
ANALYSIS OF CONSUMER PURCHASE DECISION MAKING PROCESS OF CONSUMER DURABLES GOODS**Dr. Kumar N.N¹ and Dr. H. N. Ramesh²**¹ Assistant Professor, GFGC Arkalgud, Hassan, Karnataka, India² Professor and Chairman – Institution of Management Studies, Kuvempu University, Shankergatta, Shimoga.**ABSTRACT**

This paper is an exploratory review of literature to understand and obtain insights on the effect of Reference groups and opinion leadership on Consumer Decision Making Process of durable goods. People with whom one intermingles, like friends and family, and those whom one admires, like celebrities, can persuade one's choices and buying decisions to a huge extent. For the marketers, the study of interpersonal communication amongst the different clusters of people becomes essential. The researchers have assessed and comprehensively studied various pertinent research conducted in the past. This research has revealed that family, friends and word-of-mouth by Opinion leaders play significant role during purchase decision making process of Durable Goods.

Keywords: Consumer Behavior, Reference groups, opinion leadership, Consumer Decision Making, Marketers.

1. INTRODUCTION

Human being by nature likes to be a part of different groups. A group consists of two or more individuals who have some common goal or some common values, beliefs, and aspirations. The relationship among group members can be either explicitly defined like that of family, association, club etc., be implicit like that of a group of highly influential celebrities or sports stars who are referred to as a group by their fans. A reference group, on the other hand, is a group of individual whom one refer to or who serve as a point of reference, with regard to formation of behavior, beliefs, attitudes, and aspirations. Marketer see reference group as people who influence an individual's purchase decisions.

Reference group as a term was used by Hyman where he found that respondents measure up to themselves and they are influenced by either person or groups (Hyman, 1942)¹. The concept was further polished under behavioral sciences studies, where-by a person is anticipated to be part of a group, or seeks to belong to or seeks not to be a part of (Stafford, J. 1966)². Studies on reference group persuade differ from men to women where gender is regarded as to be an influential element in consumer buying behavior (Schiffman and Kanuk, 1996)³. The same persuade is also dissimilar for different product categories (Nair & Pillai, 2007; Holmberg & Ohnfeldt, 2010)⁴. Reference group persuade has also been found to be pertinent in understanding the very noticeable attention of the product (Xihao,H., & Yang, J, 2006)⁸. Studies pointed out that public luxury services were more vulnerable to reference group influence as contrast to private necessity (Mehta et.al, 2001)⁵.

Venkatesan (1996)⁶ has confirmed that people be likely to get under societal influence when they choose to make a buying decision of a high price, high participation product. Since automobile is used to actually move around and to be noticed, it is significant to know what things influence young executives before they construct their purchase decision in terms of a specific type, size or make of car. The collection of family members, opinion leaders, celebrities and friends in a sense, make up our "reference groups". Reference groups influence attitudes and conduct. These groups in effect turn out to be the reference points from where we take cues to construct our values and standards. This phenomenon also influences our preference for specific brands or categories of products and induces our purchase decisions relating to them. Many a time we seem to be making our buying decisions subconsciously. Even there, the fundamental forces that force us to make the options we make reflect our sense of belonging towards, or the influence we seek out or get from our reference groups. Study carry out by Latif, S. Saleem and Z. U. Abideen (2011)⁷ tinted that the role models like spots personalities and celebrities also induce the behavior of consumers. However this study has showed that formal reference groups induce most consumer actions of young executives for the buying of durables.

1.1 Reference Group

Reference groups are groups that people refer to when evaluating their own qualities, circumstances, attitudes, values and behaviors¹⁰. Reference groups serve as a frame of reference to which people for all time refer to assess their accomplishments, their role, performance and ambitions. A reference group can form a membership group or non-membership group.

Lin and Chen (2009)⁹ in their study focused on the influence of buy intentions on repurchase decisions, and also to scrutinize the reasonable effects of reference groups and perceived risks. The paper locates that; buy intentions will have a optimistic effect on repurchase decision: the higher the informational reference group persuade, the better the optimistically moderating consequence between purchase intentions and repurchase decisions; the higher the worth-expressive reference group influence, the bigger the positively moderating effect between buy intentions and repurchase decisions; and the greater then mental risk, the greater the negatively moderating effect between buy intentions and repurchase decisions.

Reference groups are used mainly to assess and determine the nature of a given person or other group's character and sociological attributes. It is the cluster to which the person relates or seeks to relate him or herself psychologically. It becomes the individual's frame of reference and source for ordering his or her understandings, perceptions, the mental action, and ideas of self. It is vital for identifying a person's self-identity, mind-set, and social ties. It becomes the foundation of reference in making comparison and in assessing one's appearance and performance. Reference Group can be classified as direct and indirect reference groups, on the basis of interaction with the referent. In the direct referent groups, there is personal interaction with the referent, say, a family member, friends, peer. In an indirect reference group, there is no personal interaction with the referent, like in the case of politicians, cricketers, or movie stars. Someone you admire for good dress sense but haven't ever talked to is also an indirect referent. An indirect reference group is sometimes referred to as a aspiration reference group.

Al-Duhaish et al., (2014)¹¹ research aimed at studying the effect of the reference group on the buying decision for the Saudi Youth. The study revealed that the work colleges are the mainly persuading on the clothes purchasing decision, subsequently the friends and the community stars, celebrities and lastly the family. There are variations of reference group impact on the judgment when buying the clothes according to the dissimilarity in the average of using the internet, gender, age group, living area, and level of education. An additional study conducted in Saudi Arabia by Al-Nahdi et al., (2015)¹¹. They comment that there are some dimension of the subjective norms has the most significant influence on Saudi purchasers' behavior when purchasing housing.

1.2 Fast Moving Consumer Durables (FMCD)

The taste and preference of the consumer is extensively ranging and frequently. The accurate forecast for consumer durable decisions are complex (Sonnenberg and Erasmus, 2005)¹³ while the ultimate purchasing judgment of the consumer will vary between decision styles and profiles cannot be directly applied to distinctive purchase conditions wherein the level of involvement of the consumer differs. Involvement of the consumer in purchase making decisions may be product involvement or purchase involvement. Product involvement is the enduring interest of consumer in a product or brand. Purchase involvement connected to the need of the product. An individual who felt the need to buy van, for example, is likely to have high purchase involvement and not the product involvement. The Personal factors and situational factors make it complex to forecast the Consumer decisions beforehand (Sonnenberg and Erasmus, 2005)¹³.

According to Cooper (1994,) ¹⁴ "durability is the ability of a product to perform its required function over a lengthy period under normal conditions of use without excessive expenditure on maintenance or repair". Several units may be used to measure the durability of a product according to its field of application such as years of existence, hours of use and operational cycles¹⁵.

Every durable product ought to be able of adjust to technical, technological and design developments¹⁶. There are several measures of durability in use, including years of life, hours of use, and number of operational cycles¹⁴. In economics, goods with a extensive usable life are considered to as durable goods.

With reverence to consumer behavior towards this category, consumers are likely to spend maximum effort for comparison, evaluation of criteria, and point of purchase sources, inspection, trial and purchase. The internet has emerged as a significant external source of information. Research shows that people who search for product and brand information online are more likely to also buy online as compared to people who do not search online¹⁷.

1.2.1 The Indian consumer durables goods division can be divided into three consumers groups. There are:

Table 1. Consumer Durables Segmentation

<i>Home Appliances</i>		<i>Electronic Goods</i>
<i>White goods</i>	<i>Brown Goods</i>	<i>Consumer Electronics</i>
• Watches and clocks.	• Microwave ovens	• Television sets

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cleaning equipments. • Microwave ovens. • Dishwashers. • Cookers. • Electric fans. • Sewing machines. • Washing machines. • Refrigerators. • Air conditioners. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooking ranges • Chimneys • Mixer and grinders • Electric fans • Irons 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Audio-visual equipment • Electronic accessories • Personal computers • Mobile phones • Digital cameras
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Consumer durables usually have low volume but high unit value.

- *White goods*: Heavy consumer durables are used to be dyed only in white enamel finish. In spite of their accessibility in varied colors now, they are called white goods. It includes air conditioners, stoves, etc.,
- *Brown goods*: comparatively light electronic consumer durables for instance TVs, radios, digital media players, etc.,
- *Consumer electronics*: It refers to any electronic devices designed to be purchased and used by consumers for daily inside a house. It include Televisions, Computers, Laptops, Tablets, etc.,

1.3 Opinion Leader

In reference group we look for advice from people whom we believe knowledgeable or experienced in a particular thing, product/brand. There are many such populaces around us whom we observe as experts in one thing or the other. We seek advice from them in their respective area of expertise are known as opinion leaders and people looking for advice from opinion leaders are known as opinion seekers.

It can then be interpreted that the role opinion leader's play can be very precious particularly where the addition: consumer decision making of home electrical devices takes place. Katz and Lazarsfeld (1966)¹⁸ confirmed that opinion leaders do actually go beyond non-opinion leaders in mass media exposure, and as a result they have the capability of bridging the communication space between extension and the opinion seekers. A family friend who knows a lot about bikes and also runs a garage can prove to be a better source of information when a bike is to be purchased than a close friend who is very knowledgeable about fashion trends. Hence opinion leadership is a social word-of-mouth connection between the opinion giver and opinion seeker.

There are three situations in which opinion leadership take place

- A Situation when an individual actively look for advice from others.
- A Situation when an individual voluntarily gives information to others
- A Situation when information is generated in the course of normal communication of a group.

1.4 Consumer Decision Making

Consumers make a decision on a usual basis. A decision is merely making a choice. These choices can be concerning various brands, products, stores, etc. now and then; the consumer does not get to make options as there is only one option accessible, so one has to choose that only. The purchase decisions taken during such single product situation are known as 'Hobson's choice.' some consumer researchers view consumers as cognitive or thinking decision makers who actively seek pre-purchase information, evaluate options, and then reach a certain decision. This view also holds that in this era of information overload, consumers will not try to obtain all the information for each and every decision and would rather stop looking for more information if they feel that they have sufficient information to make a 'satisfactory decision.'

Emotions like achievement, fear, success, love, etc., frequently persuade one's purchase decisions. Consumer moods also persuade decision making. Study of consumer frame of mind and their effects on decision making can be particularly significant for service encounters, point-of-purchase stimulus, context and content of marketing communication (Gardner & Meryl Paula, 1985)¹⁹. Store image can also impact the mood of the consumers and affect decision making. The store ambiance can lift the spirit of the consumers, or it can displease them. A store with good music, lively colors may lift the consumer's spirits and can influence time

and money spent in the store, number of items purchased and revisit intentions of consumers (Smith, Ruth Belk & Sherman, 1993)²⁰.

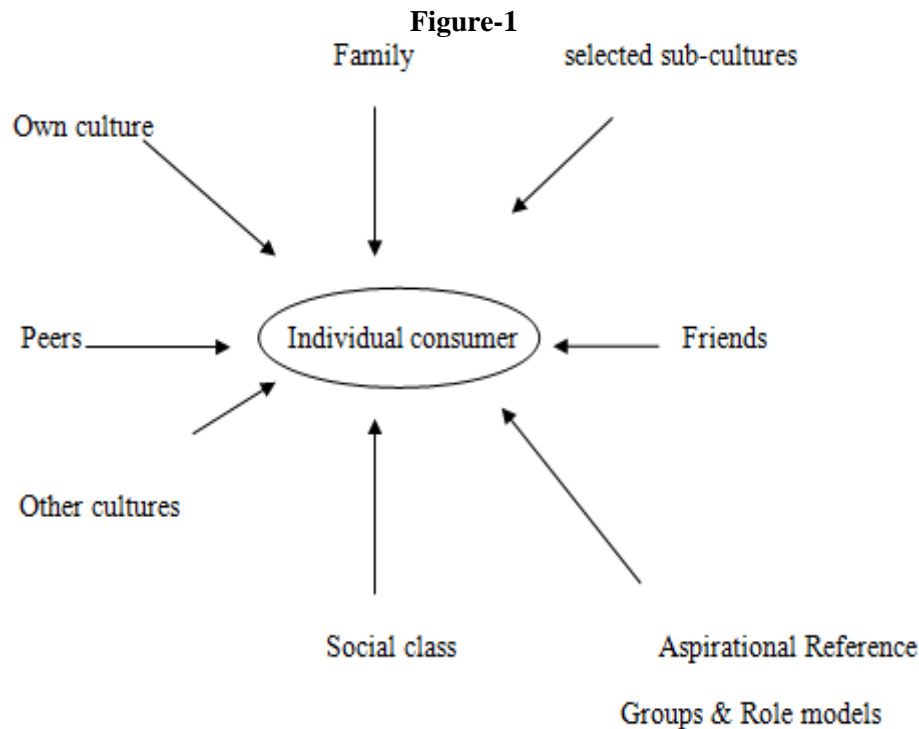
2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

- A reference group is defined as “an real or imaginary individual or group perceived of having important bearing upon an individual’s evaluations, aspirations, or behavior” (Park and Lessig, 1977)²¹. Social and interpersonal influence research can be traced back to Hyman (1942)¹, who first detailed the term ‘reference group’ when he asked respondents with which persons or groups they contrast themselves¹.
- The concept was further polished underneath behavioral sciences studies, where-by a person is expected to be element of a group, or seeks to belong to or seeks not to be a part of (Stafford, J. 1966)¹⁰.
- In 1982, a study on “Reference Group Influence on product and brand purchase decisions” was conducted by William Bearden and Michael Etzel on non-student adults in Columbia to understand the differences in the reference group influences across 16 products which were classified as publicly and privately consumed products and luxuries and necessities
- Murali et al. (2005)²² pointed out that reference group influence or social influence is important in consumers’ decision-making process, which might be accepted by most consumer behaviour models. In addition, a considerable number of studies regard as reference group influences as one of the most crucial factors which affect the consumer purchase decision-making process. The interrelated relationship between reference groups and consumer’s purchasing decision making has been brought out, and the essential of study those together has also be suggested (Yang et al., 2007)⁸.
- The reference groups in this investigate consist of not only the clusters that an person has a regular contact with groups for example family members, acquaintances, colleagues work associates etc.) But also comprise the groups that a person does not have a association in or a direct contact with, such as certain probable groups or people in a certain social rank (Hawkins et al., 1998)²³. Bourne (1957)²⁴ studied group persuade in marketing and behavioral research, and concluded the idea of the reference group has a enveloping influence on marketing studies.
- Kaur and Singh (2004)²⁵ examined that in families from dissimilar income group, their traditional customs and values and role of children in the family unit is the major factor that lend a hand in the decision making procedure in any household
- The primarily opinion leadership scale was introduce in 1944. Lazarsfeld, Berelson and Gaudet (1944)²⁶ and Katz and Lazarsfeld (1955)¹⁸ computed an index. They distinguished between ‘opinion leaders’ and ‘followers’. This idea of operational zing opinion leaders as convincing others and being asked for advice had tremendous impact on follow up studies and scale development. However, the primary effort to gauge opinion leadership has been condemned throughout the field, as statistical problems and low instrumental validity.
- Jung and Kau (2004)²⁷ established that Individualism manifests in behaviors in the direction of reference group influence, opinion leadership, information distribution, family orientation of a person.
- Torben Hansen, in his work the title, “Perspectives on Consumer decision making: an integrated approach” has recommended a framework which incorporates several perspectives on consumer decision making. The result of this study supports the difficulty of consumer decision making with his results. First, consumers do not use their cognitive and affective skills separately, rather they affect each other. Secondly, the cognitive, evaluative constructs of quality and attitude had important direct effects on buying intention, while affective construct of sentiment had no considerable direct effects on buying intention. Thirdly, price affected apparent quality which in turn affected thoughts, which in turn affected buying purpose. At the same time, cost had no direct effect on buying intent.
- Dalrymple, Shaw and Brossard (2013)²⁸ have done a considerable number of experiential studies in which they have recognized that opinion leaders have statistically significant persuade on the individual behaviors of other people.
- Diaz and Maria (2013)²⁹ have recognized that when consumers are primarily presented with high prices, and later with lower ones, they are likely to consider making buy at the new lower prices. This means that sellers can alter the mental state of buyers by playing around with prices to persuade them into making purchases.

- Bruno and Hustad (2013)³⁰ have recognized that opinion leaders act as the focal point people linking the public and the media. The acknowledgement shows that the opinion leaders get messages from the media, construe and pass them to other members of the group according to their own thoughtfulness. Klingemann and Rommele (2002) add to the discourse by in contention that opinion leaders construe the information they get from the mass media according to their own cultural and communal contexts.

3. INFLUENCE OF REFERENCE GROUP AND OPINION LEADERS ON CONSUMER DECISION MAKING PROCESS

The reference group may be identified as having a positive or negative reference for an individual. Group's form which people try to distance themselves due to their negative influence are known as avoidance groups. An individual reference group may be as small as a family or as big as a nation or culture. (Refer Fig-1)



Source: Leon G. Schiffman and Leslie L. Kanuk, Consumer behavior," (prentice Hall India, 7th edition), 265

3.1 Forms of Reference Group Influence

The influence of a reference group can be of different types. Reference group has influenced in consumers' decision making. Influences exercised by reference groups that have been discussed in the past researches are mentioned below:

3.1.1 Information Influence

The individual seeks information about a diversity of brands from an association of professionals or independent groups of specialists and from those who employee with the merchandise as profession. It is the tendency to accept information from others as proof about authenticity (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955)³¹. When making buying decisions, consumers tend to seek out others assessments of dissimilar alternatives or derive conclusions from the brands reference group members possess (Park and Lessig, 1977)²¹. Individuals performing as referents may provide new information as a clarification to a problem or add to what the individual already believes or make out (Burnkrant and Cousineau, 1975)³².

3.1.2 Utilitarian Influence

The individual's decision to purchase a particular brand is influenced by the preference of fellow workers or people with whom he or she has social interaction (Park and Lessig, 1977, 1977)²¹. This reference group persuade is similar to the normative influence (Deutsch and Gerard, 1955)³¹, the conformity conception of "it-is-dangerous-not-to-conform" (Asch, 1952)³³, and the compliance process. An individual in a product or brand buying situation would be anticipated to comply with the preferences or prospect of another individual or group if, firstly he/she make out that they mediate important rewards or sentences and he/she is provoked to realize the reward or to avoid the punishment. Subsequently, he/she believes that his actions will be visible or known to others.

3.1.3. Value-Expressive Influence

The individual considers that it would be nice to be like the type of persons that advertisements show using a particular brand. The individual feels that the possession of a certain brand, which is used by certain people, whom he admires, will also give him the same kind of image (Park and Lessig, 1977)²¹. Voluntary compliance to group norms may activate from an individual's desire to improve his or her image or self-concept by recognizing with the rules or practices of an esteemed group (McGuire, 1969; Park and Lessig, 1977)^{34, 21}.

3.2 Reference Groups as a Basis of Brand Associations

Brands used by member groups and ambition groups can become linked to consumers' mental symbol of self as they utilize these brands to describe and generate their self-concepts (Escalas and Bettman, 2003)³⁵. Possessions and brands can be utilized to satisfy such psychological requirements as actively generating one's self-concept, reinforcing and conveying self-identity, and allowing distinguishing oneself from others and emphasizing one's individuality (Ball and Tasaki, 1992; Belk, 1988; Fournier, 1998)^{36, 37, 38}. Belongings and brands can also serve a social intention by reflecting social ties such as one's family, community, and cultural groups (Muniz and O'Quinn, 2001)³⁹.

3.3 Important Reference Groups and Appeals

Friends are major influencers of a lot of consumption choices of individuals and come next only to the family. Friends provide the first social circle an individual has outside family and provide a sense of companionship. Shopping groups are the people who accompany while they go out shopping and they assist them in their decision making with respect to choice of products and brands. Brand communities consist of people who are users of a particular brand. Many marketers have identified the importance of brand communities, which not only emotionally bond the consumers to the brand but also increase consumer loyalty and positive word of mouth publicity⁴⁰.

Apart from these there are many reference groups that a consumer consults while making a purchase decisions includes work group consists of peers, subordinates, and superiors all are part of work group. Consumer- action Groups are effectual influence in consumer decision making as well as common behavior for example disaster control, public health, anti-drugs campaign, or any other cause that affects people in common.

3.4 Influence of Opinion Leaders on Consumer Decision Making Process

To be more precise opinion leaders enthusiastically gain and accept the information distributed by the mass media, process and pass on them, while the majority of the public depend primarily on the interpersonal communication with the opinion leaders to get information in order to guide their own proceedings. Here, as a medium of information, opinion leaders have vital influences on the community. visibly, the Two-step Flow of Communication emphasize the influence of opinion leaders towards the thoughts of the wider population, and stresses the reality that the influence of interpersonal communication towards the public is more recurrent and more effectual than the influence of the mass communication towards the same spectators. Because of the Internet, online opinion leaders come into sight. They are quite alike to conventional opinion leaders, except for the fact that online opinion leaders put forth their influence towards others through the Internet.

'Opinion leaders not only predict for themselves, but predict for followers' (Goldsmith, Heitmeyer, & Freiden, 1991). 'Opinion followers, with lesser tendencies and self-confidence, prefer the recommendation of others'. We often seem to opinion leaders for help in our consumer decisions. 'Opinion leaders are typically people who are extra knowledgeable about a certain product or service than the normal consumer. As such, opinion leaders can outline how a product is viewed' (Boundless, 2016).

Opinion leaders are ideal for implementing the "word of mouth" tactic, a marketing technique where people communicate to others their own opinion on a specific product or service. The exquisiteness of this method – it is practically free of cost. It requires almost no investment on the part of an association. According to numerous reports, dominant people can influence the buying habits of, on average, persons by word of mouth. In case of online buyers, it bounded up to about 8 people on an average. The opinion leaders will yet again focus on the quality and product group and the decision-maker looks for their advice. People do not like to take risk and if verdict are difficult, typically they will be in touch with opinion seeker to get implication (suggestions) from the opinion leader. Still further, the substitute buyer will make decisions in the purchase, in influencing the buyer as more people for example need assistance in purchasing parts for their cars, newest designer garments and any other durable products.

The consumer hype generated by positive word-of-mouth interaction can play a vital role in the success of a product⁴¹. A large number of target consumers are affected by the power of the consumer hype, at least in part. Entertainment and fashion products are usually more affected by a buzz than products related to insurance,

finance, electronics, etc. word-of mouth can sometimes cause great damage to brand. Negative word-of-mouth communication can damage the picture a brand has built up over a period. It is significant to make a note of those dissatisfaction consumers usually pass on negative comments to more populace than satisfied consumers and the negative information is weighted more deeply than positive information, by the undecided new product adopters⁴².

Opinion leaders in general, are people who have expertise in one subject/product or activity and have the capability of influencing others. Opinion leaders can be of different types based on their understanding, and persuade on the purchase decision of the opinion receiver and/or opinion seeker. Generalized opinion leaders are masters of various subjects and are very hard to find. Usually, opinion leaders are familiar about on product category they have high involvement in and some related areas. Market Mavens belongs to a special category of opinion leaders who have market-involvement, instead of the product- involvement of the normal opinion leader. They are people who actively seek market information which they feel may be useful for friends and acquaintances, and are great source of information regarding offers, best deals, discounts and new product or brands are in the market, which outlet to visit for which product, the new outlet in the town, etc (Fieck, Lawrence, 1987)⁴³.

Surrogate buyers is the term used for the professionals hired by actual purchasers to filter the huge amount of store, product, and brand information available, evaluate the product options available, and make recommendations and sometimes make transactions on behalf of their employer (Michael A Solomon, 1986; Aggarwal, Praveen & Cha, 1997)^{44,45}. Purchase companions are considered to be quite influential opinion leaders at the point of purchase consumer decisions. The major benefits of purchase companions are that they help reduce the stress and anxiety an individual experiences while making a purchase, especially in a high involvement, expensive product. The strong fix purchase friend provides moral support and helps the individual choose products that suit his or her taste. (Kiecker, Pamela & Hartman, 1994)⁴⁶.

The opinion leadership process happens due to various motives of both parties- the opinion leader, opinion seeker and receiver. There are four main motives behind the role of opinion leaders. Firstly self –involvement, giving advice to others provides big gratification to the opinion leaders in terms of the attention they receive. The role of opinion leader also involves a feel good factor of helping others take a decision and increasing the knowledge of opinion seekers and receivers. Secondly product involved opinion leaders may feel the necessity to talk to opinion receivers about the product if it is either too good or too bad. The information transmitted would be positive if they are satisfied with the product or brand, and negative, if they are dissatisfied with it. Thirdly social involvement opinion leaders like to share their product experience with people in general as an expression of bonding. In this case the opinion leader doesn't feel the urge to talk about the product/brand due to positive or negative experience, as in the case of product involvement. Fourthly, in message involvement with an increasing number of advertisements being targeted at consumers, these advertisements often become the topic of discussion. Consumers while making buying decisions to purchase durable products, they apply various decision rules, which includes compensatory and non compensatory decision rules.

4. CONCLUSION

This paper's intention was to obtain some insights of impact for reference group and opinion leader on consumer behavior and decision making process. It offers insights on how consumers take buying decisions and evaluate alternatives while buying FMCD products. This study has revealed that family and relatives, friends and opinion leaders influence the consumer behavior to a larger extent. Reference groups and Opinion leaders play a very vital role in consumer decision making process by giving suggestion and encouraging communication among consumers in the purchase and consumption method, where the choice to buy something is the key in and establish consumption set, The style of consuming based on the consumer's viewpoint and experiences which depends on their moods, emotions, etc. Opinion leaders play significant role at the point of purchase consumer decisions. To this end a reference group serves as a frame of reference for an individual and influences his/her behavior. It is very significant that market buzz is a strong tool in the hands of the marketers. Word-of-mouth is an interpersonal communication influences the consumer behavior to greater extent, if it is positive, can lead to huge gains for the marketer, and if it is negative, it adversely affect the decision making process of consumers. Market need to build strong relation with opinion leaders in their marketing techniques in order to arrive at consumers in a short span of time to influencing them to repurchase and retain customer loyalty. The market for consumer durables is more competitive now a day. Therefore, the manufacturer of durable products should comprehend consumer interest to a great extent to find higher sale of their products.

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