has been evolved in the field of web marketing but has been of low importance in the field of retail marketing. Very few studies have been conducted to measure consumer engagement specifically in the retail sector. The researcher attempts to identify the major constructs in consumer engagement and the factors that influence consumer engagement in retail. The researcher identified four major constructs of consumer engagement – Consumer Involvement, Consumer Intimacy, Consumer Experience and Consumer Interaction which together constitute the measure of consumer engagement. These dimensions of consumer engagement were arrived at after undergoing extensive literature review where the various dimensions were shortlisted into seven major dimension which led to a conclusion that four major dimensions of consumer engagement are valid. A lot of indepth studies have gone into consumer involvement and the focus of researchers has been to identify it as a major dimension of consumer engagement as it involves both situational involvement and enduring involvement that leads to an emotional connection with the brand. The researcher has identified these major dimensions to identify the impact of different factors on consumer engagement. Organized Retail has not much evolved in India but in the forthcoming time, the entry of foreign players may lead to identification of factors that can engage consumers in retail. Therefore, the retailer needs to focus on involving the consumers, developing intimacy with the consumers, creating a great consumer experience and interacting with consumers on frequent basis.

The factors identified to have a significant impact on consumer engagement in urban areas are Product Variety, Discounts, Air-conditioning facilities, Music and Product Displays and the factors that were identified to have a significant impact on consumer engagement in rural areas are Product Display, Discounts, Credit/Debit card facility and Fun and Entertainment. These factors acting as tools for engaging urban consumers can be concluded to have the following impact on consumer engagement

Factors Acting as Tools of Consumer engagement for Urban and Rural consumers

The urban consumers needs are modern and the results show that the factors work as follows:

- 1) Product variety – Consumer in urban areas are more concerned about the quality of the products and therefore, variety of products available in the retail store is highly important factor that can engage them because a larger product variety will provide them the options to choose from whereas rural consumer is not concerned about the larger product variety but the products that the rural consumer is habituated to.
- 2) Discounts – Indian market is a mass market and any discount or low prices attract consumer's attention and if the discounts are higher and many brand and retail stores are providing this discount, the consumer will always evaluate where he or she can get the product at the lowest prices and better value for money. Both the rural and urban consumers are highly engaged with a retail stores if they provide discounts. The urban consumers will be more concerned about the discounts so as to find out price and quality trade off wherein the urban consumer will be more desirous of price in terms of quality of products and would even accept high prices if better quality product is provided but with discount on the maximum retail price whereas rural consumer will be more concerned with

- discounts and product offering at lower prices and not be concerned with increase of prices with increase in quality of products.
- 3) Air-conditioning facilities – In a state like Rajasthan where the temperatures have extremes and there is a strong heat wave in summer, an air-conditioner inside the retail store is engaging the consumers in the urban areas but is not having a significant impact in the rural areas since the rural consumer is not concerned with air-conditioning but the product and its prices.
 - 4) Product displays – The consumer wants a complete knowledge about the product before its purchase and the display of the product and its information is highly important for the urban as well as rural consumers. With increasing awareness even among rural consumers with penetration of smart phones, the rural consumers also wants to get the product experience and therefore its display becomes important.
 - 5) Music played inside the retail store – Although for rural consumer, this factor is insignificant but the urban consumers feel more modern if a soft music is played inside the retail store which makes them feel that they have visited a modern retail store as opposed to a traditional retail store and therefore, this factor acts as another tool of consumer engagement for urban consumers.
 - 6) Credit and debit card facilities – This factors acts as tool of consumer engagement specially in rural areas because the rural consumers are more fond of paying in terms of credit facility being offered to them or paying through debit or credit card as they feel more modern if they carry an ATM card or debit or credit card and are able to swipe them at the retail store to make payments. For urban consumers, this not the engaging factor as it is normal to have a debit or credit card and swipe when they do not carry cash and therefore, this factor has low importance.
 - 7) Fun and Entertainment – The rural consumer derives pleasure out of the fund and entertainment facilities inside the retail stores and find the activities organized for the purpose highly engaging but the urban consumers do not feel any special impact of such facilities inside the retail stores as the urban consumers have lot of other avenues and media for entertainment including amusement parks, malls, gaming zones, premium cinema houses, various parks and other avenues.

Further analysis was conducted to know the impact of these factors on the dimensions of consumer involvement, consumer interaction, consumer intimacy and consumer experience. Therefore we can conclude the factors that impact all these dimensions in urban and rural areas as given below.

Factors Acting as Tools of Consumer Involvement

In urban areas, the factors that were found to have a significant impact on consumer involvement include Product Displays, Price Displays, Ambience and store atmosphere, Discounts, Music, Odor, Credit and Debit card facilities.

In rural areas, the factors that were found to have a significant impact on consumer involvement are Product Displays, Discounts and Fun & entertainment.

Factors Acting as Tools of Consumer Interaction

In urban areas, the factors that were found to have a significant impact on consumer interaction include Product variety, Product Displays, Ambience and store atmosphere, Discounts, Credit and Debit card facilities.

In rural areas, the factors that were found to have a significant impact on consumer interaction are Product Displays, Discounts and Fun & entertainment.

Factors Acting as Tools of Consumer Intimacy

In urban areas, the factors that were found to have a significant impact on consumer intimacy include Product Variety, Product Displays, Price Displays, Discounts and Music.

In rural areas, the factors that were found to have a significant impact on consumer intimacy are Product Displays, Discounts and Fun & entertainment.

Factors Acting as Tools of Consumer Experience

In urban areas, the factors that were found to have a significant impact on consumer experience include Product Variety, Product Displays, Price Displays, Ambience and store atmosphere, Discounts, Music, Odor, Credit and Debit card facilities, Sitting and relaxing facilities inside the retail store and Signs and Symbols guiding the consumers.

In rural areas, the factors that were found to have a significant impact on consumer experience are Air-conditioning facilities, Product Displays, Discounts, Signs & Symbols and Credit and debit card facilities.

The factors identified to impact consumer engagement are high priority factors but these may change from time to time with changing consumer needs and social structure and there is a need of continuous research in the field of consumer engagement in Retail. The results of the analysis are susceptible to change in case of changing socio-cultural, economic and political scenario and therefore, the need is for conducting a continuous research on the consumer engagement and its constructs.

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