Introduction to the Study:

Increase in consumers’ awareness, has shifted the focus to satisfy the consumer and to provide improved product quality. Hence delivering quality products has become an essential strategy for success and survival in today’s competitive world. Improving product quality and consumer satisfaction has become a source of competitive advantage in the industry. Such a focus on the product quality like silk for instance, has lead to the concept of consumer delight i.e. marketers try to work upon the consumer’s satisfaction. The focus on customer satisfaction and delight has led the manufacturers to understand what customer satisfaction is, so that they can meet as well as expand customers’ expectation, which will lead to improvement in products, higher profitability and customers’ loyalty. However it has been felt in general that the ‘consumer’ for the silk products and their satisfaction thereof has been a neglected subject for the marketers for many years.

Quality, durability and consistency of silk products at low price are the final expectation of a customer. In order to grow, prosper and even to survive, a product has to remain updated regarding the changing consumer needs and preferences apart from understanding the strategies and competing products in the area of consumer
satisfaction. The consumer satisfaction and delight are proving to be widely adopted aim for marketing strategy for many products.

For this study the researcher considers the consumers’ of natural silk products rather than the customers of natural silk products. However, it may be not necessary that a customer may not be a consumer of the same product purchased or consumed. The study tries to observe the consumer behaviour towards silk products and also to measure the satisfaction level on the silk products. The study is confined to Assam silk products only.

**Review of Literature:**

Robbins (1932)\(^1\), has stated that human wants are unlimited and once one want is satisfied, another wants crop up. Maslow (1943)\(^2\) has observed that human needs are growing with the satisfaction of one need another higher need crops up. Oliver (1974)\(^3\) has observed that a person will decide to behave or act in a certain way because they are motivated to select a specific behaviour over other behaviours due to what they expect the result of that selected behaviour will be.

The buying center includes all organizational members involved in a purchase situation. It is an "informal, cross-sectional decision-unit in which the primary objective is the acquisition, importation and processing of relevant

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purchasing-related information” (Spekman and Stem, 1979). The composition of the buying center may change from one purchasing situation to the next, evolves during the purchasing process, and differs among firms.

The consumer shopping is to select, purchase, use, and dispose of goods and services, in satisfaction of their needs and wants. Mainly in which shopping is about acquiring needed goods and service. However, modern shoppers buy this to reward themselves, to satisfy psychological needs or to make themselves feel good. Modern shoppers purchase things to make a statement, to show off their personality or to boost their self-esteem. Purchased item have become an affirmation of the psyche as stated by Jenefa, Kumar and Kadyan (2013).

In the silk handloom industry the demand for the products is always on the rise. Irrespective of the economic and social status of the people (low income group, middle class, high middle class and high class people) all the groups purchase silk sarees according to their needs which are identified during the survey. The reasons for this purchase behaviour are many, but the prime factor that determines their behaviour is the prestige value of the commodity. In addition to this there are other factors which play a vital role in determining the buying behaviour of the consumers of silk products. The higher income groups believe that the frequent purchase of silk

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sarees reveals that they are rich enough to afford this commodity. This conspicuous consumption is the driving force behind the constant demand for silk products.\(^6\)

Jayanthi and Vaideke (2013)\(^7\) says that buyer behaviour is about “all psychological, social and physical behaviour of potential customers as they become aware of, evaluate, purchase, consume and tell others about products and service”. Buyer behaviour involves both individual (psychological) processes and group (social) processes. Buyer behaviour is reflected from awareness right through post-purchase evaluation indicating satisfaction or non-satisfaction from purchase.

As per Bhatia et al. (2014)\(^8\), women, particularly women workforces are vital part of buying behaviour. It has been found that working women are more involved with the purchasing activities. They are more price conscious as compared to the non working married women. It has also been found that working women are more Store loyal than non working married women. In case working women, they are more quality conscious than non working married women. But non working unmarried women are quality conscious.


According to Khurana (2011)\(^9\), the Indian consumers are noted for the high degree of value orientation. Such orientation to value has labeled Indians as one of the most discerning consumers in the world. Even, luxury brands have to design a unique pricing strategy in order to get a foothold in the Indian market. Indian consumers have a high degree of family orientation. This orientation in fact, extends to the extended family and friends as well. Brands with identities that support family values tend to be popular and accepted easily in the Indian market.

Ramasamy et al. (2005)\(^{10}\) indicated that, the buying behaviour is vastly influenced by awareness and attitude towards the product. Commercial advertisements over television was said to be the most important source of information, followed by displays in retail outlets. Consumers do build opinion about a brand on the basis of which various product features play an important role in decision making process. A large number of respondents laid emphasis on quality and felt that price is an important factor while the others attached importance to image of manufacturer.

Marketers should note that the selling process of women take longer than men primarily due to backward spiral during purchase decisions, but the post purchase behaviour of women on a brand/product/service can have huge implication. Hence it is important for a marketer to provide as much information to a woman

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buyer as he can because communication plays an integral part in buying decisions. Men rely on their personal assessment while women rely more on personal trust when it comes to buying and are open for inputs at various stages. It is important for Marketer to understand that the factors like Promotional strategy, Festival offers, Discounts, Availability, Billing Speed and Ambience play a decisive role in purchase behaviour of Women Grocery consumers. Hence, it becomes important to position a product in a way that it aims at prioritizing the strategies accordingly as initiated by Chopra (2014)\textsuperscript{11}.

Watson \textit{et al.} (2002)\textsuperscript{12} believes that the buying process begins with need recognition. Having recognised a need, consumers then search for information about retailers/products that might satisfy the need. Having gathered information, consumers will then evaluate the alternatives, and make a purchase decision. Following purchase will be some form of post-purchase feeling/behaviour, when the decision is assessed.

Consumer ethics can be defined as the moral rules, principles and standards guiding the behaviour of an individual (or group) in the selection, purchase, use or selling of a good or service. To study the ethical beliefs of consumers, Muncy \& Vitell (1992)\textsuperscript{13} developed a consumer ethics scale. This scale consists of questions about consumer practices, which have ethical implications. These consumer


practices can be divided into four categories. The first category, “actively benefiting from an illegal activity”, consists of actions that are initiated by the consumer and are almost universally perceived as being illegal. The second category is labeled, “passively benefiting at the expense of others. This takes place when the consumer takes advantage of a mistake made by the seller. The third, “actively benefiting from a questionable action or behaviour” consists of a consumer doing an action that may not be perceived as universally illegal. The last category, consumers believe their action is “doing little or no harm” and is not perceived as being a big deal.

As per Pandey and Pandey (2013)\textsuperscript{14}, the responsibility of producers to take into account the needs of not only urban consumer’s lifestyle but look the change in rural consumer’s lifestyle also, because consumer is basic foundation of every business. This is fact that today consumers look, think, prefer and buys the products according to his lifestyle and it becomes opportunity to marketers to fine tune their marketing offers and achieve high level of consumer acceptance and satisfaction. The emergence of urban and rural market with availability of many durable brands from inside and outside the nation impels us to measure the impact on change in lifestyle of Indian consumers.

Organizations that capitalize on customers’ active participation in organizational activities can gain competitive advantage through greater sales

volume, enhanced operating efficiencies, positive word-of-mouth publicity, reduced marketing expenses, and enhanced customer loyalty (Reichfield, 1996)\textsuperscript{15}.

Siriwan Sererat (2009)\textsuperscript{16} defined that consumer behaviour is searching or the related research buying behaviour and good use of consumer to know their requirements to solve and help to do marketing strategies. Herein, they can answer satisfying of consumer that is 6 Ws and 1H including Who What Why Whom When Where and How. This is to search answer 7 Os compose of Occupants Objects Objectives Organizations Occasions Outlets and Operations.

Dubrovski’s (2001)\textsuperscript{17}, model proposes that consumers' buying decisions comprises of five consecutive phases of consumer behaviour through the buying process: product perceiving phase (offered product with all producer's factors of competitiveness from the consumer's point of view); value estimation phase (weighting benefits and sacrifices); comparing the values of different products and decision-making phase (comparing alternative options); action phase (realization of the decision); and consumer’s state of mind after buying action phase (satisfaction with the product).

Kalaiyarasi (2014)\textsuperscript{18} stated that women are lovers of dress materials, quality dress materials irrespective of their education level and income level. Women are quality conscious, tradition and heritage lovers and hence inspite of various dress


materials/varieties in the form of Sarees, Churidhars, Salwars etc., they have given enough importance especially to the traditional silk.

Anilkumar and Joseph (2015)\(^{19}\) states that urban and rural markets significantly differ from each other in considering general and product-specific factors while making their purchase decisions for durables. Urban and rural consumer behaviour are related as also different on various fronts as discussed earlier while making a purchase decision for buying a consumer durable (White or Brown). Marketers of consumer durables have to evolve appropriate strategies on product positioning and market segmentation catering to both the urban and rural consumers for the white and brown goods in the wide spectrum of durable products for domestic consumption aimed at MC.

Urban consumers have a significant while the rural consumers have a moderate desire to try a new product on learning about it. Considering all the select products, there have been differences between rural and urban consumers for all the select variables. Product based differences also exist for all other variables except; not buying an unfamiliar brand in case of availability of well known brands and desire to try a new product on learning about it. Overall there are significant differences between rural and urban consumers for all the select products as observed by Singh (2012)\(^{20}\).


The absence of influence of social class on the perceived value supports the inference that it is the rurality of consumers influencing the difference in value perception from those of urban consumers. The urban consumers clearly seek gains with less importance to costs and social class does not affect the results. In the case of the rural consumers the middle and lower class consider cost and sacrifice important but for the upper class the results are not strongly supported. This suggests that the urban and rural consumer differences in perceived value are significant as stated by Velayudhan (2013)\textsuperscript{21}

Jenefer (2014)\textsuperscript{22} mentions that the role of the satisfaction, trust and reputation of firm have been increasing simultaneously in order to attract and retain customers, it is incredibly necessary for the executives and brand managers to understand the customers’ needs and making them satisfied as much as possible by working on mentioned independent variables in the retail sector, as a result of this customers will remain stick with the organization on long term basis as an important part of the organization. If it is done systematically with managerial insights, then they can retain their customers and it will be win-win situation for organization and customers as well.


Subrahmanian (2011)\textsuperscript{23} says new Indian women, with her increasing financial power, has a greater discretionary income and utilizes it to satisfy wants that have gone beyond these two to include holidays abroad, personal vehicles, electronic goods etc. Her criteria for family purchases have been modified by her increased exposure to various new ideas and information, and by her new role as a facilitator. Previously, the Indian women concentrated on purchases that based on family needs and wants. Her only personal indulgences were items of clothing and adornment. Gradually, the perception that women were looking for products more suited to their physical and emotional needs and wants began to gain ground. Such products should be introduced, where marketers in the developed economies started recognizing this fact. However, the developing economies are still reluctant to extend this to other products. Thus it is high time that the marketers and manufacturers realize, understand and recognize Women as a lucrative consumer segment and start developing concepts and create products that are women centric, which reap high growth potential.

Consumers judge satisfaction with a product in comparison with their expectations about the product performance. If the performance is above the expectations, an increase in satisfaction is expected. If the performance is below expectations, a decrease in satisfaction is expected. Disconfirmation is thus expected to affect consumer satisfaction as mentioned by Yi (1993)\textsuperscript{24}.


Upamannyu and Sankpal (2014) explained that satisfaction and loyalty are important for companies to measure customers' satisfaction in order to analyze their product or service image performance and whether their satisfied customers are willing to recommend their branded product to others as well as having the intention to purchase their product/services in the future. In order to create a successful brand, marketing managers should be more devoted on building brand image, customers’ satisfaction and brand loyalty as part of their branding strategy. By maintaining and strengthening the brand images and values, it will hopefully position the brand positively in the minds of consumers.

The most important and frequent response of consumption is “do nothing”. Most of the consumers do not report their success or failure response to the company. Companies should take necessary steps to get feedback response from “do nothing” type of consumers. No matter if consumers are satisfied or not but in fact consumers normally say little about the outcome of purchase. “Nothing to say” does not mean that consumers are satisfied. More problematic are the consumers who are not satisfied, but they remain invisible. These types of consumers create negative word of mouth, and switch to other products. In order to remain competitive, companies should promote the complaints systems and encourage the complements as mentioned by Ameer and Irfan (2014).


Bennet and Thiele (2004)\textsuperscript{27} said if satisfaction and loyalty are the same construct then satisfaction is a proxy for loyalty. Which means that your satisfaction ratings or surveys can be used with confidence to make an assessment regarding loyalty. Satisfaction and loyalty are divergent and this suggests that marketing managers need to test both customer satisfaction and loyalty levels because high levels of satisfaction do not always translate into high levels of attitudinal loyalty.

As per Jones and Sasser (1995)\textsuperscript{28}, except in a few rare instances, complete customer satisfaction is the key to securing customer loyalty and generating superior long-term financial performance. Most managers realize that the more competitive the market, the more important the level of customer satisfaction. What most do not realize, however, is just how important the level of customer satisfaction is in markets where competition is intense, such as hard and soft durables, business equipment, financial services, and retailing. In markets like these, there is a tremendous difference between the loyalty of merely satisfied and completely satisfied customers.

According to Fen and Lian (2004)\textsuperscript{29}, customer satisfaction is also very crucial for marketing planning since satisfaction does influence customers’ intention. Hence, marketers should look into the factors that would affect customer satisfaction level. In addition, as customer expectations are changing over time,

practitioners are advised to measure their customer expectation and satisfaction regularly and handle complaints timely and effectively.

A study conducted by Bloch, Bush and Campbell (1993) found that consumers would select a counterfeit item over a genuine product when there is a price advantage. Even though counterfeit products compromise the quality, consumers are willing to overlook this due to the cost saving prices. This is not to say that all consumers buy counterfeit goods, and among those who do buy counterfeit goods, there are most likely differences in the frequency of purchases and differences in the importance and/or satisfaction of product attributes by product category.

Personal factors play a part. B2B buyers are overwhelmed with choices, features, benefits, information, data, and metrics. They often have to interview dozens of potential vendors and ask them hundreds of questions. No matter how disciplined they are in their buying procedures, they will often find a way to simplify their decision making either consciously or subconsciously. For example, a buyer deciding upon multiple vendors running neck and neck might decide to simply choose the vendor whose sales representative he likes the most.

Emma Aspfors (2010) reveals that “When customer’s experiences exceed their expectations, customer satisfaction together with situational and personal factors will result in customer loyalty. Again, the results showed on customer

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satisfaction and loyalty. This is something the company all the time need to strive for, because keeping the existing customers satisfied is much cheaper than trying to find new ones.\textsuperscript{32}

As per Churchill and Surprenant (1982),\textsuperscript{33} consumer satisfaction is a post-purchase phenomenon. It reflects how much the consumer likes or dislikes the product after using it. Satisfaction is major outcome of marketing activity and serves to link processes culminating in purchase and consumption with post-purchase phenomenon such as attitude change, repeat purchase and brand loyalty. The centrality of the concept is reflected by its inclusion in the marketing concept that profits are generated through the satisfaction of consumer needs and wants.

Naghibi and Sadeghi (2011)\textsuperscript{34} states that customer satisfaction as the evaluation of the quality or perceived value, expectations and level of consistency or inconsistency or differences between actual quality and expected to be considered. Comparison between product quality and perceived quality is called confirmation or mismatch. That a mismatch leads to dissatisfaction. Consequently we accept the view that satisfaction can be interpreted as the result of a comparative process. Usually when expectations are not confirmed, customer dissatisfaction, there is more


than satisfactory. The level of acceptance defined as the maximum price that a buyer is willing to pay for a product.

Sproles and Geistfeld (1978)\textsuperscript{35} has indicated that improvement of consumer satisfaction might be made through several strategies. Consumer educational and informative labeling programs could be used to disseminate appropriate information needed by consumers to make satisfactory decisions. In some cases regulation might be warranted to insure all manufacturers and retailers would offer products fulfilling selected critical criteria (i.e. safety, information on product care/use). Finally, programs of voluntary and/or mandatory product standards which are receiving increased discussion in clothing and textile trades (i.e. see ASTM Standardization News, December 1976) may be the long-run solution to problems of product performance and associated dissatisfactions.

A satisfied customer often spreads positive things about the company to the other customers. Such positive opinion proves to be more reliable and authentic than company’s propaganda, including advertisements and consequently, brings in more customers as stated by Eswari and Meera (2015)\textsuperscript{36}.

As per a Norwegian study by Solvang (2007), observed that customer service within the furniture retail business is of great importance. Compared to other retail industries, e.g. the grocery industry, the aspect of service is much more crucial for


business success within this sector. In furniture stores, customers depend much more on the service and advices given by staff than in normal grocery stores, which are to a great extent self-service oriented. It is then not surprising that customers’ perception of service and the image of furniture stores are closely linked to customer loyalty and satisfaction. Customer service and customers’ perceptions are always important but especially for small businesses. By knowing the customers’ perception, how they perceive service, selection/products, prices, location and cleanliness, customers’ satisfaction and ultimately the success of the business can be affected.\footnote{Solvang B.K. (2007). Satisfaction, Loyalty and Repurchase: A study of Norwegian Customers of furniture and Grocery Stores. Journal of Consumer Satisfaction, Dissatisfaction and Complaining Behavior. Vol. 20, p. 110.}

According to Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry (Leonard L)\footnote{Berry L.L., Parasuraman A. (1991). “Marketing Services: Competing Through Quality”. New York Press.} between 1985 and 1988 provides the basis for the measurement of customer satisfaction with a service by using the gap between the customer’s expectation of performance and their perceived experience of performance. This provides the measurer with a satisfaction "gap" which is objective and quantitative in nature. Work done by Cronin and Taylor propose the "confirmation/disconfirmation" theory of combining the "gap" described by Parasuraman, Zeithaml and Berry as two different measures (perception and expectation of performance) into a single measurement of performance according to expectation.
Customers who actively participate in organizational activities can directly increase their personal satisfaction and perceptions of service quality (Bowers, Martin & Luker 1990)\textsuperscript{39}.

The disconfirmation paradigm has been the dominant model used in explaining the customer’s satisfaction or dissatisfaction. There are actually 3 possible reactions that may come from the customer. Two of them are positive reactions while the other one is a negative one. A customer shows a positive reaction either when the product is able to perform as what he/she has expected (zero positive index) or the product is able to exceed its expected performance (positive disconfirmation index). On the other hand, a negative reaction (negative disconfirmation index) is expected when the product performs below the expectation of the customer (Jacobs et al., 1998)\textsuperscript{40}.

Bowonder and Sailesh (2005)\textsuperscript{41} have put emphasis on problems relating to failure of the silk industry in Kancheepuram and it was due to the lack of support from technology. The industry was on the brink of extinction due to the obsolescence of the designs and design making procedures. As per their Observations the use of ICT has not only helped in creating new and complex designs but also reduce the time involved in the process. The acceptance of these

silk sarees by the consumers has also increased with the automation of designing process.

According to Rawlley (1919)\(^4\), the principal object was to discover the exact requirements of the silk market and to present a general analysis of the facts to the interested parties. In doing this, he has pointed out a new source of supply for the consumer of raw silk and a new outlet for the producer and if steps are taken to organize the industry and the trade before it is too late, there is every possibility that India will play a great part in the fulfillment of world's silk contracts.

Mahan (2012)\(^4\) says Assam was the original home of eri silk from time immemorial. Muga silkworm and mulberry silk are also exclusively produced by these people. Traditional dresses made from muga yarn are mekhela chadar, riha, chapkon (a kind of shirt), etc. But in present situation different items are prepared by silk, like, gamocha (a piece of cloth used as handkerchief), blouse, sarees (ladies garment), curtain, cushion cover etc. These items made by using of various designs are adored far and wide.

As per Phukan (2012)\(^4\), there is a bright prospect of muga silk industry of Assam as the demand for natural fibre has grown considerably in the global market.


The durability and elegant lustrous natural colour is the strength of muga silk fibre. Therefore, there is every possibility to explore the national and international market by developing the production base of muga raw silk.

Bajpai and Shukla (1998)\textsuperscript{45} has expressed in their paper that at present the state (U.P.) silk products are facing a tough competition from different handloom corporations in India and the consumers are also giving preference for mixed fabrics. There is also an organized attempt of silk yarn trader’s against the Government. Hence there is an urgent need to overcome these problems. Government should patronize this industry and the supply of silk yarn should be under Government control. Silk reeling units must be established in the districts which has sericulture firms and at least one weavers training centers must be opened having free training and lodging facilities. Interest free loan to the weavers through the banks should be given for the establishment of silk textile units. Introduction of silk garments for different sex and age is essential because in the state (U.P.) almost 95% weavers are engaged in making silk saari.

Umesh \textit{et al.} (2009)\textsuperscript{46} stated that the silk industry in India is showing a dismal performance in the post WTO period. This profile of performance can be treated as warning signal for the industry because if the industry starts declining at


this rate, it will be difficult to revive the industry in the near future. Therefore, there is a need for appropriate policy intervention to remove the clogs in the system to make it more vibrant in the changed context of WTO regime. The declining trend of area under mulberry is a clear signal emanating from the near stagnant or decreasing prices of primary products like silk cocoons and raw silk in the country. The sliding down in the growth of silk industry has to be prevented and it should be vitalized with new growth impetus so as to increase its contribution to the economy. In order to be competitive in the world market, it is imperative to ensure adequate domestic production of high quality long staple silk yarn, which will also overcome the present quality problems, which are coming in the way of enhancing Indian silk exports. Export competitiveness should be enhanced through increased productivity and quality. To increase production and exports there is a need to expand production and income enhancing support to the silk industry.

In the opinion of Dey and Das (2010)\textsuperscript{47}, Eri (a variation of Silk) generates substantial income and employment each year especially for the rural poor masses, its growth has not been noticeably high as the potential in Assam. The analysis made in their paper taking into account Barpeta district as a case study have proved the existence of substantial scope for enhancing the ericulture activities even at the existing level of technology and with little effort in the food leaves production, marketing and financial assistance. According to them it may be expanded significantly that would generate further income and employment in rural Assam.

Goswami (2006), in his paper has made an attempt to analyze the impact of globalization of silk industry in North-East India from gender perspective. The study found that with respect to raw materials, globalization has some negative effect in domestic market. According to him the process of globalization of the industry though generate economic gain from rapid growth of export the negative aspects such as inadequate health care, education, training and credit facilities are a few important problems that deprived women workers in the industry.

The golden Muga silk culture is associated with the traditions and customs of Assamese people. The varieties of silk fabrics produced with fineness of texture and beauty in design and harmony in colour were magic skills of weaving mainly inherited from generation to generation. The traditional skills involved in Muga culture plays a very important role in socio-economic and cultural life of Assamese people as mentioned by Phukan and Chowdhury (2006) in their paper.

Production processes are silk blending and silk marking, which require original wooden equipment reinforced with steel for strength and electrical motors for speed. Both simple silk fibres and factory silk fibres are used and patterns are created based on traditional designs. In order to develop silk pattern production for added commercial value, original patterns with contemporary character must be

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chosen and expanded as bigger and more varied products, such as handbags. New silk patterns sold in local and regional markets will boost the income of the people. Successful conservation and development of silk pattern production adds commercial value to community handicrafts as mentioned by Sawasdee et al. (2015)\(^\text{50}\). If the local producers accept new ideas that integrate traditional knowledge, their work with cultural capital will add to the market power of local silk products.

In their paper Huang and Wang (2011)\(^\text{51}\), has stated that China though having a strong share of production of silk has relatively a small share in silk cloth marketing in the world. In their paper silk apparel retail marketing development strategies were analyzed and have identified factors like expansion of the market through customization would be the strategy need to be adopted by China in order to make it a silk flare brilliant in the world.

**Concepts:**

By going through the above literatures though not exhaustive in nature, however reveals some interesting findings and have contributed immensely to the present body of literatures. Understanding from these literatures along with other useful materials, the researcher has proceeded to develop the basic concepts for the


The study has been carried on revolving around three conceptual features, namely Consumers’ behaviour, Consumers’ satisfaction and Silk products.

**Consumer Behaviour:**

Consumer behaviour means the study of individuals, groups or organizations about their process of selecting, securing, using and disposing the products, services, experiences or ideas to satisfy needs and the impact of these processes on the society. Behaviour concerns either with the individual or the group. The use of product is often so important to the marketer because this may influence how a product is best positioned or how we can encourage increased consumption. Consumer behaviour involves services and ideas as well as tangible products.

Whether consumers will search for and use label information will be influenced by both characteristics of the product and of the buyer. Product characteristics include the extent to which the product’s probable performance can be assessed by visual inspection and its complexity, that is, the number of decisions the consumer is required to make about it. Consumer characteristics include experience with purchasing the product, and the kinds of criteria the consumer uses in judging the product. The evaluative criteria are shaped by the consumer's beliefs, attitudes, and perception of risk in the purchase. There are various steps being identified as a process of consumer behaviour. Some of them are: need recognition, information search, evaluation of alternatives, purchase and post purchase behaviour.
**Consumer Satisfaction:**

Consumer satisfaction, a business term, is a measure of how products and services supplied by a company meet or surpass Consumer expectation. It is seen as a key performance indicator within business. In a competitive marketplace where businesses compete for Consumers, Consumer satisfaction is seen as a key differentiator and increasingly has become a key element of business strategy. There is a substantial body of empirical literature that establishes the benefits of Consumer satisfaction for firms. Organizations need to retain existing Consumers while targeting non-Consumers. Measuring Consumer satisfaction provides an indication of how successful the organization is at providing products and/or services to the marketplace. Consumer satisfaction is an abstract concept and the actual manifestation of the state of satisfaction will vary from person to person and product/service to product/service. The state of satisfaction depends on a number of both psychological and physical variables which correlate with satisfaction behaviours such as return and recommend rate. The level of satisfaction can also vary depending on other products against which the Consumer can compare the organization's products.

**Silk Products:**

Silk Products are considered to be extremely fashionable in Indian subcontinent. Silk Products are considered as a symbol of royalty and prestige, a "pure fabric" used for all religious, ritual and ceremonial occasions. As per the traders the degree of demand for silk products is high. Silk fabric is usually sold at 'thans'. Such fabrics are usually worn by average women as loin cloth or 'mekhela' which is
usually a common household garment. Marketing of silk products has not presented
difficulties in view of its high local demand. Uniformity of silk yarn and
standardization of silk clothes are essential for a steady market. Over and above
marketing intelligence is necessary to manufacture new designs suited to changing
tastes and fashion. At present most of the silk products are still traditional in pattern
without much variation of design and style. Large scale production of silk products
and of uniform quality is possible and this would help in bringing down the prices of
these products.

But even then traders were facing problems as they were not able to take
huge orders because it has become impossible on the weavers side to make the
products in appropriate time as most of them were still carrying on with the
traditional handlooms which is very laborious and time consuming 52.

Traders were also facing problems in marketing their products in the market
due to entering of other similar kind of products in the market which in looks it is
quiet identical but its durability is very less but again price is also very less for
which customers were very much attracted towards it 53.

Development of Conceptual Framework & Research Design:

Based on the concepts and previous reviews the researcher has proceeded to
frame up the conceptual framework of the study.

Dhemaji, Dibrugarh and Sivasagar Districts of Assam”, unpublished M. Phil dissertation,
Department of Commerce, Dibrugarh University, pp. 68-86.
Dhemaji, Dibrugarh and Sivasagar Districts of Assam”, unpublished M. Phil dissertation,
Department of Commerce, Dibrugarh University, pp. 68-86.
There are five stages in Consumer Behaviour as mentioned in the book “Consumer Behaviour” by Khan & Martin, (2007)\textsuperscript{54}. If a consumer is rational in their approach they normally behave in these chronological stages. By rationality the researcher tries to mean that the consumers should not be influenced by any emotional attachments while purchasing silk products. Understanding the various factors associated with the silk products as backed up by the reviews and the concepts this conceptual framework has been prepared.

1) **Need Recognition:**

Needs may be functional or psychological in nature, and retailers are often trying to satisfy psychological needs as much as functional ones. The need is obviously functional in nature but, whereas with most functional goods there is an obvious stimulus resulting in need recognition. As the product selected for this study is silk, the researcher has identified three attributes contributing a consumer to go for recognizing a need for consuming silk products. These are: Rituals, Festivals and Special Occasions.

2) **Information Search:**

Once consumers recognize the need for a good or service, they will then undertake an information search. This may be passive (using internal sources such as the consumer’s memory), or active (using external sources, such as advertisements, magazine articles, family/friends). It has been suggested that the extent and depth of this search will depend upon the nature of the buying decision. Here the researcher has identified three attributes of information search regarding silk products namely friends and relatives, advertisements and sale representatives.

3) **Evaluation of Alternatives:-**

How consumers evaluate a product or brand or that of a service provider will depend on the relative importance they place on convenience, price, service, and other factors such as environmental issues. As has been stated before, there is a high probability that the consumer will prefer the convenience of remaining with their existing seller or service provider, rather than having a go through the inconvenience of changing it. For this study in evaluation of alternatives the researcher identified six attributes and these are product, price, point of delivery/place of sale, promotion, packaging and purification (silk mark).

4) **Purchase:-**

Even if the consumer has taken time to gather information, and evaluate alternatives, this provides a particular challenge for the seller: how to ensure that consumers act promptly in response to the information available to them. The consumer may have an edge over such selection as s/he may not be the customer for ultimate payment. Never the less, in case of purchase of silk the researcher indentified three attributes. These are cash, credit and installment.

5) **Post Purchase Behaviour:-**

After purchasing a product and consuming it, the consumer will evaluate the product’s performance. Where the consumer is satisfied with the product’s performance, repeat purchase is more likely to happen. Here, for this study the researcher has identified three attributes through which the silk consumer may evaluate their purchases namely compare with other product/brand, product values and collection of feedbacks.
In the exhibit 1.1, the conceptual framework for the consumers’ consumption behaviours related to this study has been highlighted:

**Exhibit 1.1: Consumer Behaviour: Conceptual Framework**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sl No.</th>
<th>Stages (Independent)</th>
<th>Variables (Dependent)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Need Recognition</td>
<td>Rituals</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Festivals</td>
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<td>Special Occasions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Information Search</td>
<td>Friends and Relatives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Advertisement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sales Representatives</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Evaluation of Alternatives</td>
<td>Product</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Price</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Point of delivery/Place of Sale</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Promotion</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Packaging</td>
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<td>Purification (Silk Mark)</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Purchase</td>
<td>Cash</td>
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<td>Credit</td>
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<td>Installment</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Post Purchase Behaviour</td>
<td>Compare with other Product/Brand</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Product Values</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Collection of Feedbacks</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Source: Self Developed

So far consumer satisfaction is concerned; the study has ventured into five selected attributes as stated in “Basic American Customer Satisfaction Index model”\(^{55}\). These are:

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Exhibit 1.2: Consumer Satisfaction: Conceptual Framework

Perceived Quality
- Strength
- Adaptability
- Reliability
- Customization

Appearance
- Fashionable
- Colourful
- Trend

Expectation
- Reliability
- Customization
- Durability

Delivery System
- Home Delivery
- Show Room Purchase
- Vendor Delivery

Sales Performance
- Sales volume
- Showroom
- Adaptability
- Price
- Offers

Perceived Value
- Price for given Quality
- Quality for given Price

Consumers Satisfaction
- Satisfaction on Purchase
- Confirm/Disconfirm Expectation
- Comparison with Ideal

Consumers Complain
- Attentive to Customer
- Attentive by Seller

Consumers Loyalty
- Suggest others to go for it
- Remain loyal forever

Source: Self Developed
i) **Perceived Quality:-**

Perceived Quality means consumer's opinion of a product's ability to fulfill his or her expectations. It may have little or nothing to do with the actual excellence of the product, and is based on the firm's current public image; consumer's experience with the firm's other products, and the influence of the opinion leaders, consumer's peer group, and others. For perceived quality four factors have been identified by the researcher for this study such as strength, adaptability, reliability and customization of silk products as highlighted in exhibit 1.2.

ii) **Appearance:-**

Appearance actually means the state, condition, manner, or style in which a person or object appears. Again for appearance three factors have been identified for the study namely fashion, colour and trend.

iii) **Expectation:-**

An expectation, which is a belief that is centered on the future, may or may not be realistic. A less advantageous result gives rise to the emotion of disappointment. If something happens that is not at all expected it is a surprise. An expectation about the behaviour or performance of another person, expressed to that person, may have the nature of a strong request, or an order. For the study in terms of expectation, three factors have been identified. These are reliability, customization and durability.

iv) **Delivery System:-**

A delivery system means a procedure for providing a product or service to the public. A wide range of delivery systems designed for any scale of operation, and for development. Regarding delivering system for this study, the researcher
has identified three factors namely home delivery, showroom purchase and vendor delivery.

v) Sales Performance:-

Sales performance is a business discipline which is focused on the practical application of sales techniques and the management of a firm's sales operations. The expectation of the consumer also lies on this factor to a large extent. For this study, five factors have been identified for sales performance. These are sales volume, showroom, adaptability, price and offers.

All these attributes would culminate together to develop a perceived value towards the psychology of a consumer.

Perceived Value:-

Perceived value means a customer opinion regarding a product value to him or her. It may have little or nothing to do with the product's market price, and depends on the product's ability to satisfy his or her needs or requirements.

Such perceived value contributes to the formation of satisfaction in the mindset of the consumer. The level of such satisfaction varies with the changing perceived value. For this study the researcher has identified two propositions such as price for given quality and quality for given price. Such perceived value leads to consumers’ satisfaction.

Consumers Satisfaction:-

Consumer satisfaction is a measure of how products and services provided by a company meet or surpass consumers’ expectation. Consumers’ satisfaction is defined as "the number of consumers, or percentage of total consumers, who
reported their experience with a firm, its products, or its services (ratings) exceeds specified satisfaction goals." In a competitive marketplace where businesses compete for consumers, consumer satisfaction is seen as a key differentiator and increasingly has become a key element of business strategy. When a brand has loyal consumer, it gains positive word-of-mouth marketing, which is both free and highly effective. To be able to attain this, firms need reliable and representative measures of satisfaction. For this study the researcher has identified three attributes influencing consumers’ satisfaction towards silk products. These are satisfaction on purchase; confirm/disconfirm expectation and comparison with ideal. The result may be positive or negative. So, if the consumer is not satisfied with the product, they go for complaining and on the other hand if the consumer is satisfied they become loyal to the product or the brand of a product.

a) **Consumers Complain:**

The researcher would like to venture into the opinion building on complains by consumers. To whom they go for complains is a subject to be considered for prudent consideration. The researcher has identified two proposition regarding the consumer complains i.e. attentive to customer and/or attentive by sellers.

b) **Consumers Loyalty:**

When a consumer gets satisfaction from a product or brand, they usually become loyal to it. Such psychological stage can be best defined when the consumers suggest others to go for it or without informing others they remain loyal to the product/brand forever. Thus the researcher has taken both the attributes to
observe the reaction of the consumers in terms of their reaction to express their positive satisfaction.

Rationale of the study:

Various studies have been conducted on production and marketing of silk products such as Bajpai and Shukla (1998), Umesh et. al (2009), Goswami (2006), Huang and Wang (2011), etc. However, a discernible study has been conducted to see the consumers’ behaviour and their satisfaction on this product till date. Assam being considered as one of the major point of silk production and distribution in India, by and large being not explored for researches in the area of consumers’ behaviour and their satisfaction derived out of purchase of natural silk products. The demand side of silk products in Assam seems not yet being taken into account. Further it has been observed that the consumers of Assam by and large, though not absolute do not have first hand information about silk products as perceived by the traders of silk products\(^{56}\), so their consumption behaviour is being explored. Without having much of knowledge about silk products as perceived, how they attain any satisfaction level is a proposition that has been evaluated. For all these reasons the researcher has carried out the study.

Scope of the Study:

The study is confined to the consumers of silk product of selected six districts of Assam i.e. North Lakhimpur, Dibrugarh, Sivasagar, Jorhat, Nagaon and Kamrup. The justification for such selection is that these are the districts where

most of the silk productions have taken place in Assam, statistical handbook of Assam 2011\textsuperscript{57}. It has been observed that most of the silk products have been sold locally barring few outlets who deals with foreign trade by exporting these products outside the country. So it has been considered that the consumers of these districts have the edge of selecting the best product or variety of the products along with some knowledge about product quality, brand, etc. The study is on “Consumers” Behaviour and their Satisfaction towards Natural Silk Products. Customers were not taken into consideration for this study. However, if a customer is also a consumer for the same product, then they were considered within the purview of the study.

In the next chapter a detail layout about the study has been furnished.

\textsuperscript{57} Statistical Handbook of Assam(2011), District Wise Silk yarn Production, Government of Assam