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## PROVOCATIVE SELLING TECHNIQUE AT THE BOTTOM OF THE PYRAMID IN A RECESSIONARY SITUATION: STUDY ON UNIFORM MANUFACTURING INDUSTRY - IN AND AROUND KOLKATA

**BHUDHAR RANJAN CHATTERJEE**

**PRINCIPAL**

**CAMS MANAGEMENT ACADEMY**

**SALT LAKE CITY, KOLKATA**

**SUKANYA CHATTERJEE**

**MANAGER-HR**

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### ABSTRACT

*There have been a lot of research in innovative selling- techniques for different products/services in different challenging situations, but in an unprecedented recession in US/EUROPE, when the Buyer – resistance grew manifold, Marketers had to resort to innovative selling techniques. A few Marketers wanted to focus on a large market segment, existing at the Bottom of Pyramid in Emerging Markets. A billion people as customers in India at BOP segment, should be a large enough allurements for any Marketer of a multinational corporation. The technique of Provocative Selling can well be applied to a Bottom of the Pyramid segment in emerging markets like India, where a billion people can be converted into customers as shown by C.K. Prahalad. The Researcher therefore emphatically believes that there is a huge scope for research to be undertaken at this segment of Emerging Economies, particularly India, to explore the potentiality that exists in different sectors of Industries. In the midst of hard-times, of course, Indian Economy did not face the real brunt of recession, a company whose Sales Curve is either on Maturity or Decline stage, then the company must adopt some Precision Selling Strategy to prevent the same from sliding into decline phase. To overcome the buying resistance, which is highest in the BOP segment, the present Research would pointedly prove that there are Marketing strategies and Techniques available to succeed. This has been shown in the following research.*

### KEYWORDS

Bottom of pyramid (BOP), Decline, Maturity.

### OVER VIEW OF THE PROJECT

There have been a lot of research in innovative selling- techniques for different products/services in different challenging situations, but in an unprecedented recession in US/EUROPE, when the Buyer – resistance grew manifold, Marketers had to resort to innovative selling techniques. A few Marketers wanted to focus on a large market segment, existing at the Bottom of Pyramid in Emerging Markets. A billion people as customers in India at BOP segment, should be a large enough allurements for any Marketer of a multinational corporation.

They finally found out some innovative skills and techniques to succeed in such trying situations and termed that technique as Provocative Selling Technique. Here the customers are supposed to see their competitive challenges in a new light that made firms to address Customer – Problem and Need, hitherto unheard of and unattended, even unnoticed. Consumers at the BOP segment, during such hard time, usually restricted their consumption a great deal, but still had some problem areas not assessed but needed to be addressed

One must divide a large market into smaller homogeneous segments on the basis of a few relevant Variables, such as Geographic, Demographic, Psychographic, Behavioral and Situational factors. Choosing the right and relevant variable is therefore very important. Firms were finding it very difficult to expand and even retain their market- share in such recessionary situation. In recessionary situation, this technique has been proved to be a highly effective method, which is based on the concept that the Seller has to be able to provoke the Buyer to buy. When the discretionary spending has dried up, the Vendor is even expected to find the Investment fund for the Buyer.

The Seller has to prove that the business-model, the Firm so long pursuing, is headed towards jeopardy, and to survive, he has to think out of the Box. He must do something differently. The conventional way would meet with failure and therefore he must approach on the platform of “Solution – Selling.”

The Seller must appreciate, understand the “Pain – Points” of the Customer, and must be in a position to identify the critical issues, to be able to offer his Product or Service as - Solutions of Buyer’s Needs.

### TO PLAN AN EFFECTIVE PROVOCATIVE SELLING MECHANISM AT THE BOP SEGMENT, ONE MUST ADOPT THE FOLLOWING STEPS:

- An Expert team of Marketers have to be entrusted with a target Firm or Industry.
  - Advance and genuine data of the target enterprise must be collected.
  - Area of specific interest of the Buyer/Seller must be identified very carefully and necessary Data to be collected beforehand.
  - The team must be capable of innovating a product / service.
  - The team approaches the target Buyer with a well laid-out plan and meets the right authority to convince them about the proposed value in their offer.
- C.K. Prahalad conceptualized and vehemently propagated Bottom of the Pyramid concept and stated that there lies a huge market of billions of people in Emerging Markets as potential customer, who earns less than \$ 2 a day. Prof. Prahalad also advocated as “we must stop thinking that these billion people are a drag on our economy, rather they are resilient and value-conscious consumers and an unforeseen door of opportunity may be opened.”

In view of the above concepts, the Researcher believes that there should be research oriented efforts, as to how Provocative Selling techniques can be successfully employed at the Bottom of the Pyramid, where such a huge opportunity really exists.

### CONTEMPORARY RESEARCH ON THE TOPIC

The concept of Provocative selling was originally propagated by three eminent Marketers, Philip Lay, Todd Hewlin, Geoffrey Moore and was published in the 2008, March Edition of HBR, with the objective of developing a Unique selling model to succeed in a recessionary situation. The model is different from the usual concept of Transactional or Relationship. Prof. David Brook through a publication on 21<sup>st</sup> August, 09, disagreed with the model published by David Moore and argued that:

- A. It created a Hype / Crisis situation and captured attention through gimmick.
  - B. It only could be considered as an Wake-up Call for the complacent companies as “ every successful company must have been Provocative in its selling approach at some point of time.”
- Niall Davitt in his research in March, 09 argued if “Provocative Selling is a new kind of Selling Eloquence?” He argued that “academicians should be able to help the companies to help their customers, which requires a combination of Knowledge, Skill and Expertise.”

- Keith Eades, CEO, Sales & Performance International, disagreed through his paper and stated Provocative Selling is based on the same platform of Solution Selling ( he claimed as his own concept).
- Bill Gates while explaining about Creative Capitalism said "Profit is not possible, when Business wants to only serve the Poor, as there should be an incentive for the Business and that is - Recognition, which would enhance a Firm's reputation and appeal to its customers".

Consumers at the BOP level also have a Class Culture in Consumption as "Consumption continues to serve as a potent site for Re-production of social class." as stated by Holt, while defining the Consumer Culture. Pierre Bourdieu in 1984 in his Theory of Test, showed how consumption of Food, Clothing etc. have been impacted in the US by such cultural factors. He also showed that Low & High Cultural Capital has an impact in purchase decision.

### DIAGRAM OF THE PROVOCATIVE SELLING VISE A VISE NORMAL SELLING

- Provocative Selling Curve starts at a much higher Point on X – AXIS, when considered as SALES-QUANTITY and Y-AXIS as SALES- EXPENSE.
- The curve grows at a much faster rate also with lesser degree of expenses.
- The curve in another way, speaks about high level of expense at the starting point.
- Risk of failure is very high compared to the normal curve.
- Rate of success is very high.

### VIEWS OF THE RESEARCHER

The technique of Provocative Selling can well be applied to a Bottom of the Pyramid segment in emerging markets like India, where a billion people can be converted into customers as shown by C.K.Prahalad. He argued through his revolutionary book, "Fortune at the Bottom Pyramid" and that "Framework of BOP would be an impetus for active involvement of Privet-Sector in building the Marketing-economic system to transform the BOP market." It would change the long-held belief and assumption about the BOP that it always remains a drag and cannot participate into any profitable association.

He also emphatically stated that these 4 billion people would form the next round of Platform of Global Trade.

The Researcher therefore emphatically believes that there is a huge scope for research to be undertaken at this segment of Emerging Economies, particularly India, to explore the potentiality that exists in different sectors of Industries.

Extensive research by C.K. Prahalad also showed that though the potential market is huge, success may not be so easy, if not backed by clear strategy and precise study. Researchers undertook a number of studies to prove that MNCs took easy ways to tap the BOP segment and did not succeed.

Extensive Research by A.Karmachari, Mikekbzanky, Nishant & Lalwani (HBR- March, 2011) showed that only a minority of MNCs have engaged with poor population and created business with 100,000 customers in Africa, 1 million customers in India. P&G invested more than \$ 10 million in its PUR water Purification for the BOP segment but eventually had to shift it to its Philanthropic arm, as sales struggled to reach 5% of the target. Sourcing from BOP products is not easy.

But they have concluded that the solution lies in Creating New Business Model, who can surmount multiple Business Barriers at a same time. Salient features of the theory are:

- A. It would provide clues to develop such products/services for the BOP segment.
- B. Inclusive in an emerging Economy like India, can easily be achieved through BOP marketing.
- C. Empowering BOP consumers remain a challenge for the BOP marketing success.

### ALTERNATIVE PERSPECTIVE & ARGUMENTS OF THE BOP CONCEPT

Prof. A.K. Jaiswal of IIM-A in 2005 stated that in 2002, CK.Prahalad and Stuart Hurt erroneously contended that big MNC's only targeted high – end (upper-end of the Pyramid) customers ignoring the BOP segment. His major contention was:

- A. We must avoid undesirable Inclusion and Exclusion in the BOP segment. Inclusion: Products who satisfy the basic needs: health, nutrition, education etc., which can enhance the well-being of the BOP consumers. Exclusion: Products of mere consumption purpose which do not contribute to the well being of the BOP consumers.
- B. Failure to provide goods/services which enhance their well-being.
- C. Estimate of the World Bank that in 2001, nearly 1 billion people earned less than \$1 daily, and can not be a part of any profitable market segment of a large company.

Therefore he argued that Fortune exists only at the Lower Middle and Middle of the Pyramid and not at the Bottom.

Prof. Karnani (2007) argues that if the objective is to reduce Poverty than the BOP people should not be regarded as Consumers but Producers, as he said that we need to facilitate production by Poor and support them to selective consumption for their well being.

He argued that consumption of welfare goods also helps raise their income.

Example: Health insurance reduces the risk and cost of medical treatment reducing the loss of productivity.

- Dr. Siamanis in his research in 2009 stated that "Companies should start by getting communities involved in creating, implementing and shaping the business itself. The sense of ownership brings thus, will help ensure that interest created through these company's products would be wide-spread and sustained."
- Prof. Cris went a step further and stated that "the sense of ownership across the spectrum of Education, Business and Environment is the key to consistent upward growth of an Economy."

### OBJECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH

In the midst of hard-times, of course, Indian Economy did not face the real brunt of recession, a company whose Sales Curve is either on Maturity or Decline stage, then the company must adopt some Precision Selling Strategy to prevent the same from sliding into decline phase. To overcome the buying resistance, which is highest in the BOP segment, the present Research would pointedly prove that there are Marketing strategies and Techniques available to succeed. This has been shown in the following research.

The present study of a sector, comparatively neglected and not as big to lure the big corporations, would further prove that there are many such small but high potential segments exists. Further researches are called for in larger markets with products and services of varied nature.

### CASE AND SCOPE OF THE RESEARCH

The Uniform manufacturing Industry in and around Kolkata , which has been witnessing a robust growth till 2006-07, is finding it difficult to maintain the momentum and needed an out of the box selling strategy, which in this case is : Provocative Selling.

This Research would be able to lay down a Road – Map and a Model for similar Industries in India/Emerging markets to accept the help of the Provocative Selling Technique, when their sales – curve is on the decline under a recession like situation.

Provocative Selling Technique, in spite of the criticism and controversy, stand out to be a very effective tool for success under such condition, in view of the Researcher.

We further intend to focus our Research on the BOP segment of Educational Institute, since the sample would constitute of Institutes, where the total cost of 2 year program is not more than Rs.3 lacs. In actual terms, it can be considered as the Middle of the Pyramid.

We intend to undertake a study on a number of students of a sample of Professional Institutes in and around Kolkata. We would like to measure the Influence of Uniform on - A) Student - Discipline and B) Loyalty, two most problem areas of the Institutes.



Study would be conducted for Pre – Uniform and Post - Uniform periods.

We would like to take help of PVASS – Pennsylvania Value Added System (Tribune Business News, Washington – Feb'2011. A statistical Method of measuring Influence of School Program on Academic growth of each or a group of students)

### PERSPECTIVE OF THE RESEARCH STUDY

Though the proposed Research has Retrospective elements in nature, its Findings have all the Prospective and Long term potentiality for the recession hit Industries in India.

There is extensive research by A.Karmachari, Mikekbzanky and Nishant on MNCs, engaged with poor population and created business with 100,000 customers in Africa, 1 million customers in India. P&G invested more than \$ 10 million in its PUR water Purification for the BOP segment but eventually had to shift it to its Philanthropic arm, as sales struggled to reach 5% of the target. Sourcing from BOP products is not easy.

BOP clearly is not for every company even if it is highly motivated.

Researchers came up with the following questions:

1. Can we manage Large no of Low margin, Low value transactions
  2. Can we work with Informal Markets?
  3. Do leaders have a long – term mind set?
  4. Can we keep out legacy and Over head Costs?
  5. Will Organizational Culture stifle a BOP innovation
- But they have concluded that the solution lies in Creating New Business Model.

### POPULATION AND SAMPLE SIZE

The industry under reference in its organized sector is not large in and around Kolkata.

The size of the organized sector is approximately - 36.

To arrive at a reasonable level of Significance, we would undertake the research on a sample of - 6 Firms, selected randomly. Population size of Professional Institute (Mgt & Tech) is approx. - 188.

In view of various constraints and following the concept of - Resource Equation Method. We would take a Sample of - 10 Institutes.

Sample Size of Respondents - 50 Students & 50 Parents (Randomly selected) from each Institute

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The Researcher decided to undertake a Market – Research Analysis under the concept of MAXIMUM DIFFERENTIAL SCALLING TECHNIQUE (MAX-DIFF). This popular and very handy technique was first practiced by Jordan Louviere in 1987 with very simple 6 steps such as:

- Select Attributes
- Show it to potential customer
- Plan the sample Survey
- Respondents to Choose MOST - LEAST
- Find out the SCORE
- Analyze the DATA to arrive at conclusion

We would take the help of basic concept of Conjoint Analysis to obtain estimates of the Main Effects of the Variables. The terminology of describing such conjoint importance in determining the Weights, is in terms of - SCORE/UTILITY.

We also intend to analyze the Data on the basis of Percentage and Rank Findings.

### ASSUMPTION

- A. Random Sample Distribution is Normal.
- B. Sample values are sufficiently close to Population Values.

### DATA SOURCE

Collected from Primary source through Questionnaire in English / Hindi

### DATA ANALYSIS

Data were collected through Questionnaires and therefore are Primary in nature. Collected data have been tabulated and analyzed in the following way to arrive at conclusive evidence with reasonable significant value.

(POST UNIFORM PERIOD)

TABLE -- 1

ATTRIBUTES	MOST	LEAST
1. Uniform gives a good look	+	--
2. It makes no difference	--	+
3. It gives schools Culture	--	+
4. Brings sense of Discipline	+	--

TABLE -- 2

ATTRIBUTES	MOST	LEAST
1. Looks Un Smart	--	+
2. Restrict Choice	+	--
3. Brings Loyalty to the Institute	+	--
4. Relates Disciplinary activities	+	--

TABLE -- 3

ATTRIBUTES	MOST	LEAST
1. Unnecessary	--	+
2. Creates Disciplinary Environment	+	--
3. Most Institute conform to Uniform	+	--
4. Expensive	+	--

(+ = Affirmative: -- = Negative)

## ANALYSIS

Utility Function Score of each of the Attribute was calculated on the simple Weighted Average Method. The Software in vogue, which also calculates the Scores on the basis of Hierarchical Bayesian Model was also used in the present context, both the methods were applied and the result converged as under.

Data thus collected, were put to two types of Quantity as well as Quality - analysis and tabulated as under.

The present study has been restricted to the observation / opinion of the concerned students and their parents to some extent, in view of certain constrains.

Due to such constrains as time and man-power, the present research has restricted its study on the Post – Uniform era, which would be a fair indicator and serve the objective of the study to a large extent, in view of the Researchers.

The Researchers would like to extend the study further as and when the said constrains eases out.

**TABLE – 4: WEIGHTED AVERAGE SCORE OF THE ATTRIBUTE**

Attributes	Wt. – Av - Score
1. Uniform gives good Looks	10
2. Makes no Difference	1
3. Brings Schools Culture	5
4. Brings sense of Discipline	25
5. Looks Un smart	1
6. Restrict Dress Choice	5
7. Brings sense of Loyalty	33
8. Unnecessary	2
9. Expensive	8
10. Most Institutes Conform to Uniform	10

## FINDINGS & CONCLUSION

The final scores/ findings unambiguously predict that Student – Uniform actually associates with two most Problem areas – Discipline and Loyalty and there can be the distinct solution to the problems, the Institutes have been searching all the time.

The 4<sup>th</sup> and the 7<sup>th</sup> attribute securing 25 and 33 respectively with highest scores clearly proved that Discipline and Loyalty are closely related to Institutional Uniform.

The Institutions could be impressed upon that when the said Attribute/Perception (4<sup>th</sup> & 7<sup>th</sup>) of Parents and Students has been clearly associated with the Uniform, they should implement uniform dress-code to bring Discipline and Loyalty in the Institute.

## RANKING AND TEST OF SIGNIFICANCE (2<sup>ND</sup> APPROACH)

The attributes have been broadly classified into 4 categories (securing higher scores) for precision and simplification and as follows:

1. Uniform gives good-look.
2. Considered as Expensive.
3. Brings sense of Discipline.
4. Brings sense of Loyalty.

To test the significant difference in the ranking of different perception of students and parents on the Utility / Value of Uniform in Professional Institutes, Chi-Square analysis and Friedman Two-way ANOVA study were undertaken to arrive and calculate Mean – Ranks.

The Null and Alternative Hypothesis have been framed as under:

Ho: There is No Difference in Student / Parent perception on Uniform.

H1: There is Significant Difference in Student / Parent perception on Uniform.

**TABLE – 5: RANKINGS ON DIFFERENT ATTRIBUTES**

SL. No.	Attributes	Mean Ranks(N= 1001)	Chi Square at 5%
1.	Uniform gives good – Look	2.65	
2.	Considered Expensive	2.64	59.75 ( 0.000)
3.	Brings Discipline	2.47	
4.	Brings Loyalty towards Institute	2.25	

Table 5, once again implies that Loyalty through Uniform is the most significant Attribute (Mean Rank = 2.25) whereas Good – Look through Uniform has been relegated to the Most insignificant attribute, as per the prevailing perception of the existing students and their parents.

Analysis of the results on Test of Significance also leads to the Chi-Square value of 59.75, which is quite significant (  $p = 0.000$  ) at 5% Level, thereby rejecting the Ho Hypothesis and accepting H1 at 5% level, clearly implying variation in perception of the respondents.

## IMPLICATION OF THE RESEARCH

BOP segment in the emerging economies, remained an area of special interest for the marketers all over the globe for a long time.

The present research may be a benign study which has endeavored to apply Provocative Selling Technique to offer solutions in the BOP segment of a relatively small/medium scale Industry and particularly where the Pain – Points of the Customers are unique.

Similar studies, if undertaken in the BOP segments of products/services of large scale Industries, may open new vistas for MNCs, who are looking for such opportunities in emerging market economies, like India.

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