

A study on Exploration of Consumer conformity factors: an Indian Perspective

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Abstract---Conformity is considered to be a major social psychology mechanism, and since last few decades its relevancy in constructive way is realized by the sociologists as well as psychologists. Consumer conformity is termed as alteration in the behavior of consumer when he /she got influential opinions from their referred group members. The alteration of behavior is the outcome of advice suggested by the group members. The main objective of the study is to determine the antecedents of the consumer conformity especially in Indian context. Primary data collection methodology used for sampling the population was non-probability sampling technique, in which this study used convenience sampling and snowball technique to choose the target audience. After considering the results of pilot study, few items were deleted as they seemed to be repetitive and 48 items being used for final scale. Finally for data analysis, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) has been used to explore the possible factors related to consumer conformity with the help of SPSS.20 version. Results of the study revealed that ATSCI (attention to social comparison information), collective self-esteem, list of values, and subjective norms and moral support of group members are the primary reasons due to which consumer seeks advice and suggestions from their peer group members for purchase related decisions.

Keywords--- Consumer conformity, antecedents, group members, psychologists, purchase decisions

I Introduction

Conformity is considered to be a major social psychology mechanism, and since last few decades its relevancy in constructive way is realized by the sociologists as well as psychologists. A constructive aspect of conformity is emphasized by various researchers like (Hodges, B. H., 2017). However, conformity is not the emerging area of research that is explored by the latest social psychologists as its centre of origin was initiated in early ninety by researchers with experimental study in specific situation (Bridges, 1914; Moede, 1920; Sherif, 1936 and Ash, 1951). Sunstein(2019) posited that in today's fast moving life style, conformity is often treated as rational informational mechanism in which individuals are exposed to mutually acceptable decision. This information will surely helps the human being to take logical decisions for them.

Social psychologists have identified the various personality traits which directly or indirectly influence the conformity. Some of those traits are as cognitive clarity (Kelman & Cohler,1959), task -oriented individuals (Bass ,1961), Confidence level, self esteem(Kelley and Lamb, 1957;Vesta,1959),public self-consciousness(Bearden & Rose, 1990) and assertiveness(Williams, 1984).All these personality or behavioral traits facilitates the social psychologists to assess the behavior of those individuals who are normal adopters of conformity .

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Consumer conformity is termed as alteration in the behavior of consumer when he /she got influential opinions from their referred group members. The alteration of behavior is the outcome of advice suggested by the group members. Consumer conformity is coined as Consumer Susceptibility to interpersonal influence by previous researchers (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Bearden and Etzel, 1982). Research revealed that customers are normally influenced by referred groups like friends, family members and peer groups, social norms, social values etc (Mourali et al., 2005; Batra et al., 2001; Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). Various variables related to consumer conformity are explained as: Social interaction among customers generates interpersonal influence for their mutual benefits (Burnkrant 1977; Bearden et al., 1989). DeVito, J. A. (2004) stated that Interpersonal influence directly or indirectly helps the customer to gather information for making better purchase decisions. At operational and execution level, interpersonal influence is only possible with the help of interpersonal communication. Interpersonal communication among two or more than two customers may be only possible when they have an established and understandable relationship (DeVito, J. A., 2004). Psychological mechanism in customer thought process for interpersonal processes initiated or conditioned, as he/she may able to pay attention and acting as per the beliefs, value system and opinions of other customers. (Calder and Burnkrant 1977) concluded that customers adopt “social comparison information” as moderating constructs which influences the interpersonal influences for product purchase and consumption pattern.

Indian demographic landscape has shown the dramatic transformation in the purchase behavior due to globalization. It has been seen that from the last decade that there is increase in income level, literacy rates, rise in living standard and reduction in poverty in India. Because of all these factors, consumption pattern of the Indian consumers has shown tremendous change (Gupta, 2011). Although a lot of previous researches had made an attempt to investigated the psychological mechanism related to consumer conformity but There is lack of studies analyzing the opinions of the consumers towards consumer conformity in Indian context. Somehow, some of the experimental studies like Sherif's conformity experiment (1936) and Asch conformity experiment (1951) discussed conformity as well as consumer conformity in particular situations. Further consumer conformity is investigated by various researchers (Feningstein, Scheier & Buss, 1975; Bearden & Rose, 1990; Deutsch and Gerard, 1955); Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975) and proposed different postulates related to conformity. There is scarcity of the studies which focus on the customers positive aspects of conformity in Indian system. The main objective of the study is to determine the antecedents of the consumer conformity especially in Indian context.

II Theoretical Background and Literature Review:

Consumer conformity is coined as Consumer Susceptibility to interpersonal influence by previous researchers (Burnkrant & Cousineau, 1975; Bearden and Etzel, 1982) .Therefore; new nomenclature adopted by marketing researchers is well accepted. CSII initially treated as independent construct for the consumer behavior related studies. Research revealed that customers are normally influenced by referred groups like friends, family members and peer groups, social norms, social values etc (Mourali et al., 2005; Batra et al., 2001; Bearden & Etzel, 1982; Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975). Various variables related to consumer conformity are explained as: Social interaction among customers generates interpersonal influence for their mutual benefits (Burnkrant 1977; Bearden et al., 1989). DeVito, J. A. (2004) stated that Interpersonal influence directly or indirectly helps

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Hofstede, (2001) stated that the mechanism normally followed by an individual to behave in a particular group is not only dependent on individual level differences; it is significantly being affected by his cultures. The validation of culture measure for social influences is widely used by various researchers like Murali et al (2005) narrated that Canadian are normally behave according to two cultural orientations (French Canadian & English Canadian).It was found that as compared to French Canadians, English Canadian were more conscious for price, not involved to become opinion givers and least concern for fashion pattern while purchasing products and services (Hui et al. 1993; Mallen (1977). Reasons for variation in two group’s culture are further investigated by some of the previous researchers. Significant variation among two cultures (French Canadian& English Canadian) is because of their socio- economic status, education level and income level (; Murali et al. 2005 Lefrançois & Chatel, 1967). Nonetheless, few research findings showed contradiction on this explanation (Chebat et al., 1988; Schaninger et al., 1985; Palda, 1967; Thomas, 1975). Therefore, acceptable justification of culture difference is sort out by suggesting neutral opinion that culture is the significant predictors of consumer related research. A social norm directly or indirectly affects the consumer conformity .Further , it has been observed by self identity of an individual is the another significant factor affects the behavior of individuals in social group.Turner et al. (1987) explained the logical and structural alignment of self-identity concept along with different layers in order to provide in-depth understanding and different meaning to it. Self-identity of an individual/consumer at interpersonal level demonstrates how he/she perceive himself/herself as different from other individuals. Normally, when an individual/consumer behaves at group level, self-identity originated at his/her affiliation to group norms (Phua, 2010). Hence in whole a person’s identity is composed of his/her self conceptualizations along with group identity. Being as group, Social Identity represents ‘stereotypical similarities’ along with group members (Nario-Redmond et al., 2004).

Arpita Khare (2013) stated that social status of a consumer is another important component affecting consumer conformity. Social status is basically an extrinsic trait of an individual’ personality that explains his/her relative position within society and it is changeable (Say Keng Lee, 2016). For example: Better financial position of an individual reveals high status of a person and normally is found that individuals with high social status are likely to be have less impact of conformity (Schmid Mast, 2010;Lammers et al., 2009).

Clark & Goldsmith, (2006) investigated and validated that Global Innovativeness is also associated to Consumer Conformity and concluded that informational influence is positively related to global innovativeness. Prior studies have examined the intersection of early adaptors of innovations with social influence (e.g., Fisher and Price, 1992) but Clark & Goldsmith, (2006) critically examined the relationship and provide new insights for

marketing professionals. Furthermore, consumer conformity is negatively related to innovations was postulated by previous researchers (Lascau & Zinkhan, 1999).

Based on the above mentioned literature, basic understanding of the consumer conformity has been understood by the researcher. Hence after that, an initiative has been taken by researcher in current study to explore the basic determine antecedents of the consumer conformity especially in Indian context. The Indian culture and value system is totally different from western countries. Therefore, findings of the current study can facilitate the marketing professionals as well as social psychologists in their working domain.

III Research Methodology

Past research work by various sociologists or marketing researchers (Feningstein, Scheier & Buss, 1975; Bearden & Rose, 1990) proposed that conformity is the social process among individuals when are exposed to their reference group members .Most of the studies considered conformity and its applications in societal setup as social pressure. However, for present study at initial stage the confusion or dilemma regarding conformity struck in the mind of researchers as it has been normally found in the society because of emotional attachment as well as normal phenomenon people take advice each other .Hence, an initiative has been taken in present study the opinions of individuals/consumers towards social reference group's influence via conformity. Further to find the factors responsible for consumer conformity model among individuals/consumers. In present study, researchers have made an attempt to proceed from the existing developed theories regards constructs like social comparison with others, value system of individuals, social identity of individuals, moral support by peer group members and culture differences for consumer conformity. These factors are validated with the help of collected primary data from the sample of population of India. Hence, deductive research is being used by the researchers in this study. Methodology used for sampling the population was non-probability sampling technique, in which this study used convenience sampling and snowball technique to choose the target audience. In this study proposed sample size of approximately 1080 respondents were there. After collecting the data through the questionnaire via online source (i.e. google form) has collected 547 responses and 533 responses via offline source (Questionnaire hardcopy). In order to reach more and more people across the country this research utilizes google forms and hard copy also to collect the data from respondents from cities like Amritsar, Chandigarh ,New Delhi (NCR),Gwalior, Vadodara, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Agra, Aligarh, Dehradun, Jaipur, Indore, Pune, Mumbai.

Based on literature, initially approximately 64 items related to consumer conformity were identified. This initial pool of items for scale consists of self generated or modified items for each constructs along with the previous available items in past studies (Bearden& Rose,1990 ; Schwartz' 2006; Rokeach ,1973; Tajfel ,1982; Luhtanen & Crocker ,1992; Park and Sohn, 2012; Kim and Chung, 2011; Cheah and Phau,2011) . After considering the results of pilot study, items were deleted as they seemed to be repetitive and 48 items being used for final scale Table (4.1) which is being used for survey .Each respondent was asked to give their opinion on the statements related to consumer conformity with the help of likert Scale where "1 stands for strongly disagree" and "5 stands for strongly agree". Finally for data analysis, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) has been used to explore the possible underlying factor structure of a set of observed variables without imposing preconceived structure on the outcome (Child, 1990).

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Respondents

Total number of respondents			1046
Variables	Responses	No. of respondents	Percentage of respondents
Gender	Male	618	59.09
	Female	428	40.91
Age Group	Below 18 Years	89	8.50
	19-34 years	493	47.16
	35-44 years	348	33.26
	45-54 years	78	7.45
	55 years & above	38	3.63
Region from with India	North region	584	55.83
	East region	46	4.39
	South region	329	31.47
	West region	87	8.31
Education	Less than Graduation	206	19.71
	Graduation	326	31.16
	Post-Graduate& above	514	49.13
Occupation	Businessman	96	9.17
	Service men	474	45.31
	Professional	72	6.88
	Student	337	32.25
	Retired	46	4.39
	Housewife	21	2.00
Income (Monthly)	Below Rs.20, 000	82	7.83
	Between Rs 20,001 to 35,000	304	29.06
	Between Rs.35, 001-50,000	245	23.42
	Between Rs.50, 001 to 75000	253	24.21
	Rs.75001 & Above	162	15.48
Marital Status	Unmarried	326	31.16
	Married	720	68.84
	Separated	Nil	-----
Family Residential Pattern	Joint Family	582	55.64
	Nuclear Family	464	44.36

Reliability Test of Scale

Table- 2. Reliability Statistics		
Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No. of Items
.866	.894	48

From the above table, it can be seen that the value for Cronbach's Alpha is 0.866 which in turn can be considered as 86.6%. It simply concluded that developed scale is 86.6% reliable for proceeding to further analysis. This 86.6% of reliability is of 48 scaled variables taken from the questionnaire. Therefore it can be concluded that 48 variables related to consumer conformity are 86.6% correlated to each other. Now since, the reliability of the developed scale is at acceptable range, the study can proceed for further analysis.

Exploratory Factor Analysis for extraction of factors of consumer conformity

From table 3, it is found that KMO value is 0.79, it means that the sample size of datasheet is 79% adequate for conducting the factor analysis.

Table - 3. KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		.792
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	21617.491
	Df	1128
	Sig.	.000

Bartlett’s test of Sphericity checks the intra-correlation of variables in a population matrix. Bartlett’s test of Sphericity verifies the correlation between the variables. It actually checks the correlation through identity matrix, note that having an identity matrix meant no correlation at all in between the variables of the population. The null hypothesis for Bartlett’s test of Sphericity can be defined as follows for the datasheet.

HO: There is no significant correlation in between the variables of the population.

H1: There is a significant correlation in between the variables of the population.

From Table 3, the significant value for the datasheet is .000 which is less than 0.05; therefore, we are rejecting the null hypothesis (HO). This implies that alternative hypothesis is accepted i.e. the variables in the study are significantly correlated with each other.

Scree Plot

Scree plot is the graphical representation of eigen values and respective component or construct in the chronological order. Bajpai(2013) suggested that all the components or constructs on steep slope of the scree plot should be retained in the conceptual models and components or constructs on shallow slope can be exempted from the conceptual models. In present study, Figure 1 shows the scree plot that can be used to extraction of factors related to consumer conformity in which total 47 items are being mentioned but plot reveals that first six factors should extracted from all the components taken for scale , rest of them should be dropped for further factor analysis of consumer conformity

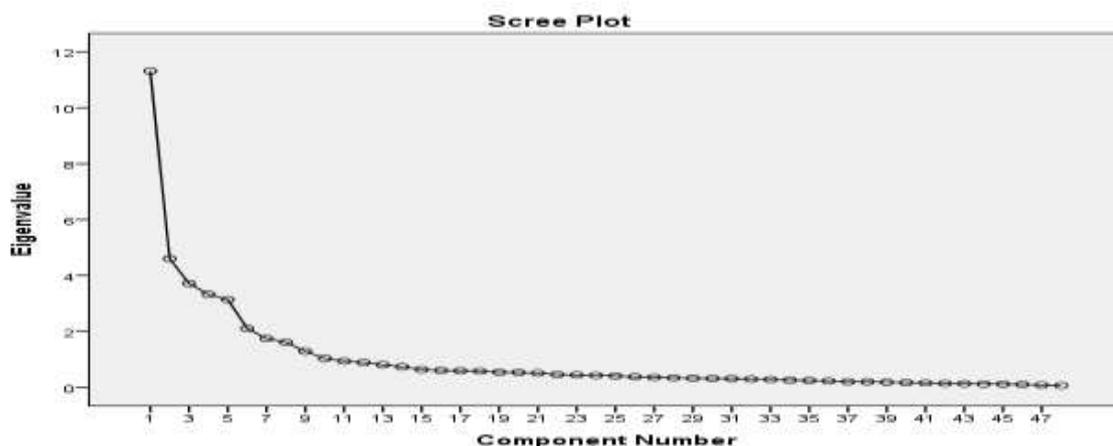


Figure 1 (Scree plot that can be used to extraction of factors related to consumer conformity)

Table- 4 Rotated component Matrix for consumer conformity factors

Rotated Component Matrix						
Statements	Component/Construct					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Eigen Value	11.313	4.599	3.715	3.327	3.139	2.104
% of Variance	23.569	9.582	7.740	6.931	6.539	4.384
Cumulative % of Variance	23.569	33.150	40.890	47.821	54.360	58.744
Scale Reliability (Cronbach's alpha)	.930	.906	.897	.905	.844	.873

Naming of Factors: All the identified constructs or factors related to consumer conformity have been given names on the basis of variables included in each factor. Table 5.4 reveals the statistics in the form of rotated component matrix .This matrix showed that total variance explained by all the extracted factors is 58.77 and scale reliability of each identified factor is also mentioned in the table.

Table- 5 Naming the factors pertaining to Attributes of Consumer conformity

Factor No.	Name of Factor	Label	Factor Loading
1	ATSCI	SCI	0.658
		SCI1	0.714
		SCI2	0.624
		SCI3	0.766
		SCI4	0.807
		SCI5	0.718
		SCI6	0.852
		SCI7	0.776
		SCI8	0.816
		SCI9	0.730
2	Consumer conformity	CC	0.533
		CC1	0.747
		CC2	0.848
		CC3	0.859
		CC4	0.852
		CC5	0.865
		CC6	0.822
		CC7	0.714
		CC8	0.422
		CC9	0.416
3	Collective self esteem	CSE	.630
		CSE1	.538
		CSE2	.471
		CSE3	.745

		CSE4	.766
		CSE5	.714
		CSE6	.753
		CSE7	.662
		CSE8	.650
		CSE9	.682
		CSE10	.707
4	List of Values	VS	.719
		VS1	.829
		VS2	.814
		VS3	.835
		VS4	.851
		VS5	.828
5	Moral support of group Members	MSPM	.692
		MSPM1	.772
		MSPM2	.757
		MSPM3	.768
		MSPM4	.771
6	Subjective Norms	SBN	.807
		SBN1	.808
		SBN3	.867
		SBN4	.800

The six extracted factors shown in the above table has been discussed as follows:

Factor 1: ATSCI (Attention to social comparison information)

The first factor is the most significant factor explaining 23.56% of the total variance explained in exploratory factor analysis related to consumer conformity in the current study. Eleven variables were loaded on this construct and most of the variables are related to social comparison mechanism being adopted by the respondents as they were confronted to social group which directly or indirectly affects consumer conformity. The results also indicated that respondents share their experience about their thought process when they are normally with their reference group members. Further, analysis indicated that respondents try to pay attention to the reactions and face expressions of others when they are along with group members in order to avoid being out of place. Another interesting fact found in this construct revealed that consumer normally become keen observer of other group's reaction as if slightest look of disapproval in the eyes of a person with whom they are interacting is enough to make them change their approach in that particular situation. Reliability of this factor in the form of Cronbach's alpha is 0.930, eigen values lies as (11.311) and factor loading ranges from 0.624 to 0.852.

Factor 2: Consumer conformity

It is revealed from the table 5 that consumer conformity itself is another factor identified in the factor analysis and this construct has explained 9.582% of the total variance and cumulative variance at this level of factor analysis has reached as 33.15%.The statements showed that respondents or consumers had usually adopted their purchasing pattern of their peer group members because of their belongingness with group members and

adhered to follow the information being shared by group members for their final purchase decisions. Furthermore an interesting point projected being projected by the respondents that if group members of their respective group can see them using a product, they often purchase the brand as expect them to buy for consumption. The respondents behave under the influence of their peer group members and positive influences of the group members force the respondents to behave as they wish them to behave. The reliability of this factor in the form of Cronbach's alpha is 0.906, eigen values lies as (4.599) and factor loading ranges from 0.416 to 0.865.

Factor 3: Collective self esteem

Table 5 signifies that “collective self esteem “is another important factor, which explains 7.74% of the total variance and cumulative variance at this stage of EFA has reached at 40.89%. Ten statements related to collective self esteem as factor reveals that respondents or consumers assumes that being as member of their respective group gave them as good impression and they feel that the group facilitates them in their various life situations .They feels that they are worthy and cooperative member of the social groups they belong to. Similarly, they have same feelings for group to which they belong to and as result of this they have strong collective self esteem. This shows that group cohesiveness and mutual respect for each other help consumers to have in collective manner. The reliability of this factor in the form of Cronbach's alpha is 0.897, eigen values lies as (3.715) and factor loading ranges from 0.416 to 0.865.

Factor 4: List of values

Six statements loaded on this factor and this factor explained 6.93% of the total variance explained and cumulative variance at this stage of EFA has reached at 47.82%.This results indicated that consumers or respondents have strong value system in this personalities and they more believe to help each others for any real life related problems whether they are related to being facilitating each other for purchase of products and services for consumption. Moreover respondents feels that helping each other in the form of information sharing with group members is main part of their daily routine and they feel enjoyment and happiness when they purchase the products with my friends or relatives and family members as reference group members. Although, they feel that they have to maintain warm relationship with others that’s why they asks for their opinions and even this give them sense of satisfaction. The reliability of this factor in the form of Cronbach's alpha is 0.905, eigen values lies as (3.327) and factor loading ranges from 0.707 to 0.854.

Factor 5: Moral Support of peer group members

Fifth factor explained 6.53% of the total variance and 54.36% of cumulative variance in the exploratory factor analysis and is labeled as “Moral Support of peer group members”. Five statements loaded in this factor reveal that consumers or respondents have positive orientation for the moral support being offered by group members during their conversation among each other for exploring products or services related information. Moreover, group members always become supportive to give their constructive opinions for me for my purchase decisions. This situation positive projection for all the members in group results in to greater conformity. Furthermore, it is found that consumers feel that Group members share knowledgeable information in very supportive manner results into boosting their moral in very positive and effective manner. The reliability of this factor in the form of Cronbach's alpha is 0.844, eigen values lies as (3.139) and factor loading ranges from 0.692 to 0.828.

Factor 6: Subjective Norms

Finally, subjective norms are the last extracted factor from the exploratory factor analysis. Table 5 showed that variance explained by this factor is 4.38% and total variance explained is 58.74%. Consumers or respondents showed strong inclination towards subjective norms shared among the group members. They believed that in order to behave cohesively in group, there should be uniformity in certain basic norms that has to be followed by all the reference group members. Furthermore, it has been found that it is expected by all social group members or consumers to have cohesiveness for better group members. The reliability of this factor in the form of Cronbach's alpha is 0.873, eigen values lies as (2.104) and factor loading ranges from 0.800 to 0.867.

IV Conclusion and implications

For sociologists and marketing researchers especially in the area of consumer behavior, the results of the study provide comprehensive account of various factors which influence consumers when they are exposed to social reference group members. The identification of consumer conformity factors enables marketing experts to tailor their marketing strategies in an effective manner. These explored factors provide an idea about underlying dimensions related to reference group influence for consumer during buying products. Results of the study revealed that ATSCI (attention to social comparison information), collective self esteem, list of values, and subjective norms and moral support of group members are the primary reasons due to which consumer seeks advice and suggestions from their peer group members for purchase related decisions

Based on the above mentioned factors of consumer conformity, the advertising companies and marketing professionals can draft their promotional strategies in such a manner so that “collectivism among individuals” should be more emphasized in advertisement content so that positive message can be communicated to target audiences. The advertisements should be drafted in such as way so that after watching ads, people can discuss with their reference group so that collective decision by all of them provide effective potential customers to the companies. Apart of this , all other factors like value system , subjective norms and attention to social comparison should also be taken care by marketing experts so that while taking any marketing decision for their companies because during “information search” stage of buying process , all these factors are significantly considered by consumers to make any final purchase decision.

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