



A CRITICAL REVIEW OF JOURNEY OF CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS LATELY

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Abstract

Previous years witnessed a lot of purchase behavior and pattern of consumption, further facing a lot of unaddressed issues has instigated recent researches on decision-making process. This paper is an attempt to explore the vitals of the buying decision-making journey till today with varieties of theories and approaches in sequence. Author has surfed different online materials/ articles and theories in books quoting interesting models explaining possibilities to influence consumer behavior favoring or disfavoring a particular brand. This study may be helpful to marketers to reshape their marketing strategies to capture a great pie of the market. Author has attempted to give several directions to marketers and future researchers towards buying pattern/ marketers approach

Keywords:

Decision-making process, Consumer behaviour, Buying behaviour, Model of decision-making

Introduction

The study of consumer behaviour makes us know how and why consumers act in a certain way making their buying decisions. It helps marketers to improve their marketing strategies for more success in the market. Thus, a challenge develops before all marketers today is how to influence the consumer buying behaviour of consumers in favor of their products or services. So, and why, the knowledge of buying behaviour deals the consumer psychology of how consumers think, feel, argues and select among existing alternatives (e.g., brands, products, and retailers), also how the consumer's environment (e.g., culture, family, media) influences him/her, additionally, how consumer motivation and decision strategies distinct between products. It also describes the cognitive gesture and make up of consumers while taking a purchase decision that primarily involves the emotions (personality, intentions, etc), supported by Ahn, Sung & Drumwright, 2016 et al, 2016 (Researchgate.net).

This research paper focuses on consumer buying behaviour, specifically on factors/moments that influence customers' decision-making process involving their emotional intelligence and other areas or factors of a purchase behavior of a consumer.

Research questions are-

- (1) What are the "moments that matter" in consumer decision-making process?
- (2) What are the emotional factors in consumer decision-making?

This research paper reviews trends, theories, previous studies and gaps in the field of buyer behaviour. Moreover, this study will present a framework of the influencing factors for each step of the decision-making process and the subject of buying decision-making was chosen due to the several reasons, e.g., individual role of a consumer who makes a lot of purchase every day that involves his/her emotions addressing any need /

problems in a purchase decision making. Secondly, marketers may seek help from this study to know their target customers and their profile, in order to improve products and services of a company, and understand how customers view (involving emotions) products versus competitors' products. This will help marketers to take an edge over competition in terms of competitive and deferential advantages enhancing company's value.

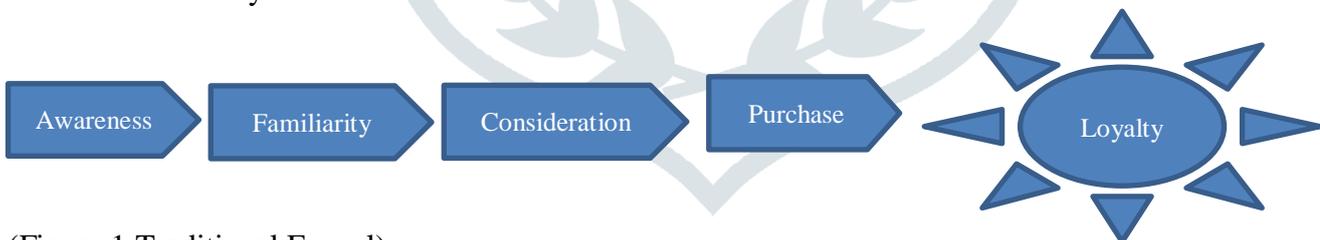
As of today, researchers are more interested into finding specific relationships and determinants of a purchase decisions with the cognitive / emotional make up to answer many more questions that come midway before a purchase., hence a new science has come into picture, I.e., neuro-/ nano-marketing, that facilitates to know how customer mind reacts to marketing stimuli, applying the principles of marketing research and neuroscience.

Over the year the changed trends in consumer behaviour in a highly dynamic world not only discusses and ask the reasons for a purchase or consumption but more it stresses on the immediate, intrinsic and emotional desires of a consumer (range of touch points) as desires are no more passive, it evolved as more active. Reasons are the customer's smarter and more efficient ways to resolve a problem because of lack of time (need for hyper-efficiency). Super - personalization is another emotional stature of consumers dying for a status quo (e-commerce is a brilliant example)

Sarmistha Nandy, 2020, in her study mentioned that impulse buying could be illustrated as spontaneous and repeatedly uncontrolled advice to purchase products. Moreover, she finds that emotions are a unique ingredient that must be added to boost the basis supply of product/service. The purchase decisions of consumers are motivated by two kinds of requirements: functional needs fulfilled by product utility and emotional needs related with the psychological aspects of product possession. The creation of emotions usually passes through the multisensory contribution of the subject: melody, aroma, color, flavor, and symbols of various types.

A. A.Mehamed & Patel Chirag, 2019, in their study elaborated that the emotions of a consumer may be notice from the facial expressions of a buyer while making purchase decisions or at the time of purchase. Authors brilliantly incorporated the expressions of consumers for a decision.

Marketing intends to reach consumers mostly influenced by their decisions when consumers are open to influence ("touch points" or "moments that matter") Touch points may be understood through the model (below) (Figure 1). It states how the consumer starts making decision with a potential brand known to him/her and reaches on one brand to buy. But this model never discussed any emotional input for a purchase so became obsolete as of today.



(Figure 1;Traditional Funnel)

A more sophisticated approach is required to help marketers guide through this environment, which is more complicated than the funnel suggests. Court et al., 2009, refers that McKinsey study elaborates a two-way communication, i.e., marketer - consumer - marketer communication instead one-way - marketers to consumers.

If we talk about the customer base that emerged significantly as a dire need of companies to sustain with, it is important for them to address the consumers purchase determinants about creating connections with clients (customer network and referrals) in order to understand the shopping experience that can help ccompanies to identify additional consumer-connection moments before purchase, during purchase, and post purchase. For instance, when consumers decided on a purchase, the marketer's work has just begun. A tendency and on-going cycle has been noticed frequently for the consumer's interest in surfing internet and have a post purchase research.

Review of different proposed models and theories

Many research authors have followed “Consumer behaviour as a study of individuals, groups, or organizations and the processes they use to select, secure, use, and dispose of products, services, experiences, or ideas to satisfy needs and the impacts that these processes have on the consumer and society.”

Name of the Model	Short description
Simon model 1960	This model conceptualizes the decision-making process in three stages of activities: intelligence activity, design activity, and choice activity. Simon argues that decision-making is a cognitive process that can be separated into simple, sequential steps.
Nicosia model 1996	This model concentrates on the communication process that occurs between a brand and a consumer. It uses a flow of events through different stages that are identified as fields.
Engel, Kollat & Blackwell model 1968	The components of this consumer model’s decision process are the following - input, information processing, decision process, and variables influencing the decision process. The decision process component consists of five following stages - need recognition, search, alternative evaluation, purchase, and outcomes.

Table1: Decision-making Models

Theory of buyer behaviour 1969	The theory explains the buyer’s brand choice behaviour and suggests three levels of consumer decision-making: extensive problem-solving limited problem solving, and habitual response behaviour. The authors identify a set of motives; several alternative courses of action, and decision mediators by which the motives are matched with the alternatives, under consumer decision process, observed the changes occurred over time as a result of their repetitive nature. Author also found how a combination of decision elements affects search processes and the incorporation of information from the buyer’s commercial and social environment.
Mintzberg model 1976	The key premise of this model is that a basic structure underlies these “unstructured” processes.
Keeney’s decision-making model 1982	This is a four-stage model takes a complex staged approach: Structure the decision problem, assess possible impacts of each alternative, determine preferences (values) of decision makers, and evaluate and compare alternatives.
Rassuli & Harrell model 1990	The choice and purchase can be viewed as inputs into a process, not merely the end of consumer decision-making efforts. In this way, one recognizes the feedback, from choice to other consumer-behaviour variables.
Sheth, Newman & Gross model 1991	This model presents five consumption values influencing consumer choice behaviour: functional, social, conditional, emotional, and epistemic values. Any or all of the five consumption values may influence the decision.

Marketing Spiral 2007	Consumer behaviour is like a spiral that begins with an interaction as opposed to communication. The spiral amplifies as the consumer increases engagement.
McKinsey's dynamic model of the consumer decision 2009	This model is more circular than sequential and has four primary phases: initial consideration; active evaluation, or the process of researching potential purchases; closure, when consumer buy brands; and post-purchase, when consumer experience them.

Consumer behaviour (purchase decisions) are the result of a long, detailed process that may include a broad information search, brands comparison, and evaluation. Marketer are considered successfull in influencing purchase behaviour depends largely on how well they understand consumer behaviour. Belch G. & Belch M., 2009, refer that marketers are required to know the specific customer needs in order to satisfy how they turn it into purchase attributes, to understand how consumers gather information about different alternatives and to use this information to select among competing brands.

2. Decision-Making Models

Academic laureates of behavioural decision have identified many irrational customer choices and emphasize is that consumer behaviour is very valuable and important for marketers.

2a. Traditional Model of Decision-Making

The traditional "five-stage model of the consumer buying process" model of consumer decision-making, a marketer has to understand these steps to bring customers buying a product/service and to communicate effectively to consumers and close the sale. Kotler & Keller (2012) also describe and explain additional stage of the model - disposal stage, including moderating effect on decision making (involvement).



Figure 2: Five-stage model of the consumer buying process

Moreover, Belch G. & Belch M. (2009) also further discussed relevant internal psychological processes for each stage of the model (Figure 3) Hereafter for each stage of the model the "moments that matter" and factors that influence them will be identified and discussed



Figure 3: Internal Psychological Processes

The first stage of the model is need/problem recognition which explores their need and the marketers want to create an imbalance between consumers' emotions (present status and their preferred status). This imbalance will create a need and make consumers buy a product or service, may be impulsive and may occur immediately.

Factors that influence these moments are creation of desired (preferred) status, availability of information about new products or versions of the products (new status), complementary products for this product may create a need and motives to drive customers for buying. The time consumed by consumer depends on his/her past experience with buying, risk involved and interest level. With an alternative product, customer evokes a set of preferred alternatives and the consumer further shrinks his/her choice.

At the third stage of evaluating alternatives, a consumer may raise question /s e.g. "Do I actually need the product?" Are there alternatives out there? Is the original product that bad? Usually, the consumer chooses one the most important attribute based on which he/she will make a final decision. In this context of moments that matter may be emotional connections or experiences with products. Marketers are required to understand

that a consumer is aware of their brand during the evaluation process and ideally knows the attribute. On this basis the consumer makes his/her buying decision and expects a best deal in terms of price, quality, brand, product positioning, a place where to buy (location), consequences of using the product, etc. Particularly for complex purchases e.g., consumer durables, automobiles, etc.

At the last stage- post-purchase (satisfaction or dissatisfaction), consumers evaluate and review the product (right/wrong/satisfactory or attractive attributes and ease of use wise). If a customer finds that the product has matched or exceeded the promises made and their expectations, they will potentially become a brand ambassador influencing other potential customers in the stage two of their customer buying period, increasing the repeat purchase, but for negative feedback it restrains the future purchase towards a product (moment that matters).

Many of the purchase decisions people make as consumers are based on a habitual or routine choice process. For many low-priced, frequently purchased products, the decision process consists of little more than recognizing the problem, engaging in a quick internal search, and making the purchase. The consumer spends little or no effort engaging in external search or alternative evaluation (Belch G. & Belch M., 2009). So, all of the stages do not apply to repeat products because every consumer already has preferences and brand loyalty.

Also, Hoyer (1984) supported statements by stating that idea-based decision-making of consumers do not let them engage in a big deal of decision-making process at the time of purchase for a repeat purchase. Therefore, consumers go with a quick and effortless choice tactics provide a satisfactory decision.

Marketers of new brands or those with a low market share face a different challenge hence attempt to offer more choice alternatives to consumers, hence they use different promotion programs and advertisements for a brand switching.

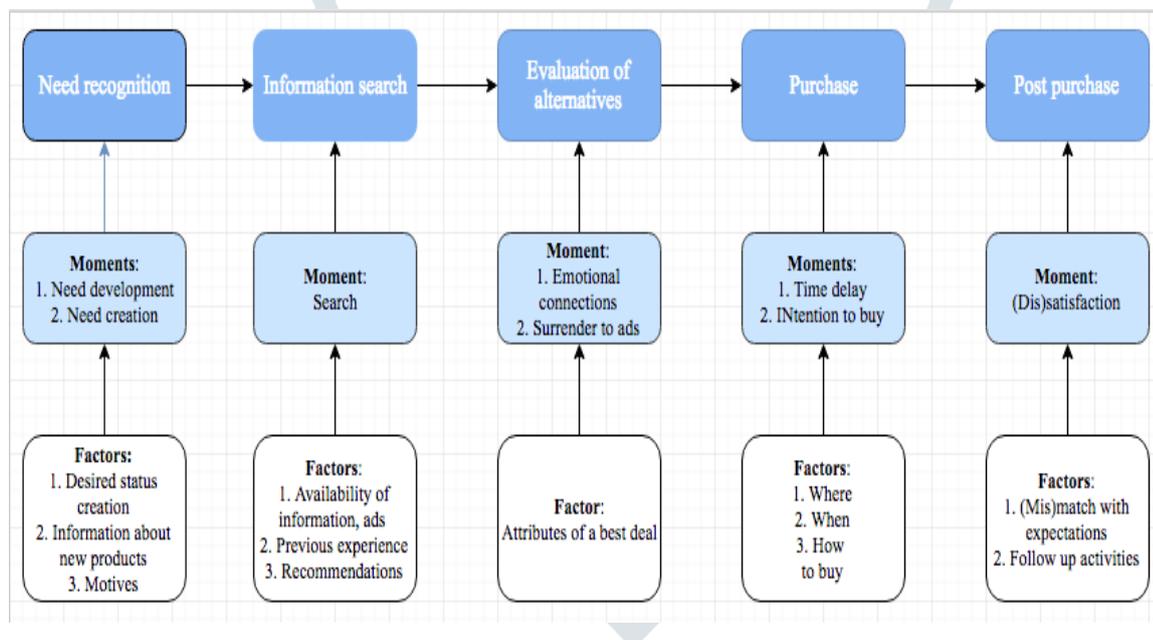


Figure 4: Framework of factors and moments that influence decision-making (adopted as it is from internet)

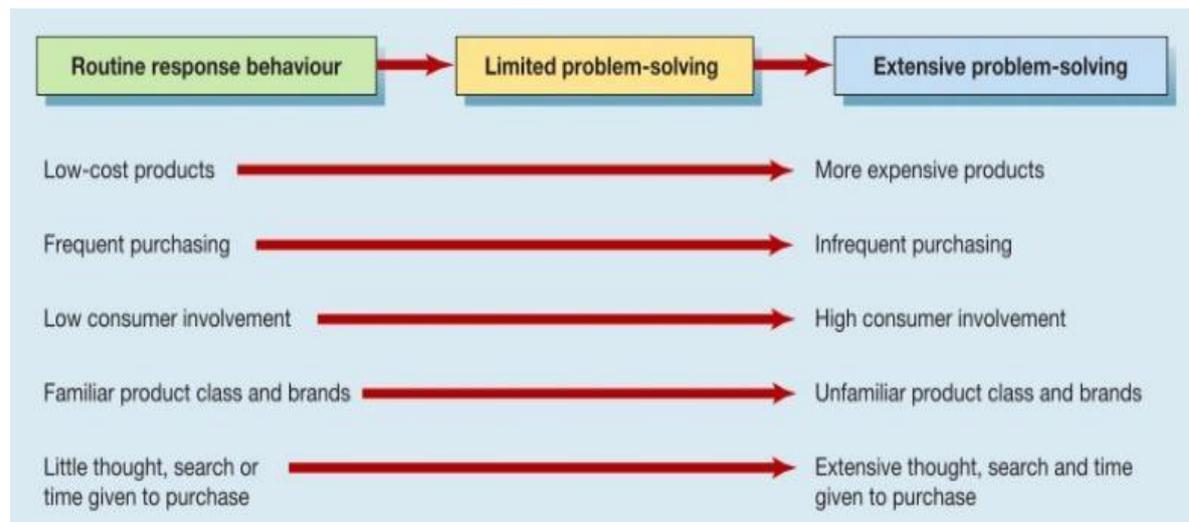
McAlister (1979) challenged the existing time assumption that product choices are made separately from of each other. The scholar offered a model incorporating dependence among selections of items groups.

Solomon et al. (2006) criticized the traditional model and mentioned that consumers don't go through this sequence whenever they buy something. The authors talk about purchase momentum (impulses that lead to unplanned purchase at the last moment). Also, the authors argue that consumers possess a collection of strategies and they choose one according to the situation and the level of effort required. It has been supported by Dhar, Huber & Khan (2007) who mention about shopping momentum that occurs when an initial purchase provides a psychological impulse that enhances the purchase of a second, unrelated product. The authors further propose that the mechanism device by Gollwitzer's (1990) about implementation and deliberation of mind- sets and deals with shopping momentum that occurs because the initial purchase moves the consumer from a deliberative to an implementable mindset, thus driving subsequent purchases.

2b. Variations in Consumer Decision-Making

Solomon et al. (2006) found decision making a continuum that starts as a habitual decision-making and ends with extended problem-solving (Figure 6). Many decisions are in the middle and characterized by limited problem-solving.

Figure 5: A continuum of buying decision behaviour (adopted as it is from internet)



Extended problem-solving phase is similar to that of tradition decision-making process whilst, limited problem-solving is usually more straight forward and simple. Instead, people usually adopt simple decision rules to choose among alternatives. Habitual decision-making refers to decisions that are made with little or no conscious effort – to make choices characterized by “without conscious control” and automatic minimal effort.

Another researcher Armano (2007) has a different view of the decision process, that is non-linear, so-called "The Marketing Spiral" (Figure 7- seeking least attention) that refers and interprets that the spiral keeps the consumers more engaged from interaction to engagement, to participation, to conversation, to affinity, to a community. The process of spiral marketing, one cycle may repeat itself adding more cycles to the spiral.



Figure 6: Decision-making process

A lot of research was done to investigate the how company’s brand influences buyer behaviour. One of the papers of S. Vijaykathan & G. Arasuraja, 17 (7), 2020, describes a profound emotional linkage with customers translating into dogged loyalty on “Emotional Branding and Buying Behavior”. They examined brand awareness in the consumer choice process. The results of this study support the identification of the impact of emotional branding on the customer buying behavior. The study is evidentiary that marketers should not limit their appeals to emotions only. The study further suggests that strategy might be to include the use of subtle emotional appeals as consumers with high levels of emotional intelligence might delay decision-making when presented with strong emotional appeals.

Likewise, Heilman, Bowman & Wright (2000) examined the evolution of brand preferences and marketing activities for market new consumers in the market and developed a theoretical framework starting with a consumer first purchase in a particular category and shows subsequent purchases in sequential purchasing stages. The theory is based on the idea that choices made by new to the market consumers are driven by two forces (1. information collection stage, 2. a stage in which information collection is extended to fewer known brands)

Belch G. & Belch M. (2009) discussed the difference between low- and high-involvement in decision making in traditional model and examines consumer behaviour in this process from a cognitive orientation. The five-stage decision process model claims the consumer a problem solver and information processor who is engaged in a variety of cognitive processes to evaluate various alternatives and determine the degree of satisfaction of a need or purchase motives. Other perspectives regarding how consumers acquire the knowledge and experience they use in making purchase decisions have been identified. To understand these perspectives, the authors examine various approaches, e.g., behavioral and cognitive/ emotional to learning and their implications for advertising and promotion. Authors insisted that culture, social class, reference groups and situational determinants are different factors that govern the purchase decision making.

Boyd et al., 2002 argued that the low and high degree of involvement buying is either less or high reflecting in the traditional model of consumer buying and depends upon the event timing of purchase (first time or repeat buying).

Yelkur,2002, diagnosed in his research that global changes in the market develops different opinions and bring convergence in the consumption pattern (e.g., in-/frequent/periodic changes in consumption pattern). It may bring brand switching and Brand selection/ preference sometime. This also result effectively in other global market and culture in terms of consumption. But of course, there can be some unknown issues unaddressed till today.

Jilani F.A.Kader & et al, 2014, in their study claims that consumers' decisions are explained by emotional intelligence and trust that plays a role as a predictor for perceived value and intentions to buy. In their study the authors understood the significant eemotional intelligence as the basis for online and mobile retailers in formulating appropriate strategies to attract more consumers.

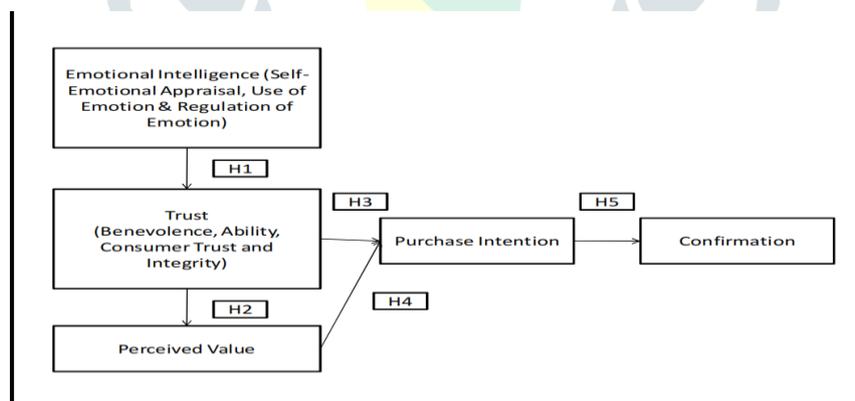
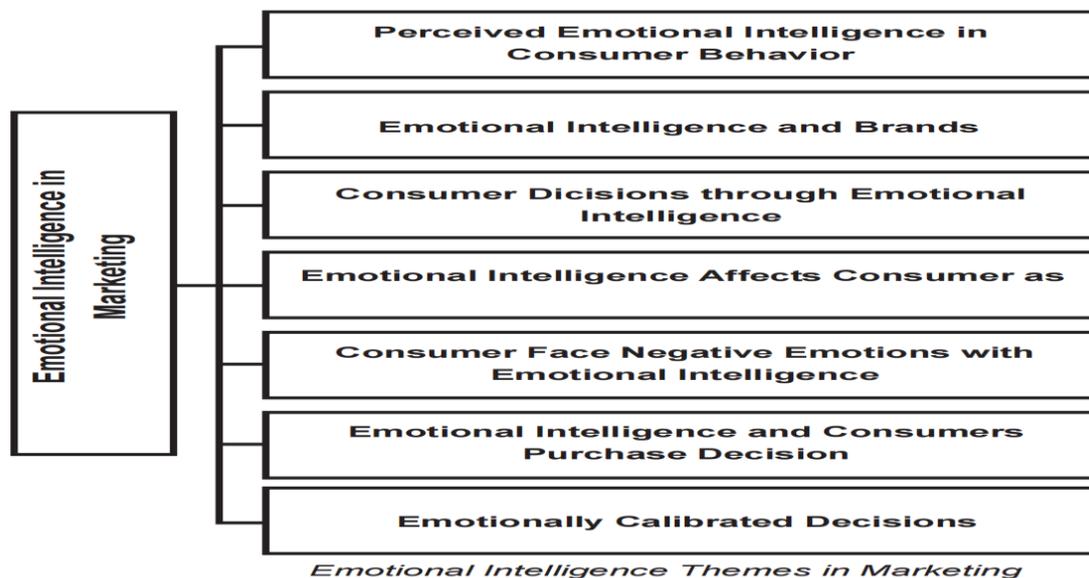


Figure 7: The Conceptual Framework of the Study that Addressing the Relationships among the Studied Variables

Authors gauge the consumers' willingness to make social inference-based purchase and explored the factors that will influence the consumers' emotional intelligence (EI).

Yaseen Safeena & et al, 2018, identified perceived emotional intelligence in consumer behavior, role of emotional intelligence in brand positioning, impact of emotional intelligence on consumers' decision-making process, effect of emotional intelligence on the consumer information, influence of emotional intelligence on consumer decision making process, consumers' ability to face negative emotions through emotional intelligence, and emotionally calibrated decisions.



Conclusion

This research paper is a presentation of different approaches and directions of consumer decision making process involving a number of factors governing the consumer perception, emotions and network. The study delves with the stages between information search and post purchase behavior in buying process. Though there is no authentic answer to such questions still it is possible to follow the tendencies and throws light on some processes. Current trends in consumer behavior has been explored with the flow of future changes and challenges in decision making. The study could find a different tangent of consumer decision making under the influence of a lot of factors emotional drives.

Traditional model served a base of modern model proposed by Mc Kinsey's (2009). Using as a foundation the traditional model a framework of influences among "moments that matter" in decision-making and factors was developed and demonstrated, that opened the further way to new research on such associations.

The researcher sniffed a gap in the methodology in reviewed articles, it was noticed that since consumers demand more and more personalization and it will find out some common characteristics and interrelations. Moreover, the feelings (stronger or less) of consumers in different countries behave differently. Normally the sense of feelings about durables are common but the drives and perception differ for non-durable products, in contrast less attention pays to services.

Study finds the role of controlling the information flow about consumers' decisions, as increased control leads to increased performance.

Research on information structure (in a choice set) is also relevant in the new marketplaces, e.g., electronic market place/ online where consumers face information overload while making decisions.

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