A Study on the Effects of Knowledge Vis-à-vis Preference of Apparel Brands by Consumers in Vadodara City

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Abstract

The impact of consumer's knowledge vis-a-vis brand preference for apparels has been investigated using a sample of consumers from Vadodara City in Gujarat. The relationship between consumers' decision-making styles and their choice between domestic and imported brand clothing, their knowledge about the brand and the basis on which they select a brand has been examined. The objective of this paper is to gauge the factors affecting purchase decision considering different perspectives as base for my research. The objective is also to analyze the significance of demographic profile of consumers affecting the purchase decision of branded garments and to observe from gender and age group perspective the consumer awareness and knowledge about different apparel brands available in the Indian market.

Keywords: *Consumer Knowledge, Apparels, Brands, Brand Preference*

1. Introduction

Consumer brand preference is an essential step to understand consumer choice behaviour, and has therefore always received great attention from marketers. Brand preferences reveal the type of attributes a brand possesses, to strengthen its position and increase its market share. Moreover, it forms a critical input in developing a company's successful brand strategy, and gives insight for product development. However, the shift to experiential marketing broadens the role of the brand from a bundle of attributes to experiences. Experiential marketing also considers both, the rational and irrational assumptions of consumer behaviour. The technological advancement helped increasing the similarities between the brands attributes and product commoditization. Consequently, consumers cannot shape their preferences among brands using rational attributes only. They seek the brand that creates experience; intrigue them in a sensorial, emotional, and creative way. Companies' competitiveness in such market has, therefore become increasingly difficult. Their survival requires building their competitive advantage by delivering memorable experiences, which would influence consumers' brand preferences, and consequently stimulate consumers' purchase decisions.

Brand "Brand is something what remains us when our factory is burned". These are the words of David Ogilvy who is considered "the father of advertising". Brands are important to brand owners at two quite different levels. Firstly, they serve as a focus for consumer loyalties and therefore develop as assets which ensure future demand and hence future cash flows. They thus introduce stability into businesses, help guard against competitive encroachment, and allow investment and planning to take place with increased confidence .Brands are business assets, legally protected and shielded from duplication. They are valuable, rare, non-substitutable and provide sustainable competitive advantages – and therefore superior financial performance.

A brand is built over time, by the impressions one has of the company, its products or services, and is confirmed (or destroyed) by experiences. People use brands to categorize their choices On the basis of existing definitions of the brand we define brand as: "Perceptible sign of the organization and its products to the human senses, through which the customer is able to differentiate an organization and its products from others".

India represents an economic opportunity on a massive scale, both as a global base and as a domestic market. Indian consumer markets are changing fast, with rapid growth in disposable incomes, the development of modern urban lifestyles, and the emergence of the kind of trend-conscious consumers that India has not seen in the past.

Apparel industry is in its growth stage. With the proliferation of western culture, more brands are added to the Indian market. Larger budget is allocated to sales promotion activities that lure the consumers. In such a scenario, it is very essential to study how consumers make their choices in category where there are several brands in the consideration set of a consumer. There is a trend for a high number of consumers in the apparel industry to switch from one brand to another due to sales promotion offers and personal comfort zone. Hence it would of interest to a marketer to learn about the consumer preferences with respect to sales promotion offer; what schemes do consumer prefer for what kind of brands, which media do they prefer to know about the brand, product, and related schemes, who prefers the branded apparel and fashion products, the price range of the fashion products. These are the questions which consumer considers while choosing a brand.

2. Research Objectives

Purchase decision is facilitated by having a comprehensive knowledge of the brand which `helps in evoking positive effects towards the brand, as these days people don't buy the product they buy images (brands). It influences brand choice, preferences and intention to purchase of consumers. Therefore, it is indispensable for a marketer to comprehend about the perceptions of consumers for a brand which impact the purchase decision embedding different perspective. Objectives of the study are:

1. To identify the brand knowledge aspects consumers associate with brands in developing preferences.

2. To examine consumer knowledge about different apparel brands available in the Vadodara city.

3. To study the consumer perception for branded.

4. To identify the factors influencing the purchase of branded apparels i.e. on what basis do they prefer the brands they purchase.

3. Research Methodology

The research has been conducted in Vadodara city, Gujarat State.
The data was collected through surveys conducted on respondents of Vadodara city on their Knowledge on Branded Apparels. The data collection instrument used was a Structured Closed Ended Questionnaire.

The data was collected and measured on a structured five point Likert scale. All of the questionnaires were distributed among the respondent in the defined areas. The data was collected for a period of 9 days and the responses were fed into the analytical tool SPSS version 21.0 of IBM for analysis and evaluation also along with MS-Excel 2007.

Sample Size: 200 Adult Respondents using branded apparels

Sampling Technique: Stratified Convenient Sampling

Sampling Area: Vadodara (Urban)

4. Review of Literature

Over the past few years, brands have increased in importance. A distinguishing tool of the companies' products or services is the branding. The theme, or combination of themes, that can be associated to brands, such as the trademark, logo, name, identity, image, personality, value and evolving entity, create the brand (De Chernatony and Riley, 1998). In general, marketing is defines as a consumer-based process that permeates organizational functions and processes, and it balances the companies' objectives and customer satisfaction. Branding is a marketing tool perceived to be important for both the company and consumer. Brands are important valuable intangible assets for companies, a distinctive tool that builds a long-term relationship with the consumers, and protects its' rights (Kolter et al., 2009).

For consumers, brands reflect their experience and knowledge; simplifying the processing of information accumulated over time about the company and its products or brands. In addition, brands reflect consumer' experiences and knowledge; thus, simplify the processing of information accumulated over time about the company and its products or brands. Consequently, brands act as signals for products of high quality and low perceived risk, thus, enable the consumers to

capture both cognitive and non-cognitive values expressed in the positive feelings and self-expression experienced (Aaker, 1998; Kotler et al., 2009). What consumers expect from the brand is crucial to shaping their preferences and determining their choices. Therefore, it is important for companies to build their brands based on the consumer's expectations of the brand.

Consumer decision-making processes and brand selection have been considered complex. The consumer chooses from different brands based on their preferences, experiences and brand knowledge. This chapter aims to investigate the extensive literature on consumer behavior theories discovering the development of preference and its antecedent. Therefore, this chapter discusses the term of brand preference.

Brand Preference
The notion of preference has been considered by different disciplines, such as economists (e.g. Samuels, 1978), psychologists (e.g. Albanese, 1987) and sociologists (e.g. Tamer, 1996). However, there is no commonly agreed definition of preference among these disciplines. For example, economists state that preferences are exogenous, stable, known with adequate precision and are revealed through choice behavior (March, 1978, p.589). The economic view of preference was criticized for assuming that preferences are stable and endogenous. An individual's preferences are not stable (Albanese, 1987) and can be endogenous or exogenous (Samuels, 1978). In marketing, the concept of preference means the desirability or choice among alternatives (Oliver and Swan, 1989). While Zajonc and Markus (1982, p. 128) propose that "a preference is a behavioral tendency that exhibits itself not so much in what the individual thinks or says about the object, but how he acts toward it", Tomer (1996) differentiates between four types of consumer preferences; the actual preference is the degree to which the consumer appreciates and develops the capacity to use certain goods. Meta-preferences are one's preferences about actual preferences that reflect the normative judgments of the higher-order self (meta-self). True preferences are a unique set representing what is really and truly the best for the person. Finally, unrestrained preferences are those that satisfy the lower or physical needs. The individual's preferences are determined by his or her actual preferences that reflect the meta- preferences and unrestrained preferences.

Brand preference precedes consumer loyalty and influence attitudinal (Kim et al., 2011) and behavioral loyalty (Tolba and Hassan, 2009). Thus, loyalty can be perceived as a true measure of brand preference (Gupta, 1988; Hardie et al., 1993). However, the reverse relationship; assuming the influence of loyalty; measured by frequency of consumer past purchases on brand preference was not supported (Hellier et al., 2003). In addition, Horsky et al., (2006) state that the omission of brand preference from the brand choice model leads to the overestimation of brand loyalty and systematic bias within loyalty parameters.

Brand Preference and Brand Choice – choice is the process of preference consolidation facilitating the choice task (Beach 1993). Brand choice is concerned with the selection and consumption of the brand (Bettman et al., 1998). Brand preference can be viewed as a motivator of brand choice. Consumer choices are based on well-defined preferences through which consumers can determine the set of alternatives from which they will make their choices (Louviere, 2000). Consumer preferences and choices tend to be more consistent; therefore, preference provides a more accurate prediction of consumer choices comparing to attitude (Bither and Wright, 1977).

Economically, the main target of the consumer in the choice task is to satisfy his preference and select the alternative with maximum utility (Rizvi, 2001). If a consumer does not select the optimal alternative to maximise his utility, he is compromised by conflicting preferences (Yoon and Simonson, 2008). Hansen (1976) identifies the confliction between alternatives preceding choices among the aspects that characterize choice.

Prior work has demonstrated the positive and significant impact of brand equity, which improves consumers' perceptions of the brand (Erdem and Swait, 1998) in the service industry (Chang and Liu, 2009) and products (Tolba and Hassan, 2009). The definition of brand equity, as the strength of association between the brand and the different types of evaluation stored in their memory, is relevant in studying consumer behaviour (Farquhar, 1990). The impact of brand equity on consumer preferences is measured at the aggregate level without investigating the impact of its different dimensions (Chang and Liu, 2009; Cobb-Walgren et al., 1995).

In a recent study, Tolba and Hassan (2009) examine the impact of different dimensions forming brand equity: knowledge equity, attitudinal equity and relationship equity on brand preference. The results support the significant impact of relationship equity, consumers' experiences, on brand preferences of

users. For non-users, their preferences of brands are affected by attitudinal equity, functional utility and symbolic image. .

Other prior research focuses on the impact of different types of attribute on brand preference, especially non-related attributes: price (e.g. Monroe, 1976; Moon and Voss, 2009), appearance (e.g. Creusen and Schoormans, 2005; Creusen and Schoormans, 1998), brand personality (e.g. Kim et al., 2011) and self-congruity (e.g. Hu et al., 2012; Branaghan and Hildebrand, 2011; Jamal and Al-Marri, 2007). In addition, Sääksjärvi and Samiee, 2011) demonstrate the significant positive impact of brand image on brand preference. This retains the importance of the different evaluative aspect of the brand attributes in consumer preference development.

5. Brief overview of popular brands in Vadodara

5.1 United Colors of Benetton
Benetton entered the Indian market in 1991-92, as a 50:50 joint venture with the DCM Group in Delhi, and launched its flagship label UCB. Effective 22nd December 2004, Benetton became a wholly owned subsidiary of the Benetton Group, Italy. UCB is today a leading brand in India with more than 106 stores across 45 cities in India. The retail network is a mix of owned and franchised stores. Many of these are mega stores, with size more than 4,500 square feet and an increased focus on apparel for men, women and kids. The company is also looking at expanding the brand in the Asia Pacific region and has recently opened stores in Male, Karachi and Kathmandu. With the Indian market increasing in strategic importance for the Benetton Group at the global level, its fashion label Sisley was launched in India in 2006.The first outlet, nearly 3,500 square feet in size, was opened in Delhi and features a collection for men and women.

5.2 Levi's

Levi's entered the Indian market in 1994-95, with the opening of their first store in Bangalore in Jun 1995. Over the last 15 years, Levi's has become the largest and most iconic jeans wear brand in the country, available in approximately 270 exclusive stores, and 500 other points of sale, across more than 200 towns across India. Closely associated with the evolution of jeans wear fashion in India, Levi's has been responsible for some of the most cutting-edge, definitive, jeans wear communication India has seen.

5.3 CK Jeans

Launched Calvin Klein in 2008. Opened 70,000 sqft of retail space over 230 points of sale, across 30 cities within a span of 5 years. Achieved the highest sales per square foot within the premium brand segment. Built CK Underwear as the undisputed leader in the premium underwear segment. Sold 51% of the business in 2011 to Warnaco Inc. And the balance 49% in 2014.

5.4 Marks & Spencers

They are still learning on how to make a consumer a customer. But the JV has allowed them to go in for local sourcing. Today, 52% of their store is stocked through local sourcing based in Bangalore. Local sourcing has helped them in lowering the price as earlier they were paying import duties on their merchandise, and the pricing proved to be prohibitive for most.

They are also able to incorporate climate as a key differentiator in our stocking. India is a more diverse market — weather-wise and otherwise — than Europe. Sourcing locally has enabled them to stock winter wear in the North in January-February and summer wear for the rest of India. It has enabled us to add more styles and colours that suit Indian tastes. The local sourcing makes them more relevant to the Indian customer. Going local helps them get our value proposition right and when you do that the customer walks in.

5.5 Jack & Jones, Veramoda and Only

Bestseller entered in market in summer 2010, the makers if apparel brand Jack & Jones, a complete wardrobe brand is chalking out retail expansion plans. The company plans to add 50 exclusive brand outlets to its existing nine. Vineet Gautam, Country Head, Jack & Jones avers, "We are targeting the metros, Tier I and II cities for the next one to two years. We have already finalized few markets like Mumbai, Ahmedabad, Surat, Pune, Baroda, Goa, Delhi, Chandigarh, Amritsar, Ludhiana, Jalandhar, Lucknow, Dehradun, Jaipur, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Chennai and Kolkata. Our ideal format is a 2,000 sq. Ft. Store but in key markets we would be opening bigger flagship stores." As far as mbosare concerned, they are already present in Lifestyle and Shoppers Stop and are looking to expand majorly with national and regional chains.
Jack & Jones' USP lies in coming up with new fashions every week much on the lines of fast fashion. They do about 12 collections a year in tune with the latest trends. "Currently, it's the colored

denims that are in, especially white. It's been an excellent hit with us. Also, skinny fits and low rise denims are quite in style. Through our washes, fabrics, patch work and embellishments, we try to give our customers value for money.

5.6 Park Avenue

Was incorporated in 1925. It is one of India's largest branded fabric and fashion retailers. Raymond Group is one of the leading, integrated producers of suiting fabric in the world, with a capacity of producing 31 million meters of wool & wool-blended fabrics. The Group owns apparel brands like Raymond, Raymond Premium Apparel, Park Avenue, Park Avenue Woman, Colorplus & Parx.

6. Data Analysis

6.1 Reliability Statistics

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	**N of Items**
.832	8

Table 1: Reliability Analysis

An examination had been made from the reliability of the data to check whether random error causing inconsistency and in turn lower reliability is at a manageable level or not, by running reliability test. From table 1 it is clear that the values of coefficient Alpha (Cronbach's Alpha) have been obtained, the minimum value of coefficient Alpha obtained was .832. This shows data has satisfactory internal consistency reliability.

6.2 Correlation Analysis

		Brand Knowledge	Average Preference
Brand Knowledge	**Pearson Correlation**	1	.602**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.001
	N	100	100
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Table 2: Correlation Analysis

The table above shows a positive correlation between Brand Knowledge and (Average) Brand Preference in Vadodara city.

7. Findings

7.1 Most Preferred Brand
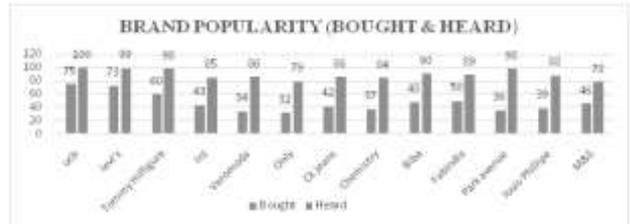
Fig.1 Most preferred Brand among Consumers

Fig. 1 shows the popular 13 brands comparison wherein it indicates that many brands which the consumers have heard of are not the ones that they would have necessarily bought.

Thus as observed in the Fig. 1 above, the brand which is most preferred by the respondents are UCB, LEVI'S and TOMMY HILLFIGURE.

### 7.2 Fabric knowledge and Brand
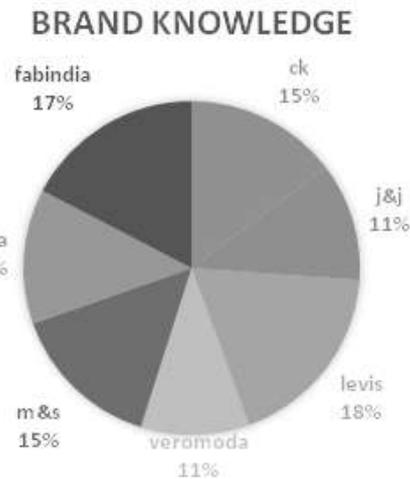
Fig. 2: Knowledge of Fabric and Brand

Fig. 2 depicts the matching of the particular fabric and special product with its relative brand which further helped me in testing the knowledge of the consumer regarding the brand. The finding was that **only 15%** had knowledge about brands which is the average of the percentage consumers knowing about at least one brand.

7.3 Awareness of Brand Presence
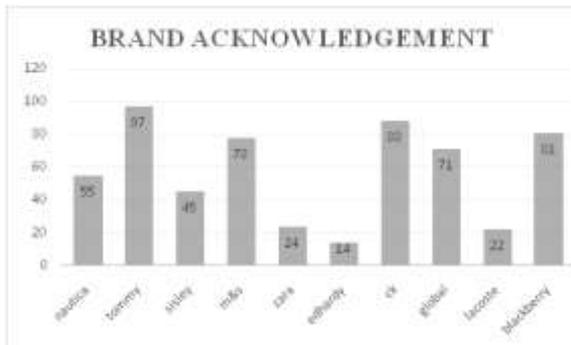
Fig. 3 Awareness of Brand Presence

Fig. 3 above depicts the results of testing the knowledge of the consumers regarding the presence of apparel brands in Vadodara. The Question also had options of brands, which were not present in Vadodara to check the knowledge of the people. On an average of 57.5% consumers were found to have knowledge about the presence of brands in Vadodara and the rest 42.5% didn't have any proper knowledge about the presence of brands in Vadodara

7.4 Preference of Cloth Material
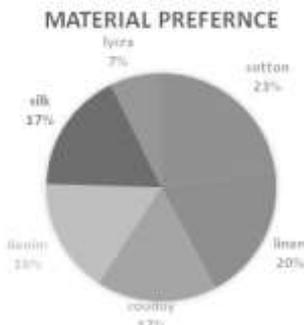
Fig. 4 Preference of Cloth Material

Fig 4 above refers to the preference of the material, the consumers prefer when they shop from their preferred brands. From the survey we got know that about 23% of people prefer cotton which the highest of all. 20% linen, 17% Coudroy and also 17% of consumers prefer Slik .16% denim and lycra is least preferred which hold only 7% out of the total 100%.

7.5 Brand Preference Parameters

As depicted in the Fig. 5 below, Quality and Comfort were the highest preferred parameters for choosing brands, whereas Advertisement & Promotion was considered to be the least preferred parameters.

Fig. 5 Chart showing Brand Preference Parameters

8. Conclusions

From the survey which conducted the results derived indicated that maximum consumers posses some knowledge required to buy apparels for their regular needs. It can also be concluded that the consumers in Vadodara are fond of buying Cotton Branded apparels most, as compared to Lycra branded apparels which are preferred the least.

There was also test of parameters on which the brand preference is ben based on. For the people of Vadodara Quality and Comfort is the most preferred reason for buying branded apparels and least preferred parameter is Adv. & promotion.

Importantly, the Top 8 brands preferred by the Consumers of Vadodara city for apparels were UCB, Levis, CK jeans, Tommy Hilfiger, Chemistry, Veromoda, Only and Jack n Jones of which UCB, Levis and Tommy Hilfiger were found to be among the top 3 preferred brands. It was also found that about 58% of people have correct knowledge and had given the responses correctly.

Finally, in the Correlation Analysis, it was also found that there is a significant positive correlation between the knowledge possessed by consumers about the apparel brands and their own brand preference. Hence it can be concluded that the Consumers in Vadodara have a fair knowledge of brands leading to the required choice of the apparel brand.

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