Synopsis

Title:

Influence of Media on Consumer Behaviour: An Examination of the role of Newspaper, Cinema, Theatre, Television and Internet

Background

The study explored the factors affecting consumer demand. The recent theories and models also considered rationality as a basic assumption. At the same time factors like habits, tastes and preferences, cultural factors, etc are treated as exogenous and considered as error terms in the econometric estimations like the constant elasticity demand functions and distributed lag models. This made the researcher to look into the factors that affect these habits, tastes and preferences. In this information age media, especially the mass media, seemed to influence the above said factors and hence the study. The study was aimed to examine the influence of media on consumer behaviour. The basic objectives of the study were:

1. To examine whether media has any direct or indirect influence on the consumer behaviour.
2. To examine the influence of media in the context of rationality assumption.
3. To analyse the impact of media on perception creation of the consumer.

Methodology:

The methodology adopted by the study is a cross-sectional analysis of the population focusing the urban population. Three primary surveys are done; one a detailed survey of the consumption pattern and the infiltration of media at the household level, and a
second one which is a survey of consumers at the point of purchase, and a survey on the internet.

An analysis of the content of the media and its character is done to examine and describe the subtle act of media under study. The content is been analysed for its components of news, information, promotion, and advertisement. Naturally, the analysis focuses more on the television channels and newspapers as they are the core part of the media.

**Sampling:**

The samples for the household survey are selected from the Corporation of Thrissur. The study wanted the maximum participation from all walks of life. However, the basic objective of the study is to examine whether there is any influence of media on consumer behaviour. Geography or factors like demography, culture is important but secondary to the economic objective. Therefore, the samples were taken from three sections of the Corporation which can be considered as the inner core, outer core and periphery along with the lines of Paul Baran in his approach in the theories of underdevelopment.

**Household Survey:**

The income category is the best categorical representation required for the study which is not available. Therefore, the study chooses a purposive sampling method in the lines mentioned above. The total samples amount to 150. The survey is conducted in the District of Thrissur of Kerala State in India. The sample households are selected on a random method from the voters’ lists of the selected wards.

**Primary survey 2:**
The survey respondents are the consumers at the point of purchase. The samples are collected from the big retail outlets of the Future group, ‘Big Bazaar’, and Reliance, ‘Reliance Fresh’, along with the City Centre in Thrissur Town. The sample size is 150.

**Primary Survey 3:**

A survey is done to get information from the internet users. A questionnaire is posted in internet and the feedbacks are collected. The sample size is 150. The survey questionnaires are appended at the end of the study report.

**Media Content Analysis:**

The content of the major television channels in Kerala are analysed. The content is categorised into various groups and the volume of each group is analysed. Asianet, Surya and Doordarshan Malayalam are the three channels selected.

Out of the major newspapers, Malayala Manorama, and Mathrubhoomi, is selected on the basis of readership and circulation. One week’s newspapers are analysed starting from 8-12-2009 to 15-12-2009.

Apart from this, 2 hit films in Malayalam language after 1995, which were box-office hits at the time of release and continues to attract more audience even after multiple screenings through television channels. The films are ‘Aaramthampuran’, starring Mohanlal and ‘Katha Parayumbol’, starring Mammooty.

Evergreen hit in Malayalam theatre ‘Ningalenne Communistakki’ is analysed from the media perspective.

The fast growing social networking phenomena is examined from the study perspective.
**Conceptual Framework:**

The study first raises the question that whether media can influence a consumer. The neoclassical economics lays the foundation for theories in consumer behaviour which is being debated for long time that whether a rational economic man can be influenced by factors other than utility and price. The irrefutable conjecture of rationality was then considered in a broader definition rather than that of a momentary one. In the broad concept of rationality, which stands for the global consistency of the actions of the consumer, his/her rationality is influenced by factors like, values, beliefs, exposure, experience, world view etc. All these are framed by the consumer’s perception. Perception is set by the receptive senses in which media has a role.

The second tenet on which the study is based is the basis of consumption. Needs necessitates consumption. There are different categorisations of needs. Abraham Maslow’s categorisation of hierarchy of needs is considered here. There are basically two types of needs: biogenic and psychogenic. The first one is the primary and the latter is secondary or the means to satisfy the first. According to Maslow, the five levels of needs are biogenic need, safety and security need, social need, ego need and self-actualisation need. Each need is mutually exclusive but with small overlapping as no need is completely satisfied.

The third tenet is that the question of consumption. What do we consume? They are commodities. Is there anything more to it? Jean Baudrillard says that we consume meaning rather than the physical commodity. He also ascribes values like sign value and symbolic exchange value to commodity apart from the traditional use value and
exchange value. Every commodity signifies something more than what it is. In
Baudrillard’s viewpoint, media does the role of the creator of meanings. It creates a
world of hyperreality.

The fourth tenet is the ‘manufacturing consent’ by Noam Chomsky. Chomsky’s
explanation of the role of media as a tool to generate public opinion favourable to
those in power is used to analyse the actions of media.

This study attempts to explore the influence of media and try to comprehend its
influence in the decision making by attempting to consolidate the various viewpoints
to reach at a conclusion which can better explain the notion of rationality and at the
same time the act of consumption.

The study started reviewing the concepts of consumption and various aspects of
media and consumer behaviour in the first chapter. An extensive review of related
literature was done.

Extensive survey of literature pertaining to rationality, rational choice, media,
consumer behaviour, consumer psychology was done in the second chapter.

The third chapter looked into the process of perception, memory and mind. It covered
all the aspects of mind and memory which creates perception.

The fourth chapter explains the process of creation of perception by media. Various
methods to analyse media are also detailed.

The fifth chapter examines the content of media. Samples of each media under
examination are taken and analysed. Though it is not a very comprehensive analysis,
it gives a feeling of what is happening there in the realm of media and thought.

**Findings of Media content analysis:**
These are the findings of the analysis of the media content.

1. Media plays a major role in the creation of meanings. In other words, media has a signifying role.

2. In newspapers and Television the volume of advertisements are significantly large to avoid attention.

3. Internet users are increasing and internet is becoming prominent as a media that can facilitate a two-way interaction in a better way than other media.

4. The use and reuse of cultural values and beliefs in different permutations and combinations do affect the perception of the consumer.

In the sixth chapter, the three primary survey data were analysed. A detailed statistical analysis and testing was not possible due to the nature of the study. The study intends to examine the influence of media on consumer behaviour. A variable which is dependant to statistically test the significance was not able to found out by the researcher. Apart from that even the basic variables like income and consumption was available only as a cross section. Hence the tools like regression and correlation could not be done. The major tool used is cross tabulation of the responses related to the incidence of the media and certain questions directed at the influence of media.

**The findings of the primary survey of the study are:**

1. The incidence of media is high among the respondents, except theatre.

2. The internet is not prevalent compared to other media.

3. Newspaper and television has a near 100% incidence in households
4. There is an association among favourite advertisements and favourite brands which implies that media in its various forms have influence in consumer decision making process and consumer behaviour in general.

5. Though the drive to create a social image is high in lower income groups and under-privileged caste groups, it is a general tendency among all groups of the society.

6. Social pressure and intuition are said to be the factors affecting consumer behaviour. Social and cultural values have role in framing consumer behaviour.

7. The advertisements can influence the perception of the consumer.

8. Heuristics play a major role in consumption.

Conclusion:

Several aspects of the act of consumption were analysed. To examine the shift factors affecting consumption demand the study travelled through the disciplines of psychology, sociology, cultural studies, a bit of biology and neuroscience and writings of Baudrillard. The rationality hypothesis is looked into in detail. As the study objectives directed the study, the influence of media was analysed in detail and the results of the primary surveys revealed that media has direct influence as well as indirect influence on consumer behaviour. Direct influence is manifested in the habit and taste formation along with the brand loyalty and brand affinity.

Media can influence the perception of the consumer and change the value system due to its continuous incidence over the consumer all the time. By affecting the values and beliefs it indirectly affects the consumer behaviour. If the media can influence the
values and beliefs and information level of the consumer it can affect the rationality hypothesis which reflects the global consistency of actions of the consumer.

Apart from that the perspective of the media/channel slowly drips into the consumer and the perception is influenced. Thus all the three objectives are satisfied.

As mentioned in the initial parts of this study there are factors other than income and price and elasticities which can influence the consumer behaviour. The Noam Chomsky’s idea of consent manufacturing is successfully done by the media as the survey results show. Any of the consumers did not see media as an evil. Instead he/she considered it as a very informative one. The consumer thinks that media helps him in arriving at decisions. The consumer is not bothered even if he is paying for only 30% of the newspaper he reads; the rest is advertisement and other things. The consumer is not bothered about the additional one hour he/she spends when watching a film on television. This additional time is used for advertisement telecast.

Further, the finding of the primary survey suggests that heuristics come into play in consumption. This underlines that the argument by Herbert Simon about the cognitive man is partially true; partial because the consumer says that heuristics is applied in the case of small purchases in terms of money value. For higher value purchases different criteria are used.

**Future Research:**

Though the study could prove that media is influencing the consumer in his decisions, it is not statistically tested. Proper quantification was not able to be performed. The future research on the topic can attempt to develop suitable quantitative tools which fit into the study. Though many aspects cannot be quantified an attempt is really worth it.