

MOTIVATION FOR BUYING BRANDED ITEMS: A CROSS COUNTRY APPLICATION OF MASLOWS HIERARCHY OF NEEDS IN CONSUMER DECISION MAKING

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***Abstract:** The brand is a pledge to buyers about the quality and prestige of a product or service. The main objective of this study is to analyse the importance of branding in the decision making of buyers and to examine the motives that drive consumer decisions when buying branded items. The conceptual framework of this study groups the hierarchy of needs according to Maslow into two main motives. The motives are risk reduction and social demonstrance. In this study, the non-probability sampling method was used to select respondents from four different countries namely, the Czech Republic, China, Ghana and Sri Lanka and a semi-structured questionnaire was administered. A total of 979 valid responses from the respective countries were used in the analysis. Findings from the study are that, among the selected countries, brands play an important role in consumer buying behaviour and risk reduction, social demonstrance are motives that drive consumer purchases.*

***Keywords:** Risk Reduction, Social Demonstrance, Brand, Branding, Motivation, Maslow's Hierarchy of Need.*

***JEL Classification:** M31, M31*

Introduction

Brand represents a consistent and holistic pledge of quality made by a company to its customers. Brands are built from nothing less than the sum of a customer's experiences with a product or service of a company. By opting for particular brands, a consumer demonstrates that he or she embraces particular values; hence, the brand becomes a tool of identity formation. For consumers to shelve out their money to acquire a brand, it is important for the brand to provide a compelling experience that contributes to the self actualization of the consumer. Consumers buy brands because they expect it to provide them with some satisfaction. The total of this satisfaction is known as consumer experience. Consumer experience is an interaction between an organization and a customer as perceived through a customer's conscious and subconscious mind. It is a blend of an organization's physical performance, the senses stimulated and emotions evoked, each intuitively measured against customer expectations across all moments of contact [17].

The essence of branding is to guarantee quality and influence the perception and expectation of consumers in a favourable way. However, when the brand does not provide pleasant experiences (non-performance of brands) for consumers, the effect on the brand image may be detrimental. It is generally believed that consumers buy

product of well known brands to reduce the risk of aggravation after use. In many instances, people buy brands to portray their social status at any given time or to feel accepted in a social group and have a sense of belonging. The study of the factors that motivate consumers to buy branded products are important because, such knowledge enable firms to formulate branding strategies to meet the needs of consumers and provide them with a compelling experience whenever they buy or come into contact with the product.

Motivation is essential in consumer behaviour studies. Maslow [12] explains that, people generally want to feel safe, loved and accepted by others. According to Maslow's theory of needs, safety and security as well as a sense of belongingness is essential in a person's life. Also Maslow indicates that self esteem is essential to consumers. When people buy branded items, they want to boost their self esteem especially if the brand is aligned to a famous celebrity or is associated with the elite in society. People often chose to buy brands which they perceive to meet their expectations (safety and self esteem) or avoid them.

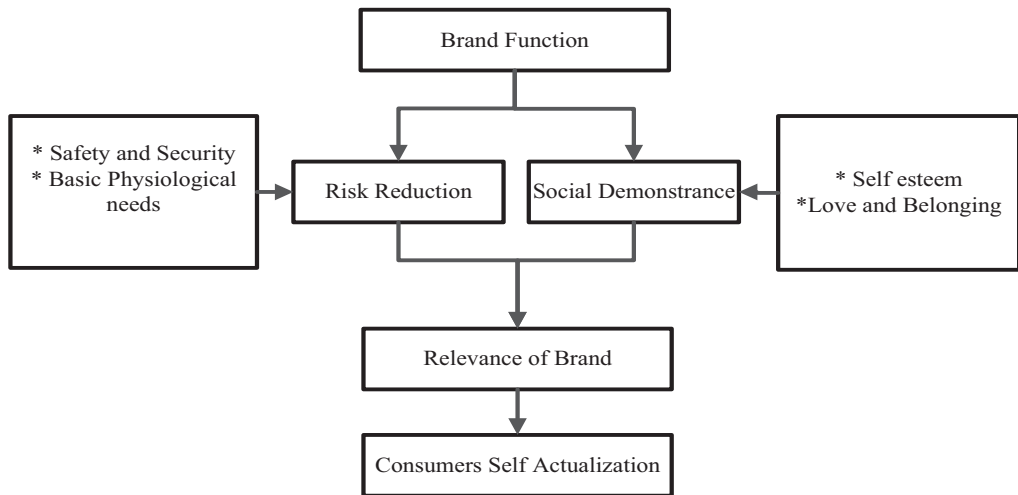
The main objective of this study is analyse the importance of branding in the decision making of buyers and to examine the motives that drive consumer decision making when buying branded items.

1 Conceptual framework

The motivation theory by Maslow [12] has been used in a number of studies. In marketing and consumer research, the theory has helped in understanding consumers' motives and actions. Marketers have historically focused on consumers' needs to define their actions in different markets. If producers design products or brands in such a way that it meets consumer needs and provide them with an inherent compelling experience, consumers will more often choose those products over that of competitors. Whichever product better fills the void created by the need will be chosen more frequently, thereby increasing sales for the company.

The conceptual framework of this study groups the hierarchy of needs according to Maslow into two main motives. This includes risk reduction, which has the concepts of safety and sense of comfort. The basic physiological needs also fall under the risk reduction motive and it is indicated in this study as the sense of survival and contentment from product usage. The other motive is social demonstrance which includes concepts such as self esteem, love and belonging. The framework links the relevance of brands, risk reduction motive and social demonstrance motive in consumer decision making. These factors together contribute to the self actualization of consumers. After becoming self actualized, a consumer tends to be satisfied with a product and service due to the inherent experience it provides, hence, the probability of repurchasing is higher. When a consumer becomes self actualized as a result of a positive experience of brand usage, there is a likelihood of repurchasing the product and the tendency of the consumer to become loyal to the specific brand is higher. The conceptual framework that guides this study is depicted in figure 1:

Fig. 1: The interrelationship between brand functions and consumer self actualization



Source of data: author

2 Theoretical background and hypothesis

The following section provides discussions of the theoretical background that contributes to the formulation of the hypothesis for the study. It includes a review of literature on the importance of brands in consumer purchases as well as the risk reduction and social demonstration motive for buying brands.

2.1 Importance of brands in consumer purchase

Brands play a role in terms of communication and identification of products of companies. They offer guidance, convey an expectation of quality and so offer help and support to those making purchasing decisions. Brands make it relatively easier for consumers to understand and assimilate information about products. Brands are important especially when consumers are choosing from products from the same category. Product category refers to the specific generic to which a product or service belongs; for example, while Pepsi is a brand name, the product category to which it belongs is soft drinks. Some researchers have shown that when consumers have feelings that brands are important for their buying decision, they do so because of the expectation from the brand to provide (intangible) benefits [8], [13]. We assume that brand are important in consumer decision making, hence, we formulate the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: In the selected countries, brands are important in consumer decision making when buying products and it varies significantly among respondents in the various countries.

2.2 Branding and risk reduction motive

When consumers are buying products of (very) complex and capital intensive in nature, the brand is a determining factor because it enables them to reduce risk

involved in the buying process and increase information efficiency. Therefore the perceived risk in purchasing the product is reduced and this helps in building a trust-based relationship. In a survey by McKinsey in more than 750 deciders in 18 representative German business markets, risk reduction was the most important brand function (45%), closely followed by information efficiency (41%). Image benefits close the group with a minor 14% [10].

Furthermore, brands identify the source or maker of a product. According to Zhang and Sood [18], consumers recognize a brand and activate their knowledge about it. Based on what consumers know about the brand in terms of its overall quality and specific characteristics, consumers are able to make expectations that are reasonable about the practical and other benefits of the brand. Therefore, brands contribute to minimizing the consumer's (subjective) risk of making a purchase mistake [8], [9]. When new products are introduced in the market, the brand name may provide the means to reduce the risk associated with the evaluation of quality and performance. The brand also helps in reducing the costs of information gathering that arise from assessing other alternatives from a larger range of products, especially when the products are in the same category [5]. Brands also present to consumers in advance, an important signal of quality that reduces the perceived risk [4].

From a marketing perspective, products can be classified into three categories, search, experience, and credibility of goods. These categories are reflections on the consumer's ability to assess product quality prior to actual product trial and usage [3], [14]. Because consumers have difficulty in assessing product attributes and quality with experience and credibility of goods, it is hard to determine their quality and thus consumers may perceive high risks in product decisions. An important way in which consumers deal with the perceived uncertainty and risk is that, they buy products of well-known brands, especially those with which consumers have had favourable past experiences [1], [9], [13]. Moreover, brands create trust as they ensure that the performances expected by consumers of the product are realized. The brand further provides as well as guarantees the continuity in the predictability of the benefit of the products. This is because they raise mean perceptions about quality and lower their variance. It follows that brands perform a risk reduction function and we expect risk reduction to be an important determinant of consumer decision making, hence the hypothesis.

Hypothesis 2: In the selected countries, risk reduction motive is important in consumer decision making when buying branded items and it varies significantly among respondents in the various countries.

2.3 Branding and social demonstrance motive

Brands are symbolic tools that enable consumers to express their self-image to their peers [11]. With regards to the symbolic expression, the brand can represent intrinsic values (self-expression) or extrinsic values (prestige) of consumers. However, this depends on whether the consumer is communicating with themselves or with others in the social surroundings [11]. The theories of self-congruity [16] and self-enhancement [15] provide explanations on why and how consumers endeavour to achieve these

symbolic benefits of brands. Consumers on a daily basis try to preserve and enhance their self-concept, and they do this by purchasing certain products [15]. In order to serve as a social symbol that contributes to achieving self-congruity, brands must allow for a personalization of the product. Bradford (2008) explains that, in markets where the customer invests his or her ego in the purchase of a particular brand, the social implications of the brand is priceless.

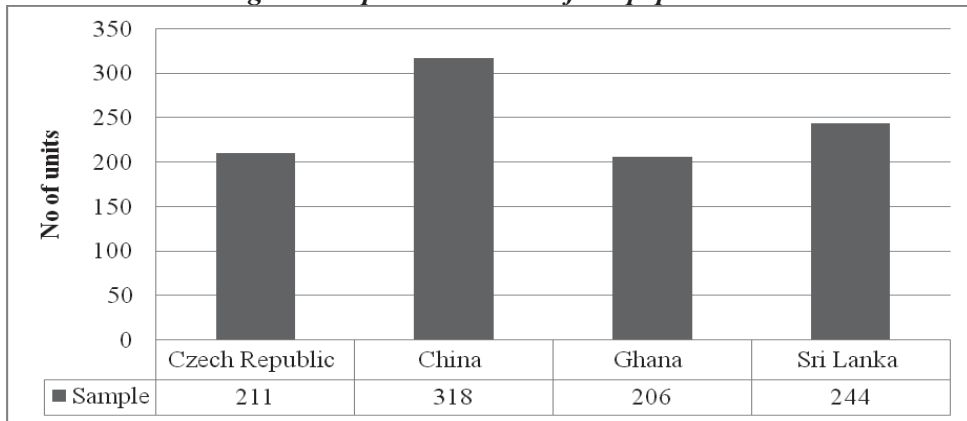
The self of the consumer does not develop in a solitude manner, but rather it evolves within a complex process of social interaction [7]. Individuals mostly take advantage of brands to communicate to other people the type of person he or she is or would like to be [2], [6]. Specifically, consumers use brands as a status symbol or as a means to indicate that they belong to a group in order to raise their self esteem and boost their sense of belongingness. One prerequisite for the use of brands as status symbol is the visibility it has with other brands in the same product category. Based on the issues discussed above, the following hypothesis is formulated

Hypothesis 3: In the selected countries, social demonstrance motive is important in consumer decision making when buying branded items and it varies significantly among respondents in the various countries.

3 Methodology

This study uses the non-probability sampling method. This sampling method enables the researchers to reach the respondents quickly, considering the size of the population. The population was made up of citizens of the respective countries. A semi-structured questionnaire was administered to all the respondents. The questionnaire which was originally in English was translated into Czech and Chinese language for the respondents in Czech Republic and China respectively and this was to ensure that the respondents understood the questions posed to them. However, the questionnaire for Sri Lanka and Ghana were in English. The questionnaires were returned and checked by the researchers to ensure that they were valid and useable and a total of 979 respondents drawn from the respective countries were used in the analysis. The 17 version of the Statistical Package for Social Scientist (SPSS) was used in the analysis and interpretation of data. The sample distribution from the respective countries is shown in figure 2:

Fig. 2: Sample distribution of the population



Source of data: authors' questionnaire

The questionnaire was broadly classified into three main groupings. Each group had four questions. The groupings and the questions are indicated below. Using a five-point Likert scale with strongly disagree (1) disagree (2), neutral or undecided (3), agree (4) and strongly agree (5) the sample responded to the following questions. The aggregate of the questions in each group were used in the hypothesis testing. The questions are as follows.

The relevance of brand in purchasing a product
When I purchase a product, the brand plays - compared to other things - an important role
When purchasing, I focus mainly on the brand.
To me, it is important to purchase a brand name product.
The brand plays a significant role as to how satisfied I am with the product.
Risk reduction function of branding
I purchase mainly brand name products because that reduces the risk of aggravation later.
I purchase brand name products because I know that I get good quality
I choose brand name products to avoid disappointments.
I purchase brand name products because I know that the performance promised is worth its money.
Social demonstrance function of branding
To me, the brand is indeed important because I believe that other people judge me on the basis of it.
I purchase particular brands because I know that other people notice them.
I purchase particular brands because I have much in common with other buyers of that brand.
I pay attention to the brand because its buyers are just like me.

4 Data analysis and results

This section provides the results of the data analysis. The sections provide discussions of the findings in relation to the hypothesis of the study.

4.1 Important of branding to consumer purchases

Table 1 provides the distribution of the respondents sampled for the study according to the countries. It shows the frequency distribution with regards to the importance of brands in consumer purchasing decision.

Tab. 1: Frequency distribution of the importance of brand

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Czech	211	3.81	.86	.06	3.70	3.93
China	318	3.29	1.02	.06	3.17	3.40
Ghana	206	3.81	.77	.05	3.70	3.92
Sri Lanka	244	3.51	.78	.05	3.41	3.61
Total	979	3.57	.91	.03	3.51	3.62

Source of data: authors' questionnaire

Table 2 provides the results of hypothesis two (H1). The hypothesis sought to find whether there is a significant variation among respondents on whether brands are important in consumer decision making when buying products.

Tab. 2: ANOVA of the importance of brand in consumer purchases

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	50.50	3	16.83	21.76	.000
Within Groups	754.35	975	.77		
Total	804.85	978			

Source of data: authors' questionnaire

The findings from the analysis indicates that, the brand is indeed important in consumer decision making when buying products and it varies significantly among respondents in the various countries. From this, it is seen that the null hypothesis is rejected. This is because the significance level of the study, thus, 0.000 is less than the p-value of 0.05. This finding confirms the assertion by Sterne (2002) that, it is incumbent on firms to build brands that are appealing and form a desire that is strong enough to compel consumers to shell out their hard-earned money to acquire them.

4.2 Risk reduction

Table 3 provides the frequency distribution of the respondents from the selected countries with regards to the risk reduction motive of buying.

Tab. 3: Frequency distribution of risk reduction motive

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Czech	211	3.6943	.73649	.05070	3.5944	3.7943
China	318	3.5967	.78461	.04400	3.5101	3.6833
Ghana	206	3.7870	.73101	.05093	3.6866	3.8874
Sri Lanka	244	3.7398	.59740	.03824	3.6644	3.8151
Total	979	3.6934	.72258	.02309	3.6481	3.7388

Source of data: authors' questionnaire

The second hypothesis (H2) was to find if there is indeed a significant difference among respondents in the selected countries with regards to risk reduction. In order words, it was meant to find whether risk reduction motive is a contributory factor in the purchasing decisions of consumers. The results are indicated in table 4 below:

Tab. 4: ANOVA of the risk reduction function for buying brands

	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	5.30	3	1.77	3.41	.017
Within Groups	505.33	975	.52		
Total	510.63	978			

Source of data: authors' questionnaire

From the analysis, the significance level calculated was 0.017 which is less than the p-value of 0.05. Hence the null hypothesis is rejected in support of the alternative hypothesis (H2) indicated above. The findings indicates that, in the four countries selected, risk reduction motive is important in consumer decision making when buying branded items and it varies significantly among respondents in the various countries.

The reduction of risk is an important factor when people are buying products of different brands. From this study, it was found that there is a positive relationship between the risk reduction motives for buying brands among respondents from all the four countries. Buyers want to spend their money on products that will last for a long time and provide them with the necessary gratification. The tendency of buyer's remorse is reduced drastically when they buy products from reputable brands. This is because the brand provides them with an assurance, as it indicates the source of the product and guarantees quality.

The findings of the risk reduction motive of the respondents go to explain that, risk aversion is of importance to consumers irrespective of country of origin. This confirms Maslow's findings that consumers to a large extent will want to feel safe and secure at all times. The findings from this study also confirms the views of Aaker [1]; Mitchell and McGoldrick [13], that brands provide an avenue for consumers to determine product quality and credence to goods and services. Also, Kapferer [8] indicates that, consumers buy brands to reduce their (subjective) risk of making a purchase mistake. This is largely true because of the varied amount of products and services that consumers are constantly exposed to on a daily basis. The consumer is faced with the dilemma of choosing quality products from the same product category. Hence, the brand provides a convenient escape and reduces the probability of making a purchase mistake.

4.3 Social demonstrance

Table 5 provides the frequency distribution of the respondents from the selected countries with regards to the social demonstrance motive of buying branded items.

Tab. 5: Frequency distribution of social demonstrance function

	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error	95% Confidence Interval for Mean	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Czech	211	3.03	.88	.06	2.91	3.15
China	318	2.60	.87	.05	2.50	2.70
Ghana	206	2.79	.84	.06	2.68	2.91
Sri Lanka	244	2.92	.77	.05	2.82	3.02
Total	979	2.81	.86	.03	2.76	2.87

Source of data: authors' questionnaire

The third hypothesis (H3) was tested to find whether there is a significant difference with regards to the social demonstrance motive for buying brands among respondents in the selected countries. The results are indicated in table 6 below.

Tab. 6: ANOVA of the social demonstrance function for buying brands

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Between Groups	27.21	3	9.07	12.81	.000
Within Groups	690.48	975	.71		
Total	717.70	978			

Source of data: authors' questionnaire

With regards to the social demonstrance function of branding, it was seen among the respondents in the selected countries that, social demonstrance motive is important in consumer decision making when buying branded items and it varies significantly among respondents in the various countries. The result of the hypothesis testing indicated a significance level of 0.000. Therefore the null hypothesis is rejected for the alternative hypothesis because the significance level recorded is less than the p-value of 0.05.

Consumers are constantly seeking for products that will contribute to the enhancement of their self-concept [15] and self-congruity [16] and these are a major determinant factor in the buying decisions irrespective of the country or culture. This finding also confirms the results of the study by Belk [2]; Escalas and Bettman [6] which revealed that consumers use the brand to communicate to others the kind of people they are so as to increase their status and reputation in the society.

5 Practical implications

This study is significant in branding decision making processes of consumer products. The finding from this study implies that, it is important for managers to understand the role brands place in consumer decision making process. Such information equips managers with firsthand information on how to strategize to meet customer motives and expectations. Managers with branding responsibilities must understand that, risk reduction and social esteem are essential in consumer markets. Hence, branding strategies must be designed to meet these motives. To do this, there should be constant evaluations and research into what drive consumers on regular basis and also to find whether the needs and expectation of consumers are been met.

Consumer motivations vary and it is important to strategize so that the brand meets the expectations of consumers. When this is done, the brands receive positive evaluations in the market and hence, gains competitive advantage. The strategies of marketing oriented firms, especially those selling fast moving consumer goods must align their branding strategies so as to highlight the risk reduction and social demonstration values or characteristics of the products they sell.

In this study, in spite of the fact that the respondents are of different cultural orientations, they had similar opinions with regards to their social motives for buying branded items. Consequently, the individualistic or collectivist cultures of the respective countries did not have an influence on whether respondents use brands to portray their social status. Managers of brands must be aware that consumers are usually interested in the symbolic definition of the brand and most importantly how it contributes to their self-identity. Regular shoppers invest their ego in purchasing brands and they expect the brand to satisfy their social esteem need. Consumers usually want to be identified and integrated into a group and that is more important. The groupings are not necessarily formed from the cultural orientation of respondents; rather, they may be formed based on attributes such as financial status, profession and social clubs. Therefore, it is essential for brand managers to align their strategies to meet the social motive that arise from a person's belongingness to specific social groupings.

The findings of the risk reduction motive of the respondents go to explain that, risk aversion is of importance to consumers irrespective of age, gender or level of income. Consumers to a large extent will want to avoid the consequences that come with unpleasant feelings of buying an unknown brand. Marketers must therefore focus on placing their brand as a secured option among others in the same product category. Such a strategy ensures that the brand stays competitive as consumers will be more comfortable buying it. Therefore, it is incumbent on managers of firms to aim at placing their brand as a secured option among others in the same product category at every point of contact with consumers.

The study by Geert Hofstede shows that, Ghana, China and Sri Lanka are highly collectivist countries. Hence, it was expected that social demonstration will be replaced with characteristics of collectivist societies like group integration and social acceptance, unlike the Czech Republic which is largely individualistic. But that was not so, because the result from these collectivist cultures indicated a motive for social demonstration when consumers are buying branded items. Therefore, firms must be proactive and have up-to-date knowledge of the dynamics and peculiarity of cultural orientation of customers in different countries. Furthermore, in order for firms to stay competitive in the global market place, branding strategies should take into account the present cultural traits exhibited by consumers, because they may influence purchasing habits.

Conclusion

In conclusion, brand plays an important role when consumers are making purchasing decisions. The gratification of buying quality products motivates and

drives buying behaviour. The findings from this paper indicates that, when buyers have an option to chose, they go for products of brands that are affordable, less risky and a source of self esteem enhancement. The self actualization of a consumer is important and the benefit of buying and using a product is to guarantee self fulfilment. This is achieved when the product or service provides a compelling experience to the consumer. Such an experience contributes to brand loyalty and repeated purchases. Also, the competitiveness of products in a market depends on the building of brands that is consistent with the expectations and the motives of consumers. The consumer motives must not be alienated in the brand building process. This can only be done when the strategy of the brand is developed and constantly evaluated to ensure that it works towards meeting the needs of consumers.

Suggestions for future research

Future research could examine the effect of the constructs in the conceptual framework on specific products or different brands or products in the same category. The conceptual framework of this study could be replicated in a lot more countries to access consumer buying behaviour. A limitation of this study is the relatively small sample size that was selected and used. A large sample size drawn from the selected countries will provide conclusions that will be representative of the population. Also, it will be interesting to extend the study to find out how the variables – risk reduction, social demonstrance and relevance of brand in purchasing decision varies among males and females. The trends and the effect of variations in income levels and age on risk reduction, social demonstrance and relevance of brand in purchasing decision could also be studied in relation to demographic variables.

This study attempted to highlight some cultural traits that explain consumer motivation. However, this is not adequate and the degree of relationship is not strong; hence, it will be useful to conduct a more comprehensive study that will bring out the relationship between various cultural variables and the motivation for buying brands in consumer markets. Such a study will provide strong empirical evidence of the relationship between culture and the variables that predominantly motivate consumers when buying branded items. Finally, though we believe that risk reduction and social demonstrance are fundamental brand functions that motivates consumers and contribute to the competitiveness of firms, there may be other brand functions that can be studied.

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