

Consumer Innovativeness: A Select Study of Organic Food and Fashionable

Ethnic Wear in India

by

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Submitted

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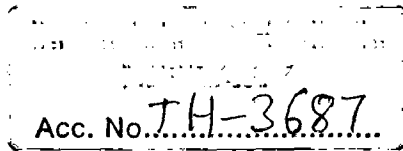


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Consumer behaviour

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A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Rajat K. Baisya', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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Abstract

This abstract of the whole thesis provides background, current status of knowledge, objective of this research, approach taken and results everything in short summary. The research analyzes domain specific consumer innovativeness, domain specific opinion leadership and related variables and purchase motivations to understand the buying behaviors in the chosen categories of environment friendly organic food and fashionable ethnic wear in India. The two categories are glued together in this research through their linkages with consumer innovativeness personality trait. The two high involvement categories chosen involve lifestyle choices for many consumers and provide insights on consumer innovativeness related research from two different types of categories. Organic food category is primarily functional in nature whereas fashionable ethnic wear category carries symbolic meaning. This contrast may be useful while understanding the adoption processes of the two relatively new categories in India. Consumer surveys in both the categories have been carried out in the Delhi National Capital Region (NCR) covering the area of 30,242 sq. km including Delhi and parts of adjoining states of Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Rajasthan. Subsequently, expert surveys in both the categories have been carried out by involving thirty three experts in organic food and seventeen experts in fashionable ethnic wear. The outcome of this dissertation is an in depth consumer insights about regular and occasional buyers in the organic food category and about buyers in the fashionable ethnic wear category. The contributions of the research include regression solutions based on consumer surveys. The study explains number of product categories bought by both regular and occasional buyers in organic food and number of brands

bought by purchasers in fashionable ethnic wear. The research also differentiates between the purchase behaviors of innovators and non innovators in both the categories.

The research starts in chapter 1 by highlighting the usefulness of personality research in consumer behavior. The cited research highlights the importance of appropriate personality variables in understanding consumer buying and consumption behaviors. Based on review of extant literature, it identifies that trait theory can have utility for consumer behavior research because of its empirical orientation. The key point that has been followed in the research is that it is generally more realistic to expect personality to be linked to consumers' decision choice, purchase or consumption of a broad product category rather than that of a specific brand.

In the field of personality traits, number of researchers has contributed to the emergence of five factor taxonomy of personality traits. The taxonomy proposes that five dimensions are necessary and sufficient to represent human personality in terms of traits including culture or openness to experience (tendency to be more open to new experiences including trying new foods, meeting people different from oneself etc.). Mowen (2000) through his 3M model of motivation and personality research has identified eight elemental traits, including openness to new experiences among others. From the reviewed research in the trait theory field, consumer innovativeness emerges as one of the key personality traits among individuals. It measures how receptive a person is to new experiences. Thus a deeper understanding of consumer innovativeness is imperative in recent times because innovation is one of the most important issues in business research

today. Hirschman (1980) has suggested, “Few concepts in the behavioral sciences have as much immediate relevance to consumer behavior as innovativeness.” Hauser et al. (2006) highlight that research on consumer innovativeness describes the mental, behavioral and demographic characteristics associated with consumer willingness to adopt innovations where the adoption is at the individual level.

Consumer innovativeness and the linkage of it to adoption behavior are the central themes of this research. Key theoretical aspects of consumer innovativeness research have been covered in chapter 1. The whole subject has been systematically developed as core concept and theme of this work by chronologically covering the key research streams of the topic in this chapter. There have been inherent complexities in the measurement issues in consumer innovativeness research. It is very important to understand these complexities inherent in the different terminologies of consumer innovativeness in a chronological manner. In terms of measurement of consumer innovativeness, the key objection raised by Midgley and Dowling (1978) involves the relative negligence in the reported studies to the dynamic social processes that characterize the diffusion of innovations. They argue that innovativeness “is the degree to which an individual is receptive to new ideas and makes innovation decisions independently of the communicated experience of others.” Midgley and Dowling (1978) conceptualize innovativeness at the level of all innovations and then mediate this by product class involvement. They make it clear that innovativeness and adoption behavior are not the same things.

However, there has been a clear paradigm shift in mid 80s as Gatignon and Robertson (1985) are some of the early researchers who have argued that product category specific innovativeness is likely to predict particular behavior especially the actual adoption of innovative products better. They argue “innovators must be identified and characterized on a product category basis and that there is not a generalized innovator across product category or interest domains.” This dissertation also takes the viewpoint that human brain has limited capacity and it is unlikely that a person can be very knowledgeable in large number of categories especially unrelated categories. Accordingly, it may be more useful to use domain specific or product category specific innovativeness while attempting to understand the adoption behavior in a category.

In line with the progress of the research focus in the field towards domain specific innovativeness, Goldsmith and Hofacker (1991) have developed the domain specific innovativeness scale as a reliable and valid self report scale. It has been validated by Nyeck et al. (1996) in international context in Canada, Israel and France. The scale focuses on the consumers themselves and on how they behave (the scale displayed in appendices section and more details provided on the scale in chapter 5). This research in the two categories has used the domain specific innovativeness scale given the flexibility of the scale, as it can be adapted for different categories.

Hauser et al. (2006) classify the consumer innovativeness research focus into measurement of innovativeness, variance of innovativeness across cultures and the relatedness of innovativeness to other constructs. On the aspect of variance of

innovativeness across cultures, major consumer innovativeness cross national studies of Steenkamp et al. (1999) and Tellis et al. (2004) have argued along with other researchers that systematic differences exist between countries on innovativeness. Accordingly, it may be useful to conduct a country specific study in an emerging Eastern country like India to understand the adoption behaviors for relevant innovative categories. However, before the country specific nature of the research can be understood more clearly, an understanding of related aspect of national cultural frameworks may be required. This study has dealt with innovativeness variance across cultures through the discussion on importance of national cultural frameworks. It is followed by the discussion on the linkage of national cultural frameworks with national level innovativeness studies.

Steenkamp (2001) highlights that Hofstede (1980, 1991) and Schwartz (1994) have developed the two most widely used national cultural frameworks in recent times. Hofstede (1980) has derived four dimensions of cultural variation – individualism vs. collectivism, power distance, masculinity vs. femininity and uncertainty avoidance. Hofstede (1991) has added the fifth dimension of long term vs. short term orientation subsequently in the framework. This framework has been applied to investigate a number of marketing issues including consumer innovativeness (Steenkamp et al., 1999). Schwartz (1992) has developed the theory of basic human values. The theory specifies 10 motivationally distinct types of values that are postulated to be recognized by people in most societies. The bipolar dimension of openness to change versus conservation of the framework may be especially relevant for consumer innovativeness research. Schwartz

(1994) has argued that national cultural priorities highlight the basic issues and problems that societies must face in order to regulate human activity.

Steenkamp et al. (1999) have done one of the few large scale cross national studies on the subject of consumer innovativeness. They have defined consumer innovativeness as “the predisposition to buy new and different products and brands rather than remain with previous choices and consumption patterns”. In concurrence with Midgley and Dowling (1978) argument that innovativeness and adoption behavior are different aspects, they point out that the strength of the consumer innovativeness effect on adoption behavior is moderated by innovation characteristics, marketing and other factors. They demonstrate that innovation orientation differs among consumers and among countries. In another major inter country study on the topic; Tellis et al. (2004) study innovativeness in 15 major world economies across countries, demographics and categories. They have found out based on research that countries differ systematically on innovativeness. They have discovered that common demographic antecedents emerge across countries. However, within these commonalities, innovativeness shows some distinct category X demographics and category X country interaction differences. Subsequently, the present research highlights the status of key research on consumer innovativeness carried out till now in India.

In the final section of chapter 1, the focus is on understanding the linkages between consumer innovativeness and other variables. For this, the linkages of consumer innovativeness with demographic variables, with new product adoption and with other

personality variables are covered. As this study attempts to identify the applicability of different dimensions of consumer innovativeness in the adoption process, different dimensions of consumer innovativeness are discussed in more detail in chapter 2.

Chapter 2 deals with the detailed literature survey on the key dimensions of consumer innovativeness. Consumer innovativeness related personality traits have been useful in research in differentiating between innovators and non innovators. A theoretical understanding of the relatedness among these variables is important because there is a research gap in Indian context in terms of full understanding about the reliability and compatibility of the different theoretical conceptualizations of innovativeness. Literature review has been classified under following main sections of opinion leadership (section 2.1), venturesomeness (2.2), optimum stimulation level (2.3) and need for uniqueness and consumers' need for uniqueness (2.4). It also covers personality variables like extended self (2.5) and materialism (2.6) that are associated with the self dimension of need for uniqueness construct.

Opinion leadership section covers relationship between consumer innovativeness and opinion leadership, opinion leadership research in international context, the motivational aspects of attaining the status of opinion leader, comparison of opinion leaders vs. non leaders, the domain specific nature of opinion leadership and the related variables like opinion seeking, word of mouth (WOM) communication which is divided into aspects of WOM obtained by receiver from sender denoted as WOM (received) and WOM provided by sender to receiver denoted as WOM (sent). In line with Harrison Walker (2001)

research, WOM (sent) is further divided into two components of WOM (Activity) denoting the aspects of enthusiasm and detail of how much is spoken by the sender of the message and WOM (Praise) denoting the favorableness or quality of communication provided by the sender of the message about the concerned entity. In this context the concept of affective commitment has also been discussed which is correlated with WOM (Activity) and WOM (Praise) variables in research.

Chapter 2 deals with innovativeness related variables like venturesomeness that is conceptualized in terms of risk taking propensity and is often related significantly with innovativeness. A multi-dimensional construct like perceived risk is relevant in this context that reflects a person's perception of the risk inherent in purchasing products in a specific product category. Optimum stimulation level (OSL) indicates the craving for novel, complex and unusual experiences among some people. People with high OSL are linked with greater willingness to take risks, to try new products, to be innovative and to seek purchase related information than people with low OSL (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2004). Similarly, people with high consumers' need for uniqueness tend to avoid conforming to others either in terms of appearance or possessions. The extended self concept deals with the interrelationships between consumers' self images and some of their own possessions with those objects extending the self images of the concerned consumers. Finally, materialism is another personality trait that indicates the degree of consumers' attachment to "worldly possessions". A detailed study of consumer innovativeness and the related dimensions may be very relevant in Indian context and may discover a lot of new insights about the chosen categories. Organic food and

fashionable ethnic wear are the two categories that have been chosen based on the fact that similar types of categories have been studied in international consumer innovativeness research and in related research. Also, these are relatively new categories that Indian consumers have been exposed to in most places here. The utility of the study lies in the fact that nascent, emerging categories like organic foods and fashionable ethnic wear may emerge as big global categories of business and this study helps in understanding the process of adoption in these categories.

Chapter 3 to Chapter 7 discuss research on understanding the category specific adoption processes (chapter 3), gaps in literature and scope of the research (chapter 4), research design and methodology with analysis carried out through SPSS Windows software (chapter 5), results and analysis (chapter 6) and conclusions and discussion (chapter 7) for the two categories and relevant parts of these chapters have been highlighted in the abstract. Wherever required, the commonalities in research approach for the two categories are addressed first followed by discussions on individual aspects of organic food category and fashionable ethnic wear category. Chapter 8 finally highlights the contributions, limitations and future areas of research. The chapter identifies the types of contributions common for both categories, followed by category specific contributions for the two categories.

In chapter 3, an attempt has been made to get a holistic understanding about the consumer adoption processes in the two categories internationally. The chapter starts with a brief overview of the organic food category. Based on international research, the linkages of

variables like food category specific innovativeness, opinion leadership, relevant word of mouth variables and relevant perceived risks with food category and specifically organic food category adoption are highlighted. Linkages of organic food category adoption and organic food category specific innovativeness with demographic variables are highlighted also. This is followed by discussions on the roles of personal values, relevant consumer purchase motivations and attitudes in the purchase process. In the fashionable ethnic wear category, brief overview of the category is followed by the linkages of purchase in fashionable clothing with consumer innovativeness related dimensions and with consumer evaluation attributes.

Chapter 4 discusses key gaps, research objectives, variables used and the specific hypotheses for both the categories. The results from the international studies on organic food are difficult to compare, as they employ different criteria for "regular purchases" and their focuses vary between specific food items, product categories and organic foods in general. Accordingly, there is a need to study regular and occasional consumers separately given that the perceptions among regular and occasional consumers differ for attributes and respective chains (ladders) other than key health aspects (Zanoli and Naspetti, 2002). In the present study, the respondent self-report purchase based classification has been used on the basis of percentage of expenditure devoted to organic food by buyers in different food categories. In this study, the extents of regular and occasional buying among purchasers have been analyzed. People spending more than 75% of monthly expenditure on organic food in a food category have been termed as regular buyers of that category whereas people spending 25-75% of monthly expenditure

on organic food in a food category have been termed as occasional buyers. Those who do not spend at least 25% of monthly expenditure on organic food in at least a food category have not been considered in the present study. In fashionable ethnic wear, brands that cost around INR 1,000/- range have been considered for research purpose.

The data for the consumer research in organic food has been collected between February to June 2006 period. The consumer survey highlights the interrelationships among the chosen consumer innovativeness related variables, the relationships of the chosen variables with demographic and time of adoption variables and the correlations of the number of categories bought by regular and occasional buyers with chosen metric variables. It attempts to understand the dynamics of word of mouth communication in the category. The consumer survey also examines the roles of major consumer motivations and attitudes in the adoption processes for both regular and occasional buyers of organic food.

Data analysis and hypothesis testing has been carried out for all buyers, for regular buyers, for occasional buyers and the rest for the comparison of regular and occasional buyers in that order. It identifies the specific motivations to which more importance is attached by regular and occasional buyers and by innovators. The strongest motivations found are health and nutrition motivations for both types of buyers. It emphasizes that the marketers should make relevant information available to target audience so that target audience awareness is at the desirable level. Only affective commitment towards the store from where organic food purchase is normally made significantly differentiates between

regular and occasional buyers in discriminant analysis. Accordingly, there is a need for the marketers to develop a detailed understanding about antecedents of the affective commitment of regular buyers and to plan a proper relationship marketing campaign for them.

Based on the regression solution for regular buyers of organic food (R square value of model at 0.923), marketers need to build affective commitment among this group. They should spend major efforts for targeting the opinion leaders of the category through communication. Based on the regression solution for occasional buyers of organic food (R square value of model at 0.704), marketers need to focus on health and nutrition benefits in their communication and need to raise the overall awareness level of target audience especially the health awareness aspect. They should spend major efforts for targeting the opinion leaders of the category through communication, and need to reduce the perceived performance risk of the same group. The consumer survey finds that the two most important factors limiting more regular usage of organic food among regular buyers are perceived higher price and lack of adequate availability of organic food.

The expert survey in organic food category has been conducted between July to October 2007 period involving a total of thirty three senior experts. There is agreement between consumer and expert surveys about the importance of many chosen variables including the importance of opinion leadership variable in the adoption process in the category. The expert survey highlights specific action areas and desirable strategies that need to be adopted by leading marketers on key issues identified in consumer research. It covers

among others the platforms for awareness creation, the strategies to be adopted by marketers for targeting the innovators and opinion leaders and the strategies for building affective commitment among regular buyers. The key marketer action points for creating affective commitment among regular buyers include better price competitiveness with conventional food through negotiation with farmers, personalized attention, regular availability including freshness of produce, choices in more organic food categories including range and fill rates, keeping an exclusive section with prime display in diversified food supermarkets and service reliability primarily through trained and knowledgeable sales people.

The consumer survey in fashionable ethnic wear for which data has been collected between February to August 2006 period explains the consumer purchase behavior in the category. It highlights the internal correlations among consumer innovativeness variables like domain specific innovativeness, domain specific opinion leadership, optimum stimulation level and consumers' need for uniqueness in the category. Additionally, it also covers the personality variables of self image (specifically extended self variable is used) and materialism. It shows the differences in values for all the relevant variables between buyers and non buyers and between innovators and non innovators.

The consumer survey also analyzes the role of different consumer evaluation attributes in the purchase of fashionable ethnic wear. It studies how buyers and non buyers and innovators and non innovators differ in terms of the importance placed on these attributes in the purchase process. It highlights the areas where the marketers need to concentrate in

terms of building the store image. Both buyers and non buyers attach high importance to the occasion for purchase and to the fit of the ethnic wear with the purchase occasion. Buyers attach more importance to the reputation of the brand name of the dress, to national brand name and to the level of fresh ideas incorporated in the dress. Innovators place higher importance on quality of clothes, reputation of the brand name of the dress, latest style, the level of fresh ideas and latest design incorporated in the dress, availability of ethnic wear varieties in the store and the customization capability of the ethnic wear brand compared to non innovators do.

The regression model links consumer innovativeness, optimum stimulation level, relevant demographic variable and consumer evaluation attributes to number of brands of around INR 1,000/- range purchased in the category. The equation developed (R square value of equation at 0.566) provides indications to marketers about their focus areas. The study establishes the fact that fashion innovators purchase more ethnic wear brands compared to others. Marketers need to plan to target the innovators. They need to focus on consumer evaluation attributes like importance on the level of uniqueness incorporated in the dress, reputation of brand name of the dress and the level of comfort expected from the dress.

The expert survey in fashionable ethnic wear has involved the opinions of seventeen experts. There is agreement between consumer survey and expert survey about the importance of many variables including the consumer innovativeness variable in the category. It covers the key marketer action areas and the strategies to be adopted by

marketers for targeting the innovators and opinion leaders. 76% of experts agree about the need to tap innovators and opinion leaders. They may be approached through event marketing by calling them in the fashion shows (41% of experts citing it), through direct marketing (41%), through PR activities (35%), through advertising (29%) and through locating stores in prime areas (24%).

There is very little literature in Indian context focusing on the consumer buying behavior in organic food. Though studying consumer innovativeness aspects has been the common objective for the chosen two categories; in organic food category, the focus has been more on developing a comparative understanding about regular and occasional buyers (given the very miniscule penetration of the category) whereas for fashionable ethnic wear, the focus has been more on comparing the purchasing behaviors of buyers and non buyers.

The research finally highlights the major contributions. Consumer surveys also identify the category specific differences in consumer purchase behavior between Indian market and major international markets. The key points of the research to be highlighted are:

1. Consumer innovativeness is the central theme of this research
2. The study has been carried out in two categories: one functional in nature (organic food) and the other carrying symbolic meaning (fashionable ethnic wear of around INR 1000 range with most brands in this range studied costing between INR 900-1200) because innovativeness characteristics is one key aspect which moderates the influence of consumer innovativeness on adoption behavior

3. Different dimensions of consumer innovativeness trait is considered in the research because a single dimension may not be able to capture complexities in adoption dynamics satisfactorily
4. Other variables like consumer purchase motivations among others brought into the studies because research clearly indicates that innovativeness and adoption behavior are not the same things as behavior is trait relevant given certain situational constraints.
5. The research has contributed significantly through regression solutions in both categories

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