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- Schemenner, R.W., Huber, J.C. and Cook, R.L. (1987), "Geographic Differences and the Location of New Manufacturing Facilities," Journal of Urban Economics, Vol. 21, No. 1, pp. 83-104.

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EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF INFORMATION SOURCES OF APPAREL SHOPPERS IN COIMBATORE CITY

P. RADHIKA
ASST. PROFESSOR

PSG COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCE(AUTONOMOUS)
COIMBATORE

ABSTRACT

The main motive to conduct this research is to explore the various sources of information which facilitates customers in the buying process of apparels. Since India is witnessing a strong Retail Revolution in the past few years, this paper might be useful and may contribute to retail managers in devising an effective marketing strategy to increase sales and in turn profit. This empirical research uses both primary and secondary data and the data collected using structured questionnaire were analysed using SPSS statistical package. Responses were obtained from a total sample of 126 respondents using store intercept technique. Twelve variables identified through this study is compressed and reduced to four latent factors namely Fashion Source, Professional Advice, Media source and Personal Source by using Factor Analysis with Varimax rotation method. The result indicated that the customers are more fashion-oriented keeping in tune with the latest trends and styles. The survey finds its applicability and implications to retailers store managers.

KEYWORDS

Apparel, Fashion Source, GDP, Information Sources, Professional Advice.

INTRODUCTION

The textile and apparel industry is one of the largest and the most important sectors in the Indian economy in terms of output, foreign exchange earnings and employment. It contributes approximately 14% to India's industrial production, 4% to the country's GDP and 17% to the country's export earnings. It provides direct employment to over 35 million people and is the second largest provider of employment after the agricultural sector. Thus the development of this sector has an overall impact on the economy. The Indian textile and apparel industry contributes approximately 4% to the global textile and apparel market. Since the textile industry has such economic importance, it has always attracted the Government's attention. Therefore, the Government has introduced policies such as the "Technology Upgradation Fund Scheme" (TUFS), "Scheme for Integrated Textile Parks" (SITP), low excise duty, high import duty to discourage imports and "National Textile Policy" to develop the textile sector (Aniruddha Akarte, Bharat Meghe & Amishi Arora, 2012 pp 1-2). For many years fashion has been an area of interest in consumer research. Fashion is a driving force that shapes the way we live – it influences apparel, hairstyles, art, food, cosmetics, cars, music, toys, furniture and many other aspects of our daily lives that we often take for granted (Solomon Michael R., Rabolt Nancy J., 2002). Shopping for clothes is one of the popular past times among people from all ages, different genders and cultural backgrounds. According to the proliferation of design and image in the clothing sector, consumers need to take serious consideration during the buying processes (Apawan Lerkpollakarn & Ardiporn Khemarangsarn, 2012). Moreover Understanding the sources of influence that drives this lucrative target segment to adopt fashion products, therefore, turned out to be an important area for marketing researchers in order to trace the possibilities of using the major sources of influence as a tool for better marketing management (Priyanka Pega & Brajesh Kumar, 2013 pp 33). Hence this research was carried out to explore the various sources of seeking information about the purchase of apparels.

LITERATURE REVIEW

In the consumer behaviour literature (Safeik 2006), consumer information sources are generally discussed within the context of consumer search behaviour (Loudon and Della Bitta 1993; Mowen and Minor 1998). The literature suggests that information which consumers need in order to assess the alternatives that are available in the market can be obtained on two levels, namely internal and external search. The former involves the initial search being carried out by the individual, often subconsciously, drawing on past experiences and learning structures. Depending upon the type of problem encountered, the degree of internal search may vary (Mowen and Minor 1998). If the purchase process involves extensive problem solving, consumers may actively search in the long-term memory for information on brand or store alternatives. For low-involvement purchase processes, internal search tends to be highly limited. If the result of internal search is not sufficient for decision-making purposes, then the consumer moves onto the second level, making use of external information sources.

External sources refer to the acquisition of information from outside sources, such as advertisements, sales personnel and retail displays. When the need for information arises, consumers can gain information from three major areas: marketing sources, personal sources and neutral sources. Marketing sources are the entire package of marketing tools that a marketer uses to communicate product information. These sources include the product itself, packaging, salespeople, display, promotion, advertising and other sources under the control of the marketers (Hawkins, Best and Coney 2001). Personal sources include all forms of interpersonal communication covering products not under the control of marketers. These sources include family influence, friend's recommendation, word-of-mouth communication and personal observation (Tan and Dolich 1983). Neutral sources include a portion of the mass media, government reports, consumer oriented reports and publication from independent product-testing agencies. These sources are typically not directly influenced by either marketers or buyers (Loudon and Della Bitta 1993). Many researches of patronage study proved that Shopping orientations and importance of store attributes were influenced by information sources (Safeik Mokhlis 2006; Kelly S. Welker 2004; Shim and Kotsiopoulos 1992b etc.).

Shim & Kotsiopoulos (1992a) in their study reported that those customers who were single and participated in community events preferred to use personal information sources. Moschis (1976) identified the various information sources such as advertisements, friends or neighbors, salespersons, and free samples and found that these information sources differed among shopping orientations of cosmetic users. Bellenger and Korgaonkar (1980) found that recreational shoppers considered newspapers and women's magazines as their important information sources than the non-recreational shoppers. Consumers use fashion products to manage their public image and sense of affiliation or autonomy (Banister and Hogg, 2004). In this process, consumers acquire knowledge and perception towards an object from various sources of influence. Some of the important sources of influence that have a strong influence on consumers' attitude formation and change are personal experience, the influence of family and friends, direct marketing, mass media and the Internet (Schiffman & Kanuk, 2007; Loudon & Della, 1993; Robertson et al., 1984; Solomon, 2002). According to Hovard & Gengler (2001), family plays a vital source of information since it provides basic values and builds up the essential convictions. Family, peer group and culture are also important sources of influence in attitude formation and change (Robertson et al., 1984). Research also indicates that Internet advertising, which gives new dimension and unique charm to the product is a vital source in influencing consumer's attitude (Srivastava & Mishra, 2012).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The empirical study attempted to investigate the important sources of information pertaining to purchasing behaviour of apparel products. The study is based on both primary and secondary data. The population comprises of all the apparel retail customers across different retail formats in Coimbatore city, popularly known as the "Manchester of South India". Primary data was collected through structured questionnaire using store intercept technique. A total of 150 questionnaires were distributed randomly to the customers exiting the store in order to capture the regency effect of purchase. Out of 150 respondents, only 126 respondents completed and returned the questionnaire with a response rate of 84%.

Before drafting the final questionnaire, a pilot survey was conducted from 25 respondents to understand the clarity and legibility of the questionnaire. The variables related to information sources were extracted from extensive literature. The final questionnaire consists of two sections. First section contains the demographic profile of the respondents like age, gender, marital status, education and occupation. The second section comprises of 12 sources of information. The responses were elicited from the respondents on a 5 point likert scale (5=Always, 4= Quite Often, 3= Sometimes, 2= Rarely, 1=Never). Reliability analysis was also performed using Cronbach Alpha coefficient method with a value of 0.788 indicating this is reliable for further data analysis. Further, in order to address the objectives of the study, exploratory factor analysis was employed and was considered to be appropriate.

DATA ANALYSIS

TABLE NO. 1: DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE RESPONDENTS (N = 126)

Characteristics	Category	Frequency	Percentage
1.Gender	Male	52	41.3
	Female	74	58.7
2.Age	Below 20	8	6.3
	21 - 30	36	28.6
	31 – 40	46	36.5
	41 – 50	13	10.3
	Above 50	23	18.3
3.Marital Status	Married	101	80.2
	Single	25	19.8
4.Educational Qualification	No formal Education	1	0.8
	Primary School	15	11.9
	Certificate/ Diploma	15	11.9
	Under graduate	39	31.0
	Post graduate	30	23.8
	Professional Degree	19	15.1
	Others	7	5.6
5.Occupation	Private sector	35	27.8
	Public Sector	4	3.2
	Self employed	12	9.5
	Professional	14	11.1
	Retired	10	7.9
	Homemaker	34	27.0
	Students	16	12.7
	Others	1	0.8

Source : Primary Data

INTERPRETATION

Before analysing the data provided by the samples, it is advisable to obtain some insights into the demographic characteristics of respondents participating in this study since it provides a background for the analysis that follows. Only a few demographic characteristics such as gender, age, marital status, education and occupation are studied, all of which were expected to be important in the interpretation of the results. Demographic variables such as gender, age, income and education attainment are frequently used for market segmentation purposes, primarily because these data are the most readily available and easy to measure among individual consumers (Pol 1991).

The sample consisted of slightly more female respondents (58.7%) as compared to male respondents (41.3%). Respondents spanned the range of age categories from 18 to 51 or over, with the majority (36.5%) of the respondents included in the survey sample being between the ages of 31-40, followed by the 21-30 group at 28.6%. The next largest age group was found to be age above 50 constituting 18.3% followed by 41-50 group at 10.3%. The least age group was below 20 years of age with 6.3%.

Respondents were also asked to provide information regarding their marital status. The analysis revealed that majority of the total sample, or 80.2% of the 126 respondents included were married while 19.8% were single. Statistics on occupation showed that a large proportion of the respondents (27.8%) were employees working in the private sector while 27.0% of the respondents were homemakers. Students and Professional (e.g. doctors, teachers, engineers etc.,) respondents constituted 12.7% and 11.1% of the sample respectively. The remaining sample constituted 21.4% consisting of self-employed (9.5%), retired (7.9%), public sector employees (3.2%) and others (0.8%).

As far as the educational level was concerned, the largest percentage of respondents (31%) possessed under graduation degree while 23.8% earned a postgraduate degree. 15.1% had obtained professional degree. 11.9% of the total respondents had attained some Certificate or diploma while the same 11.9% had completed primary school education. The remaining sample had no formal education (6.4%). The high proportion of respondents having a high education level was due to the urban nature of the sample. Education was found to be a component of patronage in some studies (Crask and Reynolds, 1978; Shim & Bickle, 1994; Kopp, et al, 1989).

Table 1 presents the key demographic characteristics of the sample in the study. In summary, the sample included in this study appeared to be elders aged between 31 and 40, more educated and includes more females, who proved that they are the one who often does shopping. This finding replicated the finding of O'Cass (2004) which stated that female consumers are more involved with fashions than male consumers. The research by Hsiao, C., & Dickerson, K., 1995 indicated that as education levels increase, consumers are more discerning in their apparel purchases.

FACTOR ANALYSIS ON INFORMATION SOURCES

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy test of sample adequacy was 0.707 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was significant at $p < 0.05$ proving that the data were therefore deemed appropriate for factor analysis. Principal components factor analysis with a Varimax rotation was used to factor the various twelve information sources which are grouped into four factors explaining 62 percent of the total variance. Each one of these factors had an eigenvalue which was greater than one.

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.707
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	498.056
	df	66
	Sig.	.000

TABLE NO. 2: KMO AND BARTLETT'S TEST FOR INFORMATION SOURCES

Factor and Variables	Factor loadings	Alpha	% of Variance
Factor 1 :Fashion source			
1.Fashion Catalogs	0.882	0.866	23.765
2.Fashion Magazine	0.856		
3.Fashion Shows	0.848		
Factor 2 :Professional advice			
4.Sales persons advice	0.799	0.664	16.561
5.Personal opinion from shoppers	0.793		
6.Store displays/Demonstration	0.496		
7.Posters and Banners	0.445		
Factor 3 :Media Source			
8.Radio/Television	0.824	0.614	15.613
9.Magazines/Newspaper	0.793		
10.Internet	0.546		
Factor 4 :Personal Source			
11. Friends/ Family / Relatives	0.842	0.366	11.118
12.Notices/ Pamphlets	0.604		

Extraction Method: Principle Components Analysis, $p < 0.05$; variance explained 62%

The first factor explains 23.77 percent of the total variance and has three items namely Fashion Catalogs, Fashion Magazine and Fashion Shows. Thus this factor was labelled as "Fashion source" with a Cronbach's alpha value of 0.866 indicating high internal consistency. The second factor contains four variables viz. Sales persons advice, Personal opinion from shoppers, Store displays/Demonstration, Posters and Banners explaining 16.56 percent of the total variance with an alpha coefficient of 0.664. This factor was named as "Professional advice" which is corroborated with the findings of Kelly.S.Welker (2004 pp 40-41).

The third factor comprises of three variables (i.e Radio/Television, Magazines/Newspaper and Internet) which have a Cronbach's alpha of 0.61 explaining 15.6 percent of variance. Since all the variables are related to the media, this factor was conceptually labelled as "Media Source". This is reminiscent of an Information Sources identified by Kelly.S.Welker (2004 pp 40 – 41), Shim and Kotsiopoulos(1992a) and Mohammed Safeik (2006).

Finally the last factor which was coined as "Personal Source" consists of two items namely Friends/ Family / Relatives and Notices/Pamphlets explaining 11.12 percent of the variance. The Cronbach's alpha for this construct was 0.37 and the relatively low coefficient alpha rating of this factor can be attributed to the small number of items. This factor is consistent with the findings of Kelly.S.Welker (2004 pp 40 – 41), Shim and Kotsiopoulos(1992a) and Mohammed Safeik (2006).

DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

It is evident from the results of this study that among the different sources of information available (viz Fashion Source, Professional Advice, Media source and Personal Source), Fashion sources like Catalogs, Magazine and Fashion Shows contribute more in influencing the apparel shoppers of Coimbatore city. This is because of the urban nature and people have easy access to a wide variety of fashion related resources. This shows that the customers are more fashion – oriented keeping in tune with the latest trends and styles. This finding is coherent with the findings of Workman and Studak(2006) which stated the female consumers invest time and energy in learning from fashion magazines, TV programs, relatives and peer. In addition to fashion Source, the other factors like Professional Advice, Media source and Personal Source must also be taken into consideration at the time of purchasing apparels. Among the Professional advice factors, 'Sales Persons Advice'(0.79) and 'Personal opinion from shoppers'(0.793) influences consumer to a larger extent. Hence the retail manager should seriously concentrate more in this aspect and provide proper training, motivation and guidance to their sales personnel to have up-to-date current fashion and styles. Since most of the customers are attracted by the display of the store, retailers must be innovative in enhancing the display in terms of product variety, color combination, lighting and the place of display. The result proved that customers are not much interested in posters and banners to know their trendy fashion.

Under Media Source, the components that were found important in influencing customers are Radio/Television(0.824), Magazines/Newspaper(0.793) and Internet(0.546). These mass-media communications provide an important sources of information that influences the formation of consumer attitude (Shiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Therefore it is recommended to all the apparel retailers to place their advertisement in an appropriate media like Radio, TV, magazines to reach their targeted customers. From a managerial perspective, knowledge of consumers' usage of informational sources enables the marketer to target the prospective consumer and to predict media usage (Visser and Du Preez 1998).

On a final note to conclude, utmost due importance should be given to personal sources like friends, family, relatives etc., which is considered to be an effective marketing strategy to improve crowd traffic and sales.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Like every other research studies, this study also has certain limitations. This study is limited to urban apparel customers with a small sample size. This can be extended to another product category with large sample size. Further studies could focus on investigating the various sources of information related to rural consumers. This research uses only external sources for acquiring information about the product. Future research could be focused on including internal sources of information like past shopping experience. Another area for future research could be the impact of the Internet on the patterns of Information search behavior.

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