Problems and Challenges of Decorative Paint Customers in Paint Brand Preference: A Study Among Decorative Paint Customers of Kerala

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Abstract: Decorative paint customers face several problems and challenges in the course of preferring a paint brand. Capturing the problems and challenges of the customers will enable ease of doing business for the paint companies as well. It is not been given a research priority in this category as most companies collect negligible customer responses from dealers and whatever could will be biased to a larger extent. Hence sufficient research data is not available specifying the customer problems and challenges pertaining to decorative paint category. This study is aimed at capturing the significant problems and challenges related to decorative paint customers in the course of preferring a paint brand. The study is deemed relevant as it is a requirement for the paint companies and this will also provide a resultant insight for the customers to identify the problems and challenges faced in paint brand preference so as to remain proactive in mitigating these problems and challenges.

Index Terms: Problems, challenges, decorative paints, market- ing, preference, brand

I. INTRODUCTION

While preferring paint brand there are several problems and challenges that are faced by the paint customers. Response are collected in relation to the product related problems and challenges, price related problems and challenges, availability related problems and challenges, advertisement/promotion related problems and challenges, application related problems and challenges and finally problems and challenges related to complaint management. This study will enable in generally identifying the problems and challenges as well as specifically identifying the class of problems and challenges faced by the respondents which could be generalized as problems and challenges related to paint buyers.

Various constructs related to product, price, availability, advertisement/promotions, application and complaint management is presented in the following table (table 1).

II. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The study aims at identifying various problems and chal- lenges faced by decorative paint customers and analyze the varying significance of the identified factors in contributing to the problems and challenges in decorative paint brand preference.

III. ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS

The survey was conducted among 450 respondents in the selected area by systematic sampling procedure.

The respondents are equally distributed among the three districts of Kerala State namely Kozhikode, Ernakualm and Trivandrum each representing the north, centre and south regions of the State. Most of the respondents reside in a municipal region and earns a monthly income of 20,000INR to 60,000 INR. Majority of the respondents have a house aged between 6-15 years that means there is a chance for the respondent to have painted the house a minimum of two times as the perceived gap between paintings for a house is estimated to be between 3-5 years. Moreover this indicates the knowledge level of the respondent in relation to paint and painting as they have two painting experience in general, atleast, to evaluate and compare. The respondents are repainting also validates this

Further, it is required to test the normality and reliability of the data for analysis and hence the normality is tested for which Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was employed.

Since the questionnaire being adopted from the past studies it is essential to test whether the factors stated under each of the variable endogenous (dependent) variables measures the exogenous (independent) variable correctly. That is first we wanted to test the convergent validity of the endogenous (dependent) variables using measurement model of the CFA.

Hypothesis

The following hypotheses are tested:

H1: Product is a major Problem and challenge

H2: Price is a major Problem and challenge

H3: Availability is a major Problem and challenge

H4: Advertisement is a major Problem and challenge

H5: Application is a major Problem and challenge

H6: Complaint behavior is a major Problem and challenge

The model fit indices are presented in the following table (table 3)

H1: Product is a major Problem and challenge

Table 1
Problems and Challenges Constructs Explained

Construct	Explained
Production 1	Complexity
Production 2	Information
Production 3	Comparison
Product 4	Experience painters can only apply paint
Product 5	Assess quality before application
Product 6	Differentiate
Price 1	Priced high
Price 2	Discounts right price
Price 3	Offers/deals right price
Availability 1	Easily available
Availability 2	Exclusive dealers
Availability 3	Available late
Availability 4	Available- e-commerce websites
Availability 5	Direct order
Promotion 1	Frequently advertised
Promotion 2	Offers/deals
Promotion 3	Dealer level promotion
Application 1	Experienced painters
Application 2	Application cost
Application 3	Unknown methods and techniques
Application 4	Modern painting (use of machines)
CM 1	Filed at dealers
CM 2	Dealer solution
CM 3	Contact
CM 4	Customer feedback
CM 5	Customer-company connect
CM 6	Dealer
CM 7	Solution
CM 8	Complaints are rare

Source: Primary data

The results exhibited in Table 4 revealed that the regulatory construct Product had a significant influence on Problem and challenges as the standardised direct effect of this construct on Problem and challenges was 0.406, (p value was significant). So the hypothesis H1 is accepted and concludes that Product is a major Problem and challenge.

In relation to the product respondents reveal that there is a highly significant problem related to understanding a paint (product). With specific relation to the paint (product) that is under consideration

Table 2
Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Particulars		Frequency	Percent
District	Ernakulam	150	33.3
	Trivandrum	150	33.3
	Kozhikode	150	33.3
	Corporation	90	20
	20,001-40,000	204	45.3
	40,001-60,000	199	44.2
Monthly Earning	60,001-80,000	32	7.1
	80,001-100,000	7	1.6
	Above 100,000	8	1.8
	1-5 years	27	6
	6-10 years	114	25.3
Age of the house	10-15 years	250	55.6
	> 15 years	59	13.1
	First time painting	16	3.6
Recent painting for the house	Repainting	434	96.4

Source: Primary data

the question remains as to what attributes are specifically defining it nor a clear understanding of how to evaluate, compare and diagnose the attributes as well as what attributes are appropriate to evaluate the paint. Unless applied it is very difficult to generalize any attribute of paint. Thus paint is considered as a complex product.

Table 3
Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Model Fit Indices	
X^2	2.822
DF	3
P	0.42
Normed X^2	0.941
GFI	0.997
AGFI	0.98
NFI	0.997
TLI	1.001
CFI	1
RMR	0.203

Table 4
Regression Coefficients-Problems and Challenges

Path	Estimate	Variance	CR	P
Product → Problems and challenges	0.41	49	9.1	<0.001
Price → Problems and challenges	0.48	69	11	<0.001
Availability → Problems and challenges	0.73	71	13	<0.001
Advertisement → Problem and challenges	0.55	89	13	<0.001
Application → Problems and challenges	0.4	45	8.8	<0.001
Complaint management → Problems and challenges	0.4	46	8.9	<0.001
Application 1 → Application	0.74	54.8	20	<0.001
Application 2 → Application	0.647	41.8	16	<0.001
Application 3 → Application	0.716	51.2	19	<0.001
Application4 → Application	0.638	40.7	16	<0.001
Product 1 → Product	0.84	71	26	<0.001
Product 2 → Product	0.8	65	23	<0.001
Product 3 → Product	0.82	67	24	<0.001
Product 4 → Product	0.64	41	16	<0.001
Product 5 → Product	0.63	40	16	<0.001
Product 6 → Product	0.64	41	16	<0.001
Availability 1 → Availability	0.58	34	12	<0.001
Availability 2 → Availability	0.64	41	14	<0.001
Availability 3 → Availability	0.47	22	9.3	<0.001
Availability 4 → Availability	0.96	70	36	<0.001
CB1 → Complaint management	0.57	57	21	<0.001
CB2 → Complaint management	0.59	59	21	<0.001
CB3 → Complaint management	0.56	56	21	<0.001
CB4 → Complaint management	0.42	42	16	<0.001
CB5 → Complaint management	0.31	31	13	<0.001
CB6 → Complaint management	0.68	68	25	<0.001
CB7 → Complaint management	0.72	72	27	<0.001
CB8 → Complaint management	0.58	58	21	<0.001
Advertisement 1 → Advertisement	0.69	47	18	<0.001
Advertisement 2 → Advertisement	0.89	79	30	<0.001
Advertisement 3 → Advertisement	0.92	84	33	<0.001
Price 1 → Price	0.6	36	15	<0.001
Price 2 → Price	0.96	92	41	<0.001
Price 3 → Price	0.9	81	31	<0.001

Source: Compiled from primacy data analysis.

Responses reveal that there is a high level of information asymmetry that prevails in the market. Relevant information is masked by sellable factors and hence there is dearth of processable information available for the customers. The manufacturer has the maximum product related information and the complete information related with the product is not transferred to the dealer as technical product information is not necessary to sell paint and no demand for technical information related to the paint (product) arises from the intermediaries, painters or customers generally. Even if the information exist it is not clearly available for the normal consumer to process it.

It is interesting to note that the paint (product) if kept alone without the support if brand imageries then there is no way a paint buyer may be able to differentiate one from that of the other. This also says that paint by itself is undifferented as the attributes by which differentiation need to be made fairly dont exist in the market.

Another significant challenge is in the use /application of paint . Though paints are available as ready to apply compositions yet there is a hesitation to take up the challenge by the owner himself in painting the entire house. The belief in the mind of the respondents generalizes the fact that to get the maximum benefit of paint application on the surface it has to be applied by experienced painters. This again substantiates the complexity of product as the best way , style or method related to paint application is vested with experienced painters as it is more of a art than a replicable science.

Responses reveal the fact that the product assessment by the respondents happens after the application of the product. The paint cannot be assessed in its product form to a desirable extent and is bought on larger assumptions and expectations. Only after application on the surface someone is able to assess the promises associated with the offer. This possess a significant challenge.

H2: Price is a major Problem and challenge

The results exhibited in Table 4, revealed that the regulatory construct Price had a significant influence on Problem and challenge as the standardised direct effect of this construct on Problem and challenges was 0.484, (p value was significant). So the hypothesis H4 is accepted and concludes that Price is a major Problem and challenge.

Most of the respondents exhibited a concern regarding the price aspect of paints as no clear mechanism is available to assess the price of paints bought. Mostly the prevailing market price is taken into consideration to compare the price of the preferred paint brand. Mostly the respondents are of the opinion that the paints are priced high. Though price is not the only factor under consideration the value is determined at the end of the day is in relation to the price hence the respondents resort to discounts from dealers to perceive the price as fair. Offers and deals are necessary to make the price felt fair for the brand to be preferred. Hence it is concluded that price of the paint brand possess a relative problem and challenge and hence deals and offers along with discounts are necessary to make the value proposition which ultimately becomes a determinant for preference of the paint brand.

H3: Availability is a major Problem and challenge

The results exhibited in Table 4, revealed that the regulatory construct Availability had a significant influence on Problem and challenges as the standardised direct effect of this con- struct on Problem and challenges was 0.730, (p value was significant). So the hypothesis H4 is accepted and concludes that Availability is a major Problem and challenge.

From among the various problems and challenges under consideration the greatest significance is fund impacting it is the availability factor. Assessing and analyzing the avail- ability variable revealed the fact that most respondents desire to purchase paints online. The responses indicate that the respondents considers the non availability of paints on e- commerce websites are causing significant problems and is challenging them is making a preference. This desirability is contingent with the socio-economic change as most purchases are made a the convenience of home the paints are also expected to be bought online and is adhered to the convenient purchase paradigm. The respondents also projected the benefits that they may have in evaluating, assessing and preferring a paint brand if the information related with the product is systematically available for analysis. Moreover the online platforms enable price comparison, has more offers and deals as well as universal recommendations and remarks of the users enabling a better informed decision on preferring the best available paint brand.

From the responses provided it is evident that paints are not available for direct order from the manufacturer point. This shows that a direct order facility is not found available from any paint manufacturer and the respondents comply to this aspect in a significant manner. The direct order is desired by the respondents as it may be possible to make decisions less influenced by the intermediaries and can avail of the complete portfolio that the dealer preferred portfolio.

From the analysis it is clear that availability of the pre- ferred brand is relatively less significant in contributing to the problems and challenges. The preferred brands are available at exclusive brand outlets as well as easily available from other multi brand paint dealers. Dealer availability is also there in major commercial areas . Most preferred paint brands are available immediately for purchase at the retail outlets. One of the reasons could be the narrowed down preference criteria as per the dealer level availability and mental shortcuts used to prefer a brand of paint might influence this aspect in a larger scale. The availability explains the problem and challenges to a greater extend as it is available through dealers only and is not free from dealer biases and preferences.

H4: Advertisement is a major Problem and challenges

The results exhibited in Table 4, revealed that the regulatory construct Advertisement had a significant influence on Problem and challenges as the standardised direct effect of this construct on Problem and challenges was 0.550, (p value was signif- icant). So the hypothesis H4 is accepted and concludes that Advertisement is a major Problem and challenge. Advertise- ment should be read along with the promotional factors which significantly contribute to the problem and challenges. The preference for a paint brand is highly influenced by the offers and discounts provided by the paint brand. The offers and deals may not significantly form part of the sales promotion campaigns of the paint companies. As the paint company depends on dealers for paint sales it is most possible that trade promotions are effectively encouraged at the dealer level. This trade promotion is found reflecting on the deals and offers provided at dealerships as well as the discounts provided. Frequent advertisements form a relative significance in the paint brand preference. The problem and challenge related to this is that there are few brands that creatively lure the customers. This creates a top-of-the-mind recall of the brand and hence other alternative offers are mostly ignored. This reduces the chance to explore other brands and the level of confidence associated with the frequently advertised brand is more and hence this familiarity may lead to preference of such brands.

H5 : Application is a major Problem and challenge

The results exhibited in Table 4, revealed that the regulatory construct Application had a significant influence on Problem and challenges as the standardised direct effect of this con- struct on Problem and challenges was 0.400, (p value was significant). So the hypothesis H5 is accepted and concludes that Application is a major Problem and challenge.

In relation to the problem and challenges explained by ap- plication of the paint on surfaces it is evident that experienced painters are required to do the painting job. Paint cannot be applied by anyone but those who have experience or scientific knowhow on painting specific surfaces. Moreover it contributes relatively high in explaining the application related problems and challenges faced by the respondent while preferring a paint brand. This gives an insight that a preference for paint brand could be impacted if the brands highlights the paint brand as enabler for anyone to paint with significant perfection. The best way of applying paint is not known to the buyer. This causes dependency on dealers and painters who in turn influences the preferences. Application cost determination is not exactly possible by the buyer. This depends on the recommendations by the dealer or the painter. There are chances that the estimates may vary from the actual literage and finish causing significant challenge to preferring a brand of paint. There can be influences based on the estimates drawn by the dealer or the painter in respect of their preferences of a particular brand which in turn is reflected as the buyers preference. This acts as a challenge because the buyers may not disclose his influence as they are also not cautious about this level of influences. They may consider the reason for preference as a rational decision made by the estimates provided by the painter and dealer masking the real influence. Modern painting mechanisms are also a problem and challenge in preferring a paint brand. The machine based or automated painting makes the process convenient, less time consuming and provides better finish but the determination of the estimated usage of paint is made in the contract and thus may not be cost effective while achieving the desired finish. Moreover automated painting is not suggested by painters and they recommend conventional painting while some brands provide a company trained painters using automated methods based on terms and conditions and if the priority of the buyer is in using modern methods the preference will be influenced, directed to the brand.

H6 : Complaint management is a major Problem and chal- lenge

The results exhibited in Table 4, revealed that the regulatory construct Complaint behavior had a significant influence on Problem and challenges as the standardised direct effect of this construct on Problem and challenges was 0.400, (p value was significant). So the hypothesis H6 is accepted and concludes that Complaint behavior is a major Problem and challenge.

Complaint management is relatively significant and rel- atively explains the problem and challenges in paint brand preference. Reading together it is understood from the analysis that the dependency of respondents for complaint management emphasizes the dealers influence on paint brand preference. It is evident that the respondents believe that the dealer from whom the paint brand is purchased has the capability to redress the complaint and provide quick solutions than dealing directly with the company in an event of post purchase dissonance. The respondents states that in an event off complaint the so called complaint can only be filed at the dealer and is seldom addressed by the company directly. Though complaints are rare as an evaluation mechanism for scientifically assessing the benefits are not available soon after use/ application and very few compliance measures are there to check the authen- ticity of the brand promises.

Customer feedback and contact with the company are a rarity as far as the respondents are concerned. Hence the conventions suggests that overall impact of complaint management has a low significance on problem and challenges related to preferring a paint brand comparing to other more significant factors that explains the variable with much higher power.

It could be observed that the problems and challenges in preferring a paint brand are significantly impacted by the availability factor followed by the advertisements/promotions and price related factors. Product related factors have relative significance along with complaint management factors and application related factors.

IV. CONCLUSION

A significant identification of the major problems and chal- lenges faced by decorative paint customers has been reveled through the study. The biggest problem and challenge for the decorative paint customers is identified as the availability factor. This is described as the source through which the paints are available. At present the paint dealers are depended on by the customers. Non-availability of paints through e-commerce websites is causing trouble for the customers. The e-commerce platform is highly depended on by customers for almost every purchase except daily grocery. The convenience, search ability, reviews, comparison and price advantage is not enjoyed by paint customers at present and this is a major problem the paint customers face. Customers opinion shows that their choice and preference for paint brands are highly influenced by dealer level promotions, offers and discounts and advertisement frequency where the dealer level influence is highlighted resulting in a biased decision making that too in the tune of dealer interest which is considered the next significant problem and challenge faced by decorative paint customers. Customers find it difficult to ascertain the price of paints and the perceived value is maintained through discounts and offers. There is a significant impact of product related challenges as the paint by itself is complex and information sufficient for evaluating paints is not available. There is a high level of information asymmetry in this category. Further product comparison is not possible without the support of brand endorsing the product and hence evaluation is biased to the tune of brand image. Complaint management aspect is also possessing problems and challenges as the complaints are handled through dealers only and mostly dealer level solutions are considered relevant and quick for the reason that paint companies and paint customers are connected through dealers only and there is no direct connection encouraged as far as complaint management and product delivery is concerned. Application is always seen as a separate activity outside the purview of dealer and paint companies and is mostly accomplished through painters popular in the locality. Customer believes that expert painters are needed to apply paint to gain its post application finish and hence the customers usually try to compromise with application of paint. Thus identified problems and challenges highlights the opportunity to strategize for the paint companies as well for the customers to proactively mitigate its impact on their decision making process.

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