

Consumer Behavioral Traits: A systematic review of Extant Literature

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Abstract— Consumer behavioral traits or characteristics are the most imperative part in the study of consumer behaviour. Researchers and practitioners have always been interested to understand the consumer behaviour so that apt marketing strategies could be formulated. This paper will deal with the three important traits namely; Materialism, Impulse buying and Conspicuous consumption. All the three traits relates to the imaginative, emotional and evaluative components of the consumption behaviour. This paper is an attempt of the author to generate new knowledge & insight about the topic through integrating significant research work by the authors' world over. It is the form of research that reviews, critiques and synthesizes the literature of the topic such that a new framework and perspective on the topic is generated.

Keywords—Conspicuous consumption, Impulse buying, Materialism.

I. INTRODUCTION

THE need to conceptualize three important consumption traits arises from the fact that with the increase in globalization, consumer culture & behaviour the world over is homogenizing. This implies that local culture in India too is being influenced by these unabated forces of globalization [32] which leads to a change in the consumer behaviour. Due to globalization the preferences and choices of the world consumer have more or less become similar. Therefore this study is an attempt of the author to assimilate the knowledge produced by the authors' world over and hence propose a comprehensive framework of consumer behavioral traits which can be further explored and empirically tested in future research endeavors. The current review identifies the literature based on these three constructs viz. Materialism, Impulse buying and Conspicuous consumption so that the understanding of these traits with what the authors world over have theorized will produce an insight for the global corporate managers who anticipates to invest in the world market.

Why Materialism, Conspicuous consumption and Impulse buying.

Materialism and conspicuous consumption (luxury/Status) are the two corner stones of consumer culture [20]. O'Cass and Julian opined that materialism appears to be an important dimension of consumer behaviour as a value and marketers are keen to know the value that characterize consumption.

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Moreover materialism has become a truly global phenomenon [22]. Further Podoshen also believes that understanding the variables like materialism, conspicuous consumption and impulse buying underlies the consumption behaviour and is vital for public policy makers, marketing managers and also to the society.

At the end paper has outlined various factors which leads a consumer to exhibit a particular above stated consumer trait and then all the common factors are extracted which collectively defines a set of factors influencing consumer behavioral traits in totality.

II. METHODOLOGY

The current study gives a broad overview of the factors which motivates a consumer to exhibit a particular consumption trait and for this purpose the extant academic literature in the area under consideration is reviewed and a combined representation of the current level of knowledge in this field is presented. A wide range of relevant electronic journal databases, academic papers and books were referred to review the works of various researchers. The papers are reviewed and selected on the bases of their relevance to the topic and then are placed chronologically from 1950 – 2013.

The current study will be inclusive of all the literature present on the said subject. In addition efforts have been made for global corporate managers and companies operational in more than one country to glean some lessons from the framework developed.

III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- i. To find out the factors which perpetuates consumer behavioral traits individually viz. Materialism, Conspicuous consumption and Impulse buying in the consumer.
- ii. To extract the common factors which collectively described as influencers for consumer behavioral traits encompassing all the above said three traits.
- iii. To establish a framework from the existing literature.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW – MATERIALISM

(i) Definitions of Materialism

Reference [4] defined materialism as the importance a person attaches to worldly possessions. At the highest level of materialism, such possessions place a central place in a person's life and are believed to provide the greatest source of satisfaction and dissatisfaction.

Reference [37] conceptualized materialism as consumer value and stated that materialism comes from value and it is value that guides people's choices. With respect to consumption, materialism will influence the type and quantity of goods purchased. Reference [20] explained materialism as a life style in which a high level material consumption functions as a goal.

Reference [27] defined the materialism among Indian consumers. The study brought forth the relationship that materialism has with cultural adherence and regional differences with-in India and materialism's impact on various purchase behavior.

Reference [54] stated that materialistic value in a consumer is a result of his life events during adolescent and adulthood. The events like stress, family structure (intact or dislocate), T.V viewing impacts greatly on an individual materialistic value.

Reference [19] found that materialistic consumers and status signaling are related and they only get the product satisfaction by expanding more than their natural economic limits. Reference [38] defined materialism, a construct as defined by [38] for "giving importance/being attached to worldly possessions", and its influence on consumer culture.

(ii) Factors influencing Materialism

There are many factors which influence materialism in a consumer as discussed below -

As stated by [11] that materialism is considered as western consumer cultural trait Indian consumers are also trying to imitate western lifestyle as they are being influenced by the westernization [17].

Reference [10] states in their research findings that due to westernization Indian consumers have become more materialistic. Reference [38] empirically showed that Indian consumer's predisposition towards foreign brands (PTFB) which is used as the proxy to globalization has a positive correlation with the materialistic values.

Ref [30] showed a high correlation among the level of income and materialism. Reference [29] in USA studied boys to be highly materialistic than girls. Added to this [31] also empirically showed that demographic variables like age and gender significantly impact the materialistic value prevalent among Indian consumers.

Reference [15] found that family disruptions influence materialism only among young adults from lower social classes. Reference [21] empirically showed that family structure is related positively to materialism. Researchers have also showed that materialism can indeed be predicted significantly by exposure to advertising on TV. Reference [22] demonstrated empirically that TV viewing is one of the most examined antecedents of materialism.

Reference [28] believe that materialism leads to the need for acquiring goods that denote prestige and in this case goods are purchased for social status. Reference [2] found that a consumer's involvement in fashion clothing will be significantly affected by a consumer's degree of materialism,

with more materialistic consumer's being more involved.

V. LITERATURE REVIEW – IMPULSE BUYING

(i) Definitions of Impulse Buying

Earlier studies of Impulse buying focused on the product as a motivator of impulse purchase. Reference [16] classified purchase as planned or impulse where planned purchase involved rational decision making and impulse purchase involved quick decision making.

Reference [4] defined that impulse buying occurs when a consumer experiences sudden, often powerful and persistent urge to buy something immediately.

Reference [5] Introduced impulsiveness as a personality trait and defined it as consumer's tendency to buy spontaneously, non-reflectively, immediately, and kinetically.

Reference [16] stated that impulse buying is a sudden decision taken by a buyer due to his cultural background. Reference [53] defined the type of in store experience make a difference in impulse buying. Affective in store experience has a significant positive effect on impulse buying.

(ii) Factors influencing Impulse Buying

Researchers have found many factors which influence impulse buying; it could be the overall shopping experience, shopper's individual traits, product related, demographic and socio – cultural.

Reference [9] have found that Indian consumers have diametrically changed in terms of their consumption behaviour and impulse buying due to entry of foreign products in Indian market, growth in organized retail industry, increasing disposable income, favorable demographic segmentation and changing culture & lifestyle.

Ref. [12] pointed out the usage of credit cards, 24 hrs retailing and online shopping as factors which result in increased impulsive buying.

Ref. [33] found that the number of impulse purchase that shoppers make in a store depends on they respond to special in store displays and discount offering.

Researchers have also found that demographic and socio-cultural factors influence the impulse purchase. Ref. [16] observed that there is an important underlying difference between consumers in western individualist societies and those in eastern collectivist cultures. They further argued that in a cultural context the theory of individualism and collectivism gives important insights about consumer's impulsive behaviour.

Ref. [11] observed that disposable incomes and credit availability have made impulse buying a widespread consumer behaviour. They further observed that gender as a social category affects impulse buying. Researchers have also pointed out that consumer's demographics and the characteristics influence the impulse purchase.

Ref. [42] studied the involvement of fashion clothing in impulse buying and variety of patterns such as emotional, pure reminded and fashion oriented impulse.

Ref. [6] found that fashion oriented impulse buying is stimulated by the fashion involvement in a consumer.

As the internal motivator of impulse buying [7] recognized the importance of autistic stimuli in motivating impulse purchase. Ref. [39] found that the internal motivators of impulse buying in a consumer are self-discrepancy, hedonic needs, mood states, autistic stimuli and social status.

VI. LITERATURE REVIEW – CONSPICUOUS CONSUMPTION

(i) *Definitions of Conspicuous Consumption*

In the theory of leisure class (1899), Thorsten Veblen coined the phrase “Conspicuous Consumption” to designate the act of purchasing certain goods and services not in order to survive but to identify oneself to others as having superior wealth and social standing. Ref. [1] explained underlying characteristic of an individual decides their consumption behaviour like young status conscious consumers are more likely affected by the interpersonal influence, also the clothes which they wear tells much about their status and group dynamics.

Conspicuous consumption in India is defined by the English speaking Indian middle class who are in a transitional phase and actively adopt a new product which enhance their personality but is different from what is being practiced by the rich and wealthy [14]. Ref. [35] defined conspicuous consumption by the psychological and brand antecedent.

Ref. [13] stated that Conspicuous consumption is a deliberate engagement in symbolic and visible purchase with a motivation to communicate a distinctive self-image to others.

(ii) *Factors influencing Conspicuous Consumption*

Ref. [23] found that social status is often reported as a major factor stimulating conspicuous consumption. Confirming this view [36] also stipulated that one of the most important forces influencing consumer’s behaviour is their desire to seek social status from acquisition of luxury goods. Ref. [18] found that consumers buy certain goods in the hope of being seen more favorably in social hierarchy. This leads to the use of conspicuous consumption in an attempt to find greater social status. Ref. [40] stated that conspicuous consumption in different cultures is directly and positively influence social status hence consumer’s conspicuous behaviour might be explained by their desire for social status.

Ref. [14] studied that in transition Indian society there are changing dynamics of socio – economic structure which is being fostered by entry of foreign brands in India which makes the consumption of luxurious imported goods to be guided by the symbolic properties (brand name) of the product than the functional property.

[Ref. 24 Page 2] quoted the research conducted by the foreign investor’s chamber of commerce and Industry (FICCI) and found that foreign brands like Louis Vuitton and Armani as the most prestigious accessory brands in India. The purchase of luxury fashion accessories fall under the umbrella of conspicuous consumption therefore the marketers of luxury

fashion accessories should not overlook potential segments in developing world [40]. Ref. [24] concluded in his study that consumption behaviour of the Indian consumers should be understood in the light of the specific cultural context in which it takes place because Asian culture is based on the interpersonal construal of self. Asian value group goals more highly and there are cultural factors underlying luxury consumption.

VII. RESEARCH FRAMEWORK AND FUTURE RESEARCH

After a comprehensive review of literature author has proposed a framework for understanding various factors which lead to materialism, impulse buying and conspicuous consumption. Thereafter common factors from each of the three categories are extracted and accommodated in a separate category namely, *consumer behavioral traits*. These are the factors which commonly impact the three traits discussed in the paper. As called by [7] that impulse buying is consumer’s personality or behavioral trait which is defined by a consumer’s tendency to buy spontaneously. Ref. [38] also calls impulse buying as a behavioral trait and cited (Data monitor report, 2010, Page 2) that among various other behavioral traits that have been associated with the Indian consumer’s, rise in impulse buying is one of them Ref. [11] stated that materialism is considered as a consumer’s trait. Ref. [13] defined conspicuous consumption as an innate trait that motivates consumers to engage in visible forms of consumption. As various authors implicitly or explicitly defined materialism, impulse buying and conspicuous consumption as behavioral traits therefore in this paper the category of common factors is called consumer behavioral traits for the purpose of understanding. The review shows that the important common factors which collectively affect all the three traits in a consumer are globalization, consumer demographics and culture.

Factors Influencing		
Materialism	Impulse Buying	Conspicuous Consumption
1.Demographics	1.Socio – Cultural	1.Culture
2.Globalization	2.Demographics	2.Globalization
3.Family Structure	3.Store environment	3.Fashion
4.Satisfaction	4.Usage of	4.Social Status
5.Culture	5.Credit cards	5.Reference Group
6.T.V Viewing(ads)	6.Fashion	6.Demographics
7.Social Status	7.Social Status	
8.Fashion	8.Globalization	
	9.Autistic Stimuli	
Common Factors Influencing – Consumer Behavioral Traits		
1.Globalization		
2.Culture		
3.Demographics		
4.Social Status		
5.Fashion		

Fig. 1 Framework For Factors Influencing Consumer Behavioral Traits.

Source: Compiled By Author

The list of the consumer traits and the factors which affect them studied in this paper is not exhaustive and more traits and the factors which affect them could be further studied in the future research attempt. The future research could be done to test the proposed framework empirically.

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