

Impact of Promotional Tools towards Product Trail in Pakistani Consumers: The Case of Low Involvement Products

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to examine the purchase decision of Pakistani consumers in category of low involvement products through sales promotional tools such as (Price discount, coupon, free sample and bonus packs etc.). Data was collected by using 300 structured questionnaires and the relationship between consumer purchase decision and sale promotion tool was analyzed by using linear regression and reliability analysis. The results show that all four variables are positively related with product trial in Pakistani context. Bonus packs and price discount have more significant values than the free sample and coupon but all are positively correlated with product trail. Only low involvement products are considered in this research and high involvement products have been ignored. This study covers a narrow area and leaves a huge gap which can further be investigated in future. It gave us clear understanding about the Pakistani users that how they react to the various sales promotion tools. This study can also help the firms for increasing their sales by using the right promotional tool and stimulate the consumers toward product trail. Observations are factual and generally applicable, irrespective of the consumers of specific education and income level. So the results are generally applicable to all consumers of all education and income level.

KEYWORDS: -- Promotional tools, product trail, Pakistani consumers and Low-involvement products

1. INTRODUCTION

Sales promotion act as a marketing lever and from past few decades it has achieved a mounting importance in the field of marketing. A large body of literature (e.g. Bawa and Shoemaker, 1987 and 1989; Blattberg and Neslin, 1990; Leone and Srinivasan, 1996; Huff and Alden, 1998; Ndubisi and Moi, 2006; Cuizon, 2009) is accumulated over here which has noted the incremental sales depends upon the accumulation and importance of the promotional tools such as free samples, price discounts & bonus packs are all associated with the product trail, while considering the one product category in low involvement products. In this study, the effects of promotional tools including price discounts, free samples, bonus packs and coupons among the Pakistani consumers are investigated.

The study on the promotional tools in Pakistan is very small; hence a slight is understood about the purchase behaviors and their responses to the various promotional strategies used by the corporations. To get on this task, the study focuses on low involvement products, which are usually supposed to be more reactive to promotional tools than high involvement products. Low involvement products are that products which are bought repeatedly, with a minimum of thought and effort because they are not of the essence concern nor have any great contact on the consumer's lifestyle (www.marketingprofs.com). Every purchase decision is not psychologically involving or equally important to the consumers.

When purchasing the low involvement products and services, people connect in the narrow decision making process, that involves the sketchy seek for information and comparison of substitute than the high involvement products. Due to the difference in decision making process among the low involvement and high involvement items, and the high frequency of buying the low involvement products, this research focuses on the low involvement products in order to reveal promotional strategies that might be more effectual in the Pakistani milieu.

Product involves a set of physical and psychological satisfaction that consumers receive after purchase (Nwokoye, 1996). From product development literature, it is expected that each trial of a product by a particular consumer, a product must be capable of meeting consumers favor and deliver the best satisfaction in terms of high needs and wants. Products used by the sellers to meet the needs and demands of consumers depends on how these consumers test new product is most important to them and required complete concern from the producers. What consumers want in a product is essentially the service benefit or solution to their problems.

Thus, the idea of product as consumer satisfier potential is very important in every effort to attract beginners. When a company sells a product, which is really marketing is the expected satisfaction, use or benefit the customer

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wants (McCarthy and Perreault, 1982). Vendors and manufacturers not confuse the physical product with the functional aspect. In other words, what really matters in a product or services are the benefits that the product provides and the ease or facilitate processing of customer product testing. Therefore, manufacturers should be more concerned about the good qualities and characteristics of a product that could improve consumer satisfaction. This is because consumers or buyers will base their decision to test the product of the above factors or highlights that are even more demanding and these promotional tools proves helpful for the marketer to change the behavior of consumer at market place. This study emphasizes the low involvement product in order to expose promotional strategies (price discounts, free samples, bonus packs and coupons) that might be more effective in the Pakistani perspective.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Sales promotion is used to make the desire result from the consumers and it plays an important role in the marketing program for retailers, wholesalers and marketers and helps them to attract consumers through a variety of promotional tools (Osman *et al.*, 2011; Rizwan *et al.*, 2013; Saeed *et al.*, 2013; Butt *et al.*, 2013). Cuizon (2009) stated that sale promotion is not only a tool to increase sales in short run but it is also a very cost effective tool as compared to other communication approaches like advertising. He further says that it is an additional strategy for marketing and to change the consumer behavior. It refers to any incentive given by the trader like wholesaler and retailer to the consumer to buy a product (shimp, 2003). He further argued that sales promotion is a tool to inspire sales force to sell the brand aggressively. Wholesaler and retailers use sales promotion to get the desired response from the consumer and develop preferred behavior but it is a short term tool to influence the consumers. Sale promotion refers to many kinds of incentives and other techniques to produce short term and immediate effects on sales (Tottan&Bolack, 1994). Sales promotion contains free sample, price discount, coupon and bonus pack. Schindler (1992) argued that although sales promotion is a short term tool but it strongly stimulates the behavior of the consumers. This paper attempts to analyze the effect of different promotional instruments on product trail.

Bonus pack

Bonus pack is one of the sales promotion techniques which offer extra product for the consumer at no additional cost (Urseth, 1994) and cause to generate higher economic value (Chen *et al.*, 2012). Consumers prefer bonuses but it is true everywhere. Reiter (1994) says that bonus pack promotion designed to increase awareness and to stimulate short term sales. According to Lee (1994) bonuses are used to increase consumer trail of a brand. The immense transaction in bonus pack is buy one get one free. This practice saves the producer from dipping price in order to get competitive advantage. Although bonus pack is an effective promotional tool toward product trail as more of product without an extra cost but its effect is less from the price discount (Ndubisi and Moi, 2006). Gilbert and Jackaria (2002) argued that bonuses do not increase brand responsiveness before trail purchase but the consumer come across the product only once and if the promotion is noticeable then it will enable brand recognition and recall the consumer for further purchase. So the consumer can peruse to buy the product if they feel significant and the greatest return of value against the amount he spends. Ong *et al.*, (1997) identified that consumer believes more on quantity claim and price. In other words consumer do not believe much on bonus pack as if they are going to purchase one bottle then they do not buy more than bottle because the consumer is dubious that the producer may make a little increase to the price of the product with the bonus pack proposing.

Price Discount

Price discount is used as a tool to extensive increase in sales and generate profit it is more effective to increase sale especially during weekend days (Ruiz *et al.*, 2006). Ailawadi and Neslin (1998); Currim and Schneider (1991) and other marketing researchers confirm that provisional reduction in price can cause a significant increase in short term sales. Further Ndubisi and Moi, (2006) stated that price discount is highly influential variable as it may change the behavior of consumer in favor of product trail. This shows the inverse relationship between price discount and product trail. Faiz (2009) contended that during the period of price discount, people are attracted towards more purchase and consumption as they consider that it is a marvelous saving period for them as the price of product is quite low as compared to usual. Ehrenberg *et al.* (1994) identified that the short term increase in sales is due to occasional customers and these occasional consumers after considering the benefit of price discount shift toward this brand instead of their preferred brand. This shows a strong association between product trail and price promotion.

Coupon

Consumer can easily understand the coupon that are used for the trail purchase by the marketer (Cook, 2003) but its effectiveness decreases over time (Kumar & Swaminathan, 2005). Jacobson and Obermiller (1990) says that

the price expectation of the customers is considered more important to purchase any product if the product has low price customer will be more attracted to purchase the product. A promotional tool “coupon” is also used for the attraction of the customers. Coupons are considered more valuable for the high value products and have low value for the lower products but it is necessary to provide the information regarding the product’s price because the customers think that the low price brands must offer high coupon because of low quality and another thing is that the brand switcher who focuses the high face value of brand than the coupon could be ineffective. Ndubisi and Moi (2006) stated that due to lack of knowledge coupon may not have significant impact on consumers and is not an effective mean to attract the consumer toward product trail but Cook (2003) says that the coupons are effortlessly realized by the clients and very useful for the experiment procure. Ehrenberger et al. (1994) says that there is a little increase in the sales not for the longer period because the occasional customer takes the advantage of that price promotion of coupon offer to the customer and after that they move toward their favorite brand. Several studies have suggested that there is difference in people’s behaviors as some use the coupon as like middle and lower class people while some people do not consider the coupon as like the upper class or the people who are status conscious. Some people feel good when they gain any discount or coupon on anything they purchased that is an imperative inspiration in practice of coupon (Schindler, 1984). It is also suggested that couponing could also be a reason for switching of customer towards another brand (regular coupon users). If a company changes its policy to not offer coupon on purchase of the product due to any reason i.e. environmental change or inflation or deflation etc. coupon increase can also increase the purchase category of coupon users.

Free Sample

Free sample is another promotional technique which marketers use frequently to encourage the product trail by providing trail size quantity without any obligation. Ndubisi and Moi (2006) argued that free sample plays substantial role in modifying the consumer behavior toward product. Product sampling affects consumer behavior in two ways: one in short run e.g. instant purchase, and the other in long run in terms of goodwill this effect depends upon the usage of sample if consumer use it instantly then it effects in short run and if consumer deferred then it effects in long run (Heiman et al., 2001). Marketing managers fathom the importance of free sample (how it effect on behavior and change it) and often send the sample of the product to customer for practical experience rather than just hear about it. So it is identified that the promotion through free sample has momentous impact on consumer. Heilman et al. (2011) argued that free sample is an effective way to pamper consumer to trail a product and is a motivational source as it creates a positive perception of the product in the customers’ minds. Boas (2004) stated that free samples are the effective means of generating incremental sales and also builds customer loyalty.

Product trail involves actually using the product as Peter and Olson (1996) says that product trail refer the degree to which a product can be tried on a small basis in small numbers which may be in expensive. Brands quickly effect the consumer behavior and choices if we add the value by encouraging trail through free sampling, coupon, bonuses and price discount (Bank, 2003). Schindler (1998) induced that price promotion is the element which highly attract consumers to trail a product. Wayne (2002) also created a positive association between price discount and product trail. So, price discounts have an enormous impact on the consumers who are price conscious.

Theoretical Framework

Hypotheses

It is important to articulate that the literature quoted above is not from Pakistan because there is lack of research on Pakistani consumer’s behavioral response to promotional tools which result in the poor understanding of the effectiveness of promotional tools in this perspective. This literature proves to be supportive for conducting this research. On the basis of above discussion in literature and theoretical framework, following hypothesis are engendered for further verification:

- H1: Bonus packs and product trail has significant relationship.*
- H2: Price discounts and product trail has significant relationship.*
- H3: Coupon and product trail has significant relationship.*
- H4: Free samples and product trail has significant relationship.*

Consumer while purchasing has to make different major decisions: First, which product to buy and second, in what quantity to buy and these decisions are largely influenced by different promotional tools. This study is designed to show how much these promotional tools influence the purchase decision. The dependent variable shows the consumer behavior which is effected by the different independent variables like bonuses, price discount, coupon and free samples. Literature cited above illustrates that price discount and free sample have positive influence on consumers and are highly influential variables but bonuses and coupon do not influence much. As mentioned above, these studies are not about Pakistan and these relations may vary in Pakistani context.

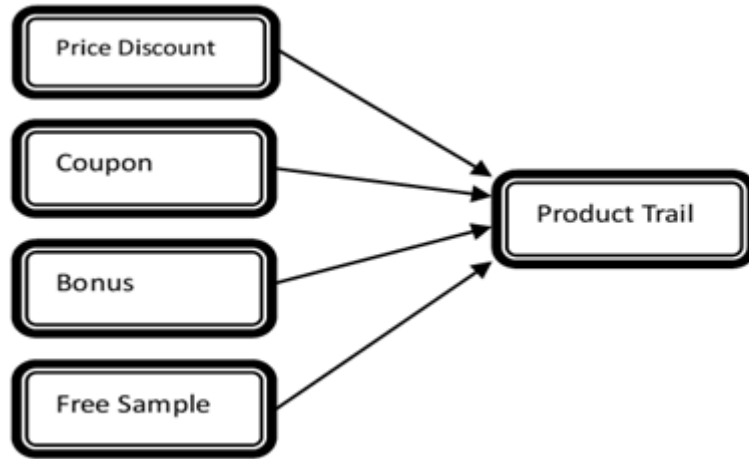


Figure 1. Research Model

3. METHODOLOGY

In the present study we investigate the impact of four different promotion tools e.g. bonus pack, price discount, coupon and free sample on consumer purchase decision in context of Pakistan. For the measurement of consumer response toward promotional tools, (bonus pack, price discount, coupon and free sample) items are used from the study of Garretson and Burton's (2003) and similar method is used in the study of Ndubisi and Chew (2005). Same studies of Garretson and Burton's (2003) and Ndubisi and Moi (2005) are used for the measurement of trial behavior of consumers.

Figure 1 symbolizes the research model. A five point likert scale questionnaire for the constructs measurements be made up of one strongly disagree, second disagree, third neither agree nor disagree, fourth disagree and fifth strongly agree is used. Each independent variable has five items as the three other items were omitted because they were considered extraneous and the dependent variable is tested with the four items with respect to independent variable.

Table 1. Scales of the study

| No. | Variables | Items | References |
|-----|----------------|---|------------------------|
| 1 | Price discount | 1. If a Product, offers price discount that could be a reason for me to buy it. 2. When I buy a Product that offers price discount, I feel I am getting a good buy. 3. I have favorite Products, but most of the time I buy a Product that offers price discount. 4. Compared to most people, I am more likely to buy Products that offer price discount 5. One should try to buy a product that offers price discount. | Osman et al. (2011) |
| 2 | Coupon | 1. If a Product, offers coupon that could be a reason for me to buy it. 2. When I buy a Product that offers coupon, I feel I am getting a good buy. 3. I have favorite Products, but most of the time I buy a Product that offers coupon. 4. Compared to most people, I am more likely to buy Products that offer coupon 5. One should try to buy a product that offers coupon. | Osman et al. (2011) |
| 3 | Free Sample | 1. If a Product, offers free sample that could be a reason for me to buy it. 2. When I buy a Product that offers free sample, I feel I am getting a good buy. 3. I have favorite Products, but most of the time I buy a Product that offers free sample. 4. Compared to most people, I am more likely to buy Products that offer free sample 5. One should try to buy a product that offers free sample. | Osman et al. (2011) |
| 4 | Bonus | 1. If a Product, offers bonus that could be a reason for me to buy it. 2. When I buy a Product that offers bonus, I feel I am getting a good buy. 3. I have favorite Products, but most of the time I buy a Product that offers bonus. 4. Compared to most people, I am more likely to buy Products that offer bonus. 5. One should try to buy a product that offers bonus. | Osman et al. (2011) |
| 5 | Product Trial | 1. Coupon enables me to buy a product, which I have not tried before 2. Price Discount enables me to buy a product, which I have not tried before 3. Free Sample enables me to buy a product, which I have not tried before 4. Bonus enables me to buy a product, which I have not tried before. | Ndubisi and Moi (2006) |

Sample/Data Collection

Convenient sampling technique was used and a total 300 questionnaire were rotated from which only 248 returned and 29 were rejected. So the 219 questionnaires used in data analysis denote a reaction rate of 82.67 percent. Out of 219 questionnaires returned, 64.8 percent were male respondents and 35.2 percent were female respondents and various education level like Matriculation 1.8 percent, Inter 15.1 percent, Bachelor 45.7 percent, Master 26.9 percent and MS/M.Phil. 10.5 percent. Various income levels in Pakistan are also represented for example below 15000 was 46.6 percent, 15000-25000 (28.3 percent), 25000-35000 (11.9 percent), 35000-45000 (5.0 percent), 45000-55000 (5.0 percent) and above 55000 were 3.2 percent.

A high communality value is observed for each item and the overall results show that the construct measures are valid. Linear regression model was used to predict the relationship between the variables. Standardized beta coefficient is used as a regression coefficient for the direct comparison between the coefficients and as to their comparative explanatory power of independent variables for dependent variable.

Reliability Analysis

Cronbach alpha values were used to examine the reliability of the variables. All the variables of the study were reliable as their alpha values were greater than the recommended level of 0.6 (Moss et al. 1998). It shows that all 24 items measures the valid and reliable views of consumers.

Table 2: Reliability of Measurements Scales

| Scales | Items | Cornbrash's alpha |
|----------------|-------|-------------------|
| Trail Behavior | 4 | 0.737 |
| Price Discount | 5 | 0.830 |
| Coupon | 5 | 0.888 |
| Free Sample | 5 | 0.829 |
| Bonus Pack | 5 | 0.870 |

Hypothesis Testing (Regression Analysis)

After the confirmation of the reliability of the data, regression analysis was run. This section of the study will discuss the results of the hypotheses of the study.

Bonus Pack and Product trial

According to the regression results of the study, there is a significant positive relationship between Bonus Pack and Product Trial with $\beta = 0.330$ and sig value is less than 0.001. These results confirm the significant affect of Bonus Pack on Product trial and beta value shows that the explanatory variable contributes 33 percent towards product trial. The regression results of the study validate the H1.

Price discount and Product trial

The regression results of the study confirm the significant positive impact of price discount on product trial. The estimated beta value of the relationship is ($\beta = 0.313$) and the sig value is less than 0.001. These results shows that the explanatory variable contributes more than 31 percent towards product trial and validate the significance of H2.

Coupon and Product trial

While considering the significance between Coupon and Product trial, the results of the current study shows significant positive relationship between these two variables with ($\beta=0.213$) and ($p < 0.001$). These regression results confirm the significant positive influence of Coupon on Product trial and validate the H3. The explanatory variable of Coupon contributes more than 21 percent towards product trial.

Free Samples and Product trial

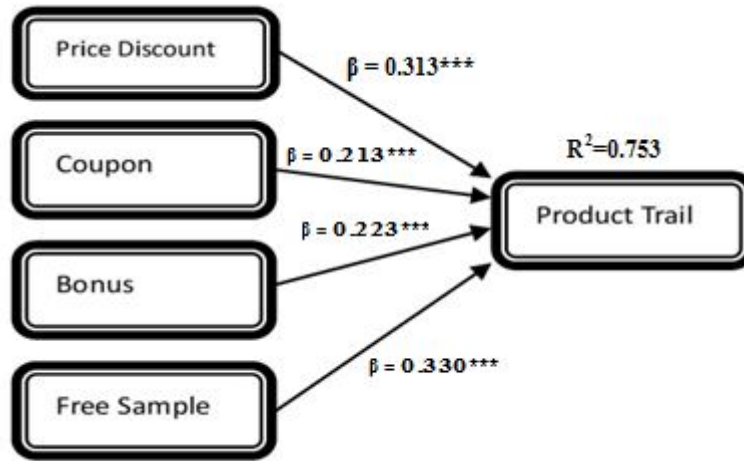
There is also a significant positive relationship between free samples and product trial. The regression estimates of the relationship is ($\beta=0.223$) and ($p < 0.001$) that shows a significant effect of free samples on product trial. According to these results, the current study validate the H4 and conclude that free samples contributes more than 22 percent towards product trial.

The ANOVA results of the model confirms the significant effect of these explanatory variables on product trial with ($F = 28.76$) and (p value is less than 0.001). The adjusted R^2 of the model is 0.753 that shows all these explanatory variables explain more than 75 percent variance in the predicted variable (product trial). The regression results of the study are summarized in Table 2 and figure 2 shows the structural model results of the study.

Similar to some other studies (Tottan & Bolack, 1994; Cuizon, 2009; Osman et al, 2011), this study also confirms that different promotional tools (price discount, coupon, free sample & bonus) have a significant positive influence on purchase decision (product trail).

Table No. 2: Regression Results

| Hypothesis | Model Variables | Estimate | S.E | Sig. | t | Results |
|------------|-----------------|----------|-------|-------|-------|-----------|
| H1 | PD → PT | 0.313 | 0.040 | 0.000 | 7.156 | Supported |
| H2 | C → PT | 0.213 | 0.035 | 0.000 | 4.938 | Supported |
| H3 | FS → PT | 0.223 | 0.042 | 0.000 | 4.970 | Supported |
| H4 | B → PT | 0.330 | 0.041 | 0.000 | 7.275 | Supported |

Note: $R^2=0.753$ **Figure 2. Structural Research Model Results**

5. DISCUSSION

This research contains important implications on theory and provides new insights to understand sales promotion strategies and their impact on Pakistani environment and consumer behavior toward purchase decision in low involvement product category. It also helps to increase the awareness of different tools of sales promotion. This research provides a clear understanding and explanation about the promotion and their linkages with the purchase decision (how much these tools effect the consumer behavior). This study has an important contribution to the body of knowledge in this field; one of the major implications is that the organizations can increase the sales by offering the right promotional tool and stimulate the consumers toward product trail. As this study indicates that all the four promotional tools (price discount, coupon, free sample and bonus) are positively correlated with purchase decision so organizations can achieve success by designing careful promotional strategies and budget according to the level of promotional tools preference.

Findings indicate that bonuses and price discounts have strong influence on product trail. Bonus is more effective among all and price discount is less effective as compared to bonus but the other two factors (free sample & coupon) are less effective than these two but are positively related with product trail. The determinant power of free sample can be increased by keeping a regular sample with the original product and make it prominent on shelves with product. The power of coupon is small among all, this may be due to lack of awareness and due to the fact that consumers may not feel easy in its use so sellers need to aware the consumers about the benefits of coupon and inform them about its usage. By doing this, we can enhance the credibility of the product and confidence of consumers. On the other hand, sellers must continue to offer bonus and price discount as they have robust effect on sales.

It is important to notify that the observed significant relationship between dependent and independent variables of this research are not baffled by respondents' education and income level. In other words, these observations are factual and generally applicable, irrespective to the consumers of specific education and income level. So these results are generally applicable to all consumers of all education and income level.

6. Conclusion and Managerial Implications

The current study conceptualizes a cognitive-affective model to integrate the different aspects of why and how customers use sales promotion. The results of the study indicate that the model significantly predicted the resulting behavior of product trial with the help of proposed explanatory variables. Through contrasting four types of promotional tolls i.e. price discount, coupon, bonus pack and free samples, the study highlight the impact of these variables in the process of sales promotion. All these variables of sales promotion motivate the customers to try a

new product. Although Schindler (1992) argued that sales promotion is a short term tool but it strongly stimulates the behavior of the consumers and it is very important for the firms coming in the market with new product that need to be tested by the customers. From a managerial standpoint, the results of the present study show that retailers should also take into account that consumers might enjoy using these promotional tools (affect component) and treat information and make evaluation as the basis of their future use of sales promotions (cognitive component). Moreover, we believe our model could be useful to retailers initiating appropriate promotional tools, depending on their promotional objectives. Finally, our results suggest the importance for retailers to understand the influence of individual traits on the promotional process. Particularly, segmenting consumer markets according to the identified variables would allow managers to select promotional mechanisms more efficiently. For instance, identifying the relative importance of the store loyal consumers segment among store patrons will dictate which type of sales promotions should be implemented.

7. Limitations and Future Research

There are few limitations exist in this study. First one: this study focuses only on one category which is low involvement product and ignores the high involvement category. An important research direction is to assess the effectiveness of these promotional tools in context of high involvement products. Some scholar believes that these variables are not responsive for high involvement category but it is required to test in Pakistani viewpoint. By using this study in future researches we may use comparative approach between low and high involvement products to check if they equally respond to promotional tools.

This research is powerless to complete all the promotional tools so there is a burning need to investigate other promotional tools on product trail. Instead of these four promotional tools (e.g. price discount, coupon, free sample and bonuses) which are examined in this study; future researches may investigate other promotional tool on the same topic such as in-store display, refund, contests etc.

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