

Role of Consumer Engagement Measures in Controlling Post Purchase Dissonance

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Abstract: This paper lays emphasis on the effective way of tackling post purchase dissonance. Consumer engagement measures pave a way for the sellers to help combat the dissonance felt among the customer post their purchase transaction. The paper assess that the customers prefer to be a part of those customer engagement measures which include mailing and sending customer feedback online. Moreover, it was found that those customers who are a part of the customer engagement measures being designed are more loyal to the seller. Post purchase dissonance can result in customers advising others not to buy the product from their seller by effective customer engagement programmes on behalf of the seller ensure that it doesn't happen so.

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1. Introduction

For ages, marketers have studied consumer behaviour in great detail to get an insight into the consumer's mind. Trying to understand what goes into a consumer's mind as he tries to make a decision of product purchase has kept the marketers on their toes. With the world being reduced to a global village and the competition to grab a share of the market pie becoming fiercer than ever, the task of gauging a consumer's thought process has become indispensable for a company's success. Not only does it help an organisation to regulate their production process and introduce such products in the market which consumers prefer to indulge in, but it also helps them to increase customer loyalty by providing them with goods which they require. The process of buying a product is marred by the conflicting ideas in the mind of the consumer to buy or not to buy a certain product. These conflicting ideas create a stage of dissonance in a consumer's thought process. Whenever a consumer faces a tussle between his believed thought and his present conflicting outcome which go against his beliefs, he is said to be experiencing dissonance (Festinger, 1957). Festinger described cognitive dissonance as a state which comes into existence when a person gets confused between two cognitions (thoughts), which cannot exist together and hence create tension for him. As the person believes both the thoughts to be true, it invokes mental tension in his mind. The resulting dissonance motivates the individual to bring harmony to inconsistent elements and thereby reduce psychological tension. Once the purchase has been made, a human mind starts assessing the pros and cons of the purchase transaction made. This activity leads to emanation of myriad of conflicting thoughts in the mind of the buyer. The positive aspects of a choice forgone

and the negative aspects of the decision made create ascending strain in the human mind and make the buyer rethink about the decision made (Kassarjian and Cohen, 1965). The marketers over the period of years have tried to help customers to reduce negative thoughts from their minds regarding a product post purchase. Companies resort to numerous measures to make their customers believe that they have made a great purchase and they need not ponder over the negative traits of their purchase. Cognitive dissonance can categorically be found not only in the post purchase stage but is easily visible in the pre decision stage as well, according to (Koller and Salzberger, 2007).

A consumer after making a desired decision may feel that by choosing a certain brand, he has forgone the positive traits of an alternative brand which he could have possessed if he had chosen the alternative brand. The guilt might get accentuated if bought brand doesn't perform as per the desired expectations of the consumers. Previously available information or experience provides fundamental reasons for purchase decisions. After making a purchase decision if someone found enough motivation towards switching, then the consumers feel less regret after finding negative performance of a chosen alternative (Inman & Zeelenberg, 2002). Dissonance is supposed to be highest during the post purchase stage. Once the purchase has been made, it can give highest anxiety levels to the consumers if the expectation he had from the products is not met. When a purchase transaction gets completed, most of the consumers feel that their decision has got hugely effected by the sales interventions being made by the seller and hence their cognitive consistency has been compromised to the various marketing interventions made by the seller (Bell, 1967).

It has also been observed that the buyers who switch brands experience more regret than buyers who did not switch brands (Keaveney, Huber & Herrmann, 2007). It has also been claimed that most of the consumers buying especially the household appliances experience post purchase dissatisfaction as they had already spent good amount of time searching information about the product before making the purchase by visiting stores, collecting information through internet etc (Newman & Westbrook, 1978). Hence, there's always a great chance that even the highly informed customers might also feel post purchase dissonance.

In such a scenario, it becomes a company's responsibility to help a consumer reduce his dissonance levels by providing them with such details post purchase that it helps increase the confidence of the consumer in the product. High dissonance levels in a consumer in the post purchase stage can make them switch to other brand. Hence, the consumer should initiate such programmes which help to satiate the consumers. Rather such engaging programmes should be made where the customer should be satisfied with the product but should also be willing to promote, defend and do battle with others, on behalf of the product. This idea gave the birth to the concept of customer engagement. This has been a fact for long that retaining customer has become more difficult than ever (Jacob, 1994). And technological advancements have made this a cruel reality today for the sellers around (Stiglitz, 2003). Satiating a customer's need should be the first step into the process of maintaining a lasting relationship with the consumer. The purchase should be followed by a series of activities on the behalf of the company to keep the customer interested in their brand. In the process of buying, using and consuming the product, the consumer invests emotionally, psychologically and physically into the product (Shevlin, 2006).

Customer engagement programmes are meant to fill the customers with the positive traits of the product and seek more consonance post purchase of the product since there is even strong evidence that reveals US corporations lose half their customers in five years (Ganesh, Arnold, & Reynolds, 2000).

2. Hypotheses and Research Methodology

Through this research paper, we would like to establish a linkage between post purchase dissonance and the role of consumer engagement measures in controlling it. The theory of cognitive dissonance hasn't been studied much in detail.

H₁: The consumers believe that in person attention from the seller helps to reduce post purchase dissonance more as compared to mailing and online feedback.

H₂: Those consumers who are followed by seller through consumer engagement measures are more prone to disloyalty.

H₃: Those customers who don't desire to be a part of post purchase consumer engagement never do negative publicity of the seller who causes them dissonance and never refrain from buying from that seller again.

It was pre decided that the research would be conducted with the help of the primary data. In order to make the data more authentic and to get the closest possible results, a questionnaire was designed. The survey was conducted in New Delhi, India and the target sample was chosen through quota sampling. Four quotas were taken and survey was conducted by getting the questionnaires filled from them. The sample size was 120.

Gender Quota	Age Quota	Education Quota	Income (p.a.) Quota
Male	18-25 years	Undergraduate	Less than 1,00,000
Female	26-30 years	Graduate	1,00,000 - 3,00,000
	31-40 years	Postgraduate	4,00,000 - 6,00,000
	41-50 years		More than 6,00,000
	More than 50 years		

The data collected from the respondents was checked twice in order to discard any incomplete forms. Around 20 questionnaires were found to be redundant since some of them were incomplete while few were not answered in the prescribed way mentioned to the respondents. In order to make sure that the results obtained from the research are accurate to the maximum possible level, SPSS 16 Software package was used to derive the main values so as to accept or reject the formed hypotheses.

3. Analysis and Interpretation

The hypotheses were tested on the basis of the questionnaire designed and the survey done. The analysis tried to create an association between post purchase dissonance and effectiveness of customer engagement measures in reducing it.

E- Mails and online customer feedback forms are supposed to be prominent sources of customer engagement. Through these two sources, the seller tries to remain in touch with their customers and try to combat their dissonance levels. The first hypotheses claiming that the customers believe that in person touch from the seller helps more in reducing post purchase dissonance as compared to distant technological sources such as mailing and online feedback was rightfully rejected.

Table 1 Kruskal-Wallis Test for Hypothesis 1 and its results

Always want a follow up and kept engaged		N	Mean Rank
Contact through mails and calls	Strongly Agree	47	49.64
	Agree	40	37.38
	Total	87	
Send customer feedback forms	Strongly Agree	47	36.14
	Agree	40	53.24
	Total	87	
Keep in-person tab on me	Strongly Agree	47	45.28
	Agree	40	42.50
	Total	87	

Test Statistics for Hypothesis 1^{a,b}

	Contact through mails and calls	Send customer feedback forms	Keep in-person tab on me
Chi-Square	7.020	11.433	.277
Df	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	.008	.001	.598

a. Kruskal Wallis Test;

b. Grouping Variable: Always want a follow up and kept engaged

Table 1 shown above clearly mentions that those customers who claimed that like to be followed up by their sellers and want to be a part of the customer engagement measures on behalf of the seller prefer to be followed post heir purchase through mails, calls and online customer forms as against the seller making a personal visit to them to check their dissonance levels. The hypothesis was tested through SPSS 16 and Kruskal Wallis test was used to prove the same. The value of significance was decided at .05 and it proved that the option mails, calls and customer feedback forms had values lesser than it. Hence, the hypothesis is rejected.

H₁: The consumers believe that in person attention from the seller helps to reduce post purchase dissonance more as compared to mailing and online feedback -- REJECTED

The second hypothesis was also rejected which claimed that those customers who are a part of the company's customer engagement programmes and seek more part in customer engagement policies tend to be more disloyal. The analysis proved the opposite of the hypothesis.

Table 2 Kruskal-Wallis Test for Hypothesis 2 and its results

Always want a follow up and kept engaged		N	Mean Rank
Always remain loyal	Strongly Agree	47	39.06
	Agree	40	49.80
	Total	87	

Test Statistics for Hypothesis 2^{a,b}

Always remain loyal	
Chi-Square	4.664
Df	1
Asymp. Sig.	.031

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Always want a follow up and kept engaged

Table 2 shows that those customers who always desire to be followed by the seller and wish to be a part of the customer engagement measures being started by the company remain loyal to their sellers. The valid argument behind this result was found to be the assurance which the customers receive from their sellers through mails and feedback forms which guarantee them to tackle their post purchase problems and dissonance if experienced at any stage once the purchase transaction has been completed. The hypothesis was proved using the statistical test – Kruskal Wallis. The significance value was found to be .031 which is lesser than .05, hence proving that the result is significant.

H₂: Those consumers who are followed by seller through consumer engagement measures are more prone to disloyalty-- REJECTED

Table 3 Kruskal-Wallis Test for Hypothesis 3 and its results

	Never desire a follow up	N	Mean Rank
Return the product	Strongly Agree	9	15.17
	Agree	27	19.61
	Total	36	
Switch to other brands	Strongly Agree	9	10.78
	Agree	27	21.07
	Total	36	
Advise others not to buy	Strongly Agree	9	8.56
	Agree	27	21.81
	Total	36	
Refrain from buying from that seller	Strongly Agree	9	12.06
	Agree	27	20.65
	Total	36	

The third hypothesis tried to prove that those customers who don't desire to be a part of the customer engagement programmes never switch to other brands and refrain from advising others to not to visit the seller whose experienced has caused them dissonance. This hypothesis was again

tested through SPSS 16 software. The results through the Kruskal Wallis test showed that those customers who don't wish to be a part of the customer engagement programmes would not shy away from switching to some other brand, would even advise others not to go for the said seller and would refrain from buying the same seller again. This proves that if a customer experiences post purchase dissonance and that dissonance is not tackled properly through an effective customer engagement measure, not only would it make the customer move over to some other brand, it would even spread negative reviews about the product amongst the probable future consumers whom the unsatisfied customer is in touch with. It can spread negative advertising about the product and the seller.

Test Statistics for Hypothesis 3^{a,b}

	Return the product	Switch to other brands	Advise others not to buy	Refrain from buying from that seller
Chi-Square	1.392	7.488	11.581	7.327
Df	1	1	1	1
Asymp. Sig.	.238	.006	.001	.007

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: Never desire a follow up

This table shows that all the three variables chosen shows a significance value lesser than .05, hence the hypothesis is abruptly rejected.

H₃: Those customers who don't desire to be a part of post purchase consumer engagement don't do negative publicity of the seller who causes them dissonance and never refrain from buying from that seller again -- REJECTED

4. Conclusion and Future Research

The paper has tried to establish a positive relationship between the post purchase dissonance and the effectiveness of customer engagement measures in reducing it. Post purchase dissonance for long has been discussed in the marketing scenario and many researchers have tried to find out effective measures of dealing with it. Ever since the advent of the customer engagement measures, an effort on behalf of the seller to be able to engage the customer into the positive traits of the product has garnered immense popularity. This couldn't be denied that the customers love to be inundated with positive information about their purchase which would help them strengthen their belief that they have made indeed the correct purchase and need not fret over the products they forgone while making their purchase.

This paper helps to establish that those customers who are a part of the customer engagement measures being adopted by the company tend to have lower dissonance levels as against those who refuse to be kept engaged to a company. Moreover, the research also suggested that the customers prefer to be followed through mailing and online feedback forms, rather than the seller meeting them in person and keeping a tab of their post purchase dissonance levels. In addition, it was also proved that those customers who are not a part of the company's customer engagement measures tend to be more disloyal as against those customers who follow such measures. It proves that those customers who regularly participate in the online consumer discussions being organized by the

company tend to remain loyal towards the company. Such customers who refrain from participating in engagement activities also tend to advise others namely their family and friends not to make the purchase from the said seller as it can have negative repercussions on their dissonance levels. They participate in encouraging negative publicity about that seller and refrain from buying from that seller again. This fact couldn't be denied that those customers who are followed by the company through their customer engagement programmes are supposed to be happy customers and tend to stick to the seller for a longer period of time.

The present research shows that customer engagement does help to keep the dissonance levels of the customer in control post purchase of their transaction. Those customers who are enrolled in the customer engagement programmes of the company are found to be more loyal and seem to have low pangs of post purchase dissonance. Although, there is still immense scope of exploring this topic further. The future researchers can try to figure that what specific customer engagement strategies work in combating the post purchase dissonance in the most effective manner. Besides, the future researchers can also try to find out that what set of products cause the maximum post purchase dissonance among the customers and which engagement measure works best for which category of product. The researchers can also try to identify that which gender takes more interest in being a part of the customer engagement measures of the company signifying that which gender experiences more dissonance. Similarly other demographic variables can also be studied to find that which age group is more enthusiastic to be a part of these engagement measures and which avoids being a part of it.

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