Information Asymmetry: Catalyzing Paint Customer Dependence on Influencers for Purchase Decision

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Abstract
Purchase of certain categories of products or services requires somewhat specialized knowledge about the category for making better informed decisions, the lack of which makes consumers susceptible to be influenced by influencers. Decorative paints are falling into such category and the consumers are vulnerable to the influences of dealers, painters and other influencing agents once the need for painting is identified to the time of making the final choice. This is basically because of the high level of information asymmetry where the belief of the consumer related to the credibility weight age of the information from each influencer is determined. Some categories of influencers, by way of their profession, have a personal interest in the buying behavior exhibited by the consumers. They actively exercise their influence through brand recommendations and, in most cases, ensure that their recommendations are adhered to. Apart from this the paint consumers are prone to be influenced by recommendation at a varying quantum of information from different sources based on the credibility attached to the information source. this is based on the further belief that information with a particular source is accurate and complete than the other. This paper identifies and generalizes this conceptual framework of information asymmetry and how it leads to the dependency of paint consumer son the influencers.

Keywords: Information asymmetry, decorative paints, purchase decision, influencers

Introduction
Purchase of certain categories of products or services requires somewhat specialized knowledge about the category for making better informed decisions, the lack of which makes consumers susceptible to be influenced by influencers. Some categories of influencers, by way of their profession, have a personal interest in the buying behavior exhibited by the consumers. They actively exercise their influence through brand recommendations and, in most cases, ensure that their recommendations are adhered to. (Gopal, 2014). The consumer recommends a brand in terms of his own perceptions and feelings in the face of the characteristics presented by it, without taking into account the social consideration and the links of the brand with certain aspirational groups. The fact that neither the status function nor the social identification function have an influence on the recommendation seems to indicate that the consumer considers it irrelevant to base his advice on aspects that are not derived from his personal interaction with the brand and that, on the other hand, may already be known to the person to whom the recommendation is going to be made. The recommendation of the brand seems to be determined by the consumers' own perceptions of it, rather than by the image and social prestige of the brand. (Belen Del Rio, 2001).

Buying behavior of decorative paint customers
The customers for decorative paints exhibit dissonance buying behavior: - sometimes consumer is highly involved in the purchase but there are few differences between brands. Consumers will buy paints quickly as there are few differences between brands. The customer preference may vary from each other, depending on the factors like product, price, Quality, brand, and Advertisement. (Kuma, Subramanian, & Karthik, 2014). The customer buying decisions of branded paints are influenced by
various factors, which are very different from non-branded paints where price plays very important role in purchase decisions. There no significant difference, in the opinion of respondents on the product, in respect of their demographic factors and price should not be considered as the first factor while purchasing branded paints. (Rao, 2014) Research has revealed that mostly the consumer's interaction with the category is on the lower side. Once the house is painted most users do not retain even a modicum of interest in the category until the house has to be repainted. The purchase decision in the case of paints carries undue importance of intermediary over the end consumer. This is, because more often than not, it is the painter or the contractor who makes the final decision of choosing the brand. (Dubey, 1999).

Influence at various stages of decision making
The influencers play their part at different levels in differing quantum where the customers are drifted through their perception towards a brand influencing a shift from their actual requirements to a modified requirement which ultimately drags down the choice tunnel for the customer. This influencers have express capacity at various stages of the decision making process of a customer. As recommendations flow to the customers at all the stages the customer is self reliant to begin the search for a suitable brand of paint. The total set is identified by the customer. This total set will naturally have a large permutation and combination possibilities making the decision making complex and time consuming rather confusing. The need for a heuristics applies even so early in this stage and the first attempt of recommendation receiving attitude is exhibited by the customer. The primary choice for recommendation would be the online virtual sources as this seems to be an extension to the self. There is no public exhibition of ignorance or difficulty in choices but continues to get the opinion and recommendations available online. Plenty of sources from social networking cites to professional recommendation sites are available for the customer. This will narrow down the total set. But this level of consideration set is also having a large vale proposition base yet difficult to finalize on. Here at this stage the role of relatives appear and then comes the neighbours come into force. The customer collects opinion most probably from neighbours first and then from relatives. This will narrow down again the consideration set but not preferred by the customer. In this mean time the customer start discussing this issue with friends and from this discussion most probably the final consideration set gets converted to a preference set. From this preference set the customer decided the value proposition that he may purchase and this value proposition will be the basis at the time of purchase. The recommendation of the dealers and the painters will only remain influential slightly deviating from this value proposition and this value proposition is inclusive of branded or non branded comparisons.

Dependency of paint customers - a discussion
The self reliance of the customer is the beginning of the purchase decision process and continues till the total set is arrived at based on the self image and perceptional influences. The paint customer may resort to gaining opinions and recommendations from virtual sources as it is considered as a self –extension and the customer search factors are not exhibited for others The consideration set is still large to make a decision and hence may rely on self evaluation but after a certain extend may resort to mental short cuts. Such mental short cuts are not emotional but rely on neighbours and relatives for a quick short listing from the consideration set to a final consideration set. The final consideration is discussed with friend which is yet another heuristic approach to arriving at a better choice and the preference set is finally created. The final preference set created for decorative paint purchase is more or less a value proposition preference rather than a brand or products attribute preference. The dealer and painter recommendations will be considered at the time of final decision or at the point of purchase where the opinion and recommendations are valued against the already set value proposition in the mind of the paint customer.
The recommendation of painters and dealers are limited to influence the customers to finally arrive at the most appropriate decision of the branded or unbranded paint which carries minimum deviation from the already arrived at value proposition in the mind of the customer. The credibility of information from various influencers are weighted with difference by the paint consumer. A conceptual framework on the information flow and the credibility attached to each information flow from various influencers is represented in figure 1.

**Figure 1: The level of credibility assigned to the information flow by paint consumer**

In this framework the information flow is weighted using “+” and “-” symbols. The information received from manufacturers has initial credibility and in the due course of time is nullified to some extent while a purchase decision is made. This is due to several factors like the time the information is delivered and the time it is processed, the variety of options available, the doubt on manufacturers claim, the incapacity of the customer to analyse and evaluate the information and the like. Thus the information flow carries both “+” and “-” symbols indicating a neutral impact, whereas the consumer of paint believes in the information provided by the painters much more than the information from the paint manufacturer, hence the credibility attached to the information from the Painter is more than the paint manufacturer which is indicated with “+ + “. Paint dealers are the most influential among the available influencers and the information available from the dealer is the most credible one for customers while the purchase decision is made. This is indicated in the framework with “+ + + “ representing most credibility weight age by the paint consumers. Several other influencers form part of the purchase decision and though these information is considered credible, is not given relatively high consideration.

**Information Asymmetry leading to influencer dependence**

Paint consumers generally is of the opinion that the information from the paint manufacturers is not sufficient to arrive at a decision as most of the communication from paint manufacturers are based on the competitive orientation and the most sellable factors or attributes are only highlighted. Getting valuable information directly from the manufacturer is difficult and is not personalized for individual customer requirements. Though such facilities as “talk to an executive “ ,“ live call”, “toll free number for queries” are available this is considered inconvenient for a paint consumer. Moreover, consumers generally is of the opinion that a multi brand dealer may have more comparative knowledge about paints and the dealer may have responses of many painters, paint contractors as well as customers with which a better decision may be arrived at and hence the dealer level recommendations are dominating the purchase decision compared to painters.
information is collected by the consumer, evaluated and analyzed further at the dealer level based on the dealer information and hence the painter’s recommendation stands second in credibility and influencing capacity compared to that of the dealer and other influencers.

Bibliography