

**AN EXPLORATORY STUDY ON THE LOYALTY OR  
VARIETY SEEKING PURCHASE PATTERN OF  
DIFFERENT BRANDS OF TOILET SOAPS AMONG A SET  
OF MANAGEMENT STUDENTS**

**VINOD URATH\***

**N.R. NARAYANAN\***

**ABSTRACT:**

A study was conducted on the management students of coimbatore to assess the usage and the recall patterns of different Toilet soap brands among the said group of customers. The study was proposed on the assumption that there are multitudes of effects of promotion and branding on the consumer in his buying decisions affecting choice of different brands in the toilet soap category .There is large extend of proof which shows at that the choice of the brands in overwhelming number of cases in such product category is dependent on the amount of advertisement and the resultant level of recall attained by the receptors in general .Taking acue from this the study proposed to use the method of unaided recall to find out the brands which has succeeded in making the customer be comparatively loyal. It is appreciated that there is also a tendency among the customers to change the brands not only as a permanent alternative but also as a variety seeking alternative especially in a category which in this case is known as a low involvement category product..As far as recall is concerned ,by such a study one can predict the extend to which such a vareity seeking-ness is happening and that is an indication of the customers urge to look for something different and should be studied in more detail .The study was also intended to see the pattern of changes happening in the variety seeking behavior front of the said customers. The result of which can be seen as indicative of a tendency of the customers to change from

\* ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, GURUVAYURAPPAN INSTITUTE OF MANAGEMENT, NAVAKKARAI, COIMBATORE.

established brands to any others probably over a time period. Study also proposes to figure out the customer choice set from which a future brand could get to become prominent.

**KeyWords:** Unaided Recall, Recallability, Low involvement purchase, Loyalty, variety seekingness, Top-of-the-Mind Recall

### 1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY:

A study was conducted on the management students of Coimbatore to assess the usage patterns of different Toilet soap brands among the said group of customers. The study was proposed on the assumption that there are multitudes of effects especially advertising effects on the consumer in his choice and usage patterns of different brands of toilet soaps. It can be seen that the brand success in overwhelming number of cases in such product categories are dependent on the amount of advertisement and the nature of the same. So the study proposes to find out the brands which has succeeded in making the customer be comparatively loyal by assessing the extend of mind space being taken by different brands of soaps and its usage patterns.

#### **Toilet soaps-A typical low involvement product**

There is also a tendency among the customers to change the brands not only as a permanent alternative but also as a variety seeking habit. This is found out as synonymous with the nature of the product and the nature of the purchase situation faced by the customer which in this case typically be called the low involvement purchase behavior.

#### **Proposed intend of study-find out the extend of variety seeking behavior**

The study was also intended to seek the pattern of changes happening in the variety seeking behavior front of the said customers. The result from such a study can help in assessing to what extend it is indicative of a tendency of the customers to change from established brands to any others.

#### **Variety brands in customer purchase kitty-A future contender for prime choice**

Thus the study also proposes to figure out the customer choice set from which a future brand could get to become prominent. This will fetch an insight into the average number of such brands in the minds of the customers thus giving an indication and a pattern of the competitive

atmosphere in this segment (see the recall study questionnaire in Annexure ) . This approach was necessitated because in a low involvement purchase situation all of it comes into the picture.

## 1.2 Review of literature

Wright and Barbour (1975) talked about the concept of “pool of alternatives” while this is what has been referred to as an “evoked or consideration set” by Howard and Sheth (1969); Urban (1975). “This concept is based on the Evidence that while consumers may have knowledge of a large number of brands in a product class, they may consider only a few of these for purchase on any particular occasion” (Bettman and Park 1980; Lussier and Olshavsky 1979). This situation has evolved because of proliferation of brands that has occurred in the marketplace for consumer packaged goods, It is not possible for the buyers to give equal consideration to all available brands. “In order to simplify the decision-making task, many brands are eliminated from consideration early in the decision process and the final selection is made from a relatively small number of brands. This final subset of brands actually considered for purchase when making a specific brand choice is called the evoked set “(Howard & Sheth 1969).

The composition of such an evoked set has important influences on subsequent probabilities of brand choice

An evoked set can happen when brands are recalled from memory (in the case of memory-based recall )(Bettman 1979; Lynch and Srull 1982). But there is another instance of choice set formation called as stimulus-based choice situations where in mere brand familiarity enables quicker and easier perceptual identification of a brand and, therefore, facilitates inclusion in the evoked set choice. .

This is what we call as memory-based choice situations, wherein the brand familiarity increases or leads over time to the probability of a brand being recalled and, therefore, facilitates inclusion in the evoked set.

From the marketing manager's point of view an understanding of how consumers finally select the brand(s) that they purchase is only relevant if the firm's brand is among those finally considered, i.e., is in the evoked set. Yet, while the process by which consumers evaluate and make final brand choices has been a subject of great interest and the focus of a large body of

research, the process of evoked set formation has received only recent attention (Belonax 1979, May 1979, Parkinson and Reilly 1979, Brisoux and Laroche 1980) . Howard and Sheth defined the evoked set as "the brands that the buyer considers as acceptable for his next purchase".

#### **a. Brand Recall and its relationship with evoked set**

“Narayana and Markin (1975) examined the concept of evoked set more closely and ended up by further classifying all of the known brands in the consumer's "awareness set." They came up with the division of the brands in the awareness set into different levels such as the evoked set, the inept set (rejected brands), and the inert set (brands evaluated neither positively nor negatively).”

According to Narayana and Markin, “a brand would belong to the evoked set if it were considered for purchase by the consumer and evaluated positively. It would be in the inept set if it were rejected from the consumer's purchase consideration and evaluated negatively. Finally, it would be in the inert set if it were neither accepted nor rejected by the consumer and evaluated neither positively nor negatively “.

“Gronhaug's (1973-74) study demonstrated a positive relationship between evoked set size and education level, in most other studies there existed a positive relationship between evoked set size and brand loyalty.” Indicating a stronger possibility of more brand recall for certain brands leading to more purchase possibility.

In their study “Individual and Product correlates of Evoked Set size for consumer Packaged goods”“(Michael Reilly, Montana State University and Thomas L. Parkinson, Lehigh University) had found out that evoked set size is positively correlated with the size of the awareness set . This empirical finding is consistent with earlier results published by Markin and Narayana (1975),

#### **b. Evoked, inert ,inept set**

The measurement of the first two sets is done through direct questioning only on the buying consideration dimension, while the inert set is inferred by deduction of the first two from the awareness set . The evaluations attached to the different sets are a precondition to the consumer choice behavior (Narayana and Markin 1976)

## 1.2 Assessment of Loyalty position verses variety seeking behavior mode

This study proposes to assess the extend of loyalty of different brands of toilet soaps through the unaided recall method. Here the extend of loyalty is assessed by seeing the prominence of certain brand/s in the first level recall as also by examining the vastness of the recall set at the second level. The variety seeking behavior is also being assessed from the second level and third level recall.

### a. Thus this study uses three levels of recall which is explained here:

The loyalty aspect is being assessed in this study in three levels

In the first level by asking the customers as an unaided recall to figure out the first choice brand, or consistently used brand followed by asking them to figure out the second choice or less frequently used brand (variety brand) in the second level and to figure out all the names of brands he knows at the third level. (memory based recalls)

### b. Proposed approach to analyse the result

#### First choice brand- The loyal brand

The first level brand is the brand to be considered as most frequently used and so got certain level of brand loyalty from the respective customers. (see questionnaire in Appendix)

#### Second choice (variety) brand- The future choice set

While the second level (variety) use brand /s and the vastness of the same in the customers mind will tell us the propensity of the customer to jettison the first preference brand over a period of time. This can explain possible future lack of loyalty to the first preference brand and the extent of variety seeking ness confronted by the first choice brand.

## 1.3 Studying the comfort level of the first choice brand against competitive attack

The study by using the statistical analysis of averages intends to find out the first choice brands' level of comfort by studying each brands pattern of 'customer choice set' at the secondary level.

Ie, Each first choice brand/s subsequent second level choice set is assessed and the relationship figured out. The number and size of choice set will tell the competitive intensity for the concerned first choice brand.

## 1.4 Studying the exhaustive list of aware brands (ones lying in the mind-space of customer but yet to reach the purchase kitty)

The study uses the method of unaided recall to find out the brand prominently lying in the mind of the customer at the third level which is basically the brands which the customer is aware of but not till now used by him. This gives an idea of the primary recall ability achieved by different brands, since in the low involvement category an extent of mere recall of the brand name itself can induce the customer to purchase the brand. In the longer run such brands become ones with higher familiarity for the customer, which in itself can become a factor which help very much in brand selection and continued patronage.

So the study tries to find out the prominent brands which lie in the mind space but not yet found its way in to the purchase kitty of the customer but will become a substantial player if managed well since a high recall level is indicative of comparatively lesser effort needed to make it a success.

## **2. Managerial implication:**

It is seen that in a low involvement consumer item, since the choice is heavily influenced by the recallability of the said brands, more number of recalled 'brands in use' in variety seeking mode (second level recall) is bad news for the prominent brand (brand mainly purchased by the customer) because the customer is keeping more options in his purchase and any of those variety brands could become a prominent brand for him in future and as such the manager can feel the need to urgently seek to know the reasons for variations in the choice set between brands and figure out the ways to act on it in an urgent manner.

## **3. Research Methodology**

### **3.1 Sampling**

Sample is taken from one management institute in coimbatore and the sample consisted of students of two different admission years. The sample consisted of 40 such students. All the students were served the interview schedule concurrently so as to avoid any bias in the pattern of responses due to peer influence on responses. So 40 trained enumerators took the survey at the same time and recorded the findings.

The population proposed to study is the postgraduate management students in the city of coimbatore.

The college is selected as a representative sample for the study considering the fair mix of students representing different regions of both Kerala and Tamilnadu constituting the student profile of this college.

### 3.2 Instrument used to get response (see Appendix)

The instrument used was an unaided brand recall schedule. The instrument is used to get the responses with regard to the primary brand, secondary brand (variety brand/s) and the recalled brand/s (brands not being tried but recalled) and obtains unaided recalls to the questions on the primary used brand, variety choice brand and the recalled but never tried brands.

### 3.3 Limitation of the study

The extent of generalization possible to the general public at large is not much since the study is limited to a very small skewed layer of the vast demographic dispersion that dot the customer profile of many consumer goods in India.

Nevertheless since such studies are hard to find in the academic realm or in any other scholarly pursuits, this study may function as an inspiration to look into the customer tendencies in such a context in future and expand the study to the different population segments. This study is only an academic pursuit to put forth to the concerned decision makers and the academicians so as to inspire them to search for more and varied research possibilities at a larger canvas which can only give the manager a practical, actionable and meaningful results.

### 3.4 Tools for the Analysis

#### 3.4.1 Simple Average method

#### Formula 1: TO FIND OUT THE PROPENSITY FOR ALTERNATIVE BRANDS AMONG CUSTOMERS OF EACH OF THE PROMINENT BRAND

AVERAGE NUMBER OF VARIETY BRANDS FOR EACH PRIMARY BRAND	=	$\frac{\text{TOTAL NO: OF 2ND CHOICE (VARIETY BRANDS)}}{\text{NO: OF CUSTOMERS OF THE SAID PRIMARY BRAND}}$
AVERAGE NO: OF NEVER USED BUT RECALLED BRANDS FOR	=	$\frac{\text{TOTAL NO: OF NEVER USED BUT RECALLED BRANDS}}{\text{-----}}$

EACH PRIMARY BRAND

NO: OF CUSTOMERS OF THE SAID PRIMARY BRAND

The tool used for this analysis is the simple average method in order to get a measure of

- i) The average number of respondents for each brand when that brand is chosen as the first choice brand(loyal Brand)
- ii) The average number of variety brands customer chose for each of the first choice brand(used to see propensity to change)
- iii) Average number of never used but recalled brands for each first choice brand

The measures available from such an analysis are useful for

Case I above - it gives the most prominent brand (loyalty) of the customers at large

Case ii above- gives the extend of variety seeking-ness among customers for each of the individual primary brand

Case iii above- gives the extensive number of brands in the mind space of consumer for each of the primary brand, thus indicating the proneness of each primary brands' consumer to switch the brand in future

### 3.4.2 Range

Extreme variations are used to check the extend of variability between the least variety prone and the largest variety prone primary brands (variety seeking brand averages of largest variety prone to least variety prone primary brand)

## 4. Analysis and Interpretations

**Table 1: Table showing the number of Primary brand users for each brand**

	Total respondents	Primary users	Lux	Primary Lifebuoy users	Primary Pears users	Other brands



No: of primary customers of the said brand	40	15	08	05	12*
Percentage of primary brand users		37%	20%	13%	30%

\*others include brands as Dettol,Cinthol,Medimix,Santhoor,Dove

At the first level recall we see that no one is having more than one brand as their prominent brand –in-use which suggest that customers do keep certain one brand as a primary brand.

**Table 2: Table showing Average number of ‘second choice brands ‘used by customer for respective first choice brands**

Brands	Irrespective of any particular 1st choice brand	Lux	Lifebuoy	pears	others
Average					
Averages = Total no: of 2nd choice brands No: of primary customers of the said brand	67/40= 1.68 No: of brands	32/15=2.2 No:of brands	13/8=1.63 No:of brands	3/5=0.6 No:of brands	15/12=1.25 No: of brands
Range	2.2-0.6= 1.6				

**Interpretation(Table 2)**

**4.1.Brands used as a secondary ( variety /secondary ) choice (Refer Table 2) .**

**4.1.a. Average Number of variety brands used when taken irrespective of any particular first choice brand**

Average Number for total = 67 /40 i.e.; 1.68 no: of brands

Average Number of different brands used as a variety choice is 1.68, meaning each customer got more than one variety brand in his usage kitty.

#### **4.1.2 Average Number of variety brands used when Lux is the first choice brand**

Among **Lux** brand users there exist some more tendency of variety seeking as compared to the Average when taken 'irrespective of any particular brand ' ie; 2.2 for **Lux** users versus 1.68 for the Average irrespective of any particular brand:

#### **4.1.2 Average Number of variety brands used when Lifebuoy is the first choice brand**

Average Number for Lifebuoy= $13/8=1.63$  number of brands

Among lifebuoy users it is seen that it conforms to the average for the entire brands taken in totality and is an indication of an acceptable level of variety seeking behavior only among primarily Lifebuoy customers

#### **4.1.3 Average Number of variety brands used when pears is the first choice brand**

Average Number for pears= $3/5=0.6$  number of brands

This brand got one of the lowest variety seeking primary customers with on Lifebuoy 0.5, which is less than the average. of the total.

#### **4.1.4 Average Number of variety brands used when 'other brands' is the first choice brand**

Average Number for 'other brands'= $15/12=1.25$  number of brands

For all the other brands put together their average for variety seeking behavior is standing at 1.2, which tells us that some brands though having lesser penetration as such seems to keep the penetrated customers more glued to its brand than some other brands.

#### **4.1.5 Interpretation**

On inferring from the above explanations, pears seems to have the least number of brand switching customers showing more loyalty while Lux with 2.2 got the most disloyal customers.

**This is clarified more when we see the Average number of variety brands used when taken irrespective of any particular first choice brand. Here the average is only 1.68 showing the Lux Average as disproportionately high.**

#### **4.1.6 Extreme Deviations**

**To check the extend of variability between the least variety prone to highest variety prone brand, the range is used. Thus the range of Average Number of variety brands used is**

found out. This gives a measure of to what extent two brands with extreme averages differ in variety seeking-ness of its customers

So range in the above scenario is  $(2.2-0.6)= 1.6$

When the range of the values (extreme ones) was taken it is seen as 1.6, which is quite high thus suggesting that the customers of different brands are not alike in the variety-seeking attribute. There are differences between the variety seeking behavior patterns of the customers in this segment according to the variations in his first choice brand.

It can be seen that some brands do face a tendency of large switching from its customers while some do not. So this sort of a behavior on the part of the customer is suggestive of the fact that there can be less of variety seeking even in this category if the customer is very satisfied with the offering.

**Table 3: Table showing Average number of ‘brands recalled but never used by customer’ for different first choice brands**

Brands	Irrespective of any particular 1st choice brand	Lux	Lifebuoy	Pears	Other brands
Averages = Total no: of recalled but never used brands No: of primary customers of the said brand	$135/40 = 3.38$ No: of brands	$58/15 = 3.85$ No: of brands	$18/8 = 2.25$ No: of brands	$23/5 = 4.6$ No: of brands	$38/12 = 3.2$ No: of brands
Range	$4.6-2.25=2.35$				

**4.2 Third level recall of brands (Brands not used but recalled by customer) (Refer Table 3)**

**4.2.a. Average Number of ‘brands recalled but not used by customer’ when taken irrespective of any particular first choice brand**

Average Number: for total =  $135/40 = 3.38$  no: of brands

This shows that the customer recalls much higher number of brands never used by him suggesting a high ‘brand awareness set’ on an Average than recalled in the secondary brand choice instances.

#### **4.2.1. Average Number of ‘never used brands’ recalled when Lux is the first choice (prominent) brand**

Average Number for Lux= $58/15=3.85$  no: of brands

It is clear that customers of Lux are prone to the exposure of the competing brands

With 3.85 number of brands being recalled on an unaided recall attempt. This is the second highest among the lot and is above the total average.

#### **4.2.2. Average Number of ‘never used brands’ recalled when Lifebuoy is the first choice brand**

Average Number for Lifebuoy= $18/8=2.25$

The brand seems to have a primary customer base who are much less prone to different brand exposure with only 2.25 as the average which is the lowest

#### **4.2.3. Average Number of ‘never used brands’ recalled when pears is the first choice brand**

Average Number for pears= $23/5=4.6$

The surprise of the pack is the pears brand, which seems to have a high level of competitive brand exposure among its customers.

#### **4.2.4. Average Number of ‘never used brands’ recalled when ‘other brands’(brands other than the above mentioned ones) are the first choice**

Average Number for ‘other brands’= $38/12=3.2$

When total of other brands are taken the average comes to 3.2, which is less than the

Average for the total of all brands put together.

#### **4.2.6 Extreme Deviation**

Range for the third level recall= $4.6-2.25=2.35$

When the range is seen, it is higher at 2.35, suggesting a vast difference in the recallability at the awareness level (non-usage but known level) between the customers of different brands.

#### 4.2.7 Interpretation

In this analysis (brands recalled but not used), primary Lux brand users maintains parity in the Average Number of brands recalled with that of the total average (ie;when taken irrespective of any particular first choice brand) but other brands including Lifebuoy got lesser averages. An exception here is pears. But the surprise factor here is the high average attested to the primarily pears users with 4.5 as the average attained in this case.

It is to be particularly noticed that the average for pears brand was the lowest when the averages for the second choice brands were considered while it was the highest for the Lux brand in that case. As a possible explanation this may suggest that even with more than average number of brands recalled at the third level the pears brand users are very firmly standing with the brand and is not experimenting., which is not the case with the Lux brand.

In the case of other brands who are smaller players their primary customers were less prone to recalling brands (third level recall) than both Lux and pears customers. In this aspect the lowest recall is for the primarily Lifebuoy users.

#### 5. Major findings of the study

1. The major finding of the study is the extend of proneness of the primarily Lux brand users to seek variety (2nd level average being 2.2) as compared to other competing brands Lifebuoy(1.63) and pears(0.6). Also this average for Lux brand is more compared to the average when taken irrespective of any particular first choice brand (the average in this case being 1.68) This assumes more importance since in each and every other brands case the averages are substantially low suggesting a much lesser chance of variety seekingness in those cases.

2. a) When the third level (awareness level) recall is studied ,it is seen that Lux customers recalling on an average 3.85 number of brands as compared to the average when taken irrespective of any particular first choice brand(the average in this case being 3.38).Though the average here looks much closer to the combined average still it is keeping with the overll trend of more brands being retained in the mind by primarily Lux brand users as compared to any other brands.

b) As far as the other brands are concerned, in the third level recall Lifebuoy brand got an average of 2.25 only and Pears brand 4.6 and in the 'other brands' case it is 3.2.

Here also compared to most other brands the Lux brands' primary customers seem to possess more brands in their 'awareness set'.

### Conclusion

When the above findings are closely analyzed it can be concluded that in the variety seeking mode as well as in the brand recall mode (third level) the primary Lux brand users are more prone to seek something different thus showing signs of comparatively less loyalty. Also though Pears brand showed the highest number recalled at the third level, at the variety seeking level it is quite low. The suggestion could be to broad base a study to find if such tendencies are there in other customer profiles of the brand so that the brand can be better managed. Such studies should help in finding out and read the possible mind set changes among customers of such products so that precious time is available for the managers to act on it.

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**ANNEXURE-1**

**THIS IS AN UNAIDED RECALL SCHEDULE BEING SERVED BY AN ENUMERATOR TO FIND OUT THE RECALLABILITY OF BRANDS WITHOUT ANY AID BEING OFFERED**

**SCHEDULE**

- 1. TELL WHICH SOAP BRAND/S ARE MOSTLY USED BY YOU**
- 2. TELL WHICH OTHER BRAND/S OF BATHING SOAPS YOU USE FOR VARIETY /OCCASIONALLY**
- 3. RECALL THE OTHER BATHING SOAP BRANDS YOU KNOW BUT ARE NOT USING.**

