



Perceived Consumer-Centric Marketing- Mix at the Urban Bottom of the Pyramid- An empirical study of Food market

Yukti Sharma¹, Dr. Reshma Nasreen²

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ABSTRACT: *Purpose of study: The current research study strives to develop a reliable and valid consumer-centric marketing- mix for the core or essential food items at Urban Bottom or Base of the Pyramid market. Design/methodology/approach: This research paper reviews the existing marketing- mix elements of western food market (Product, Price, Place and Promotion). A survey of six hundred households was conducted in six selected slum areas of Delhi. Thereby, based on the exploratory factor analysis existing elements of marketing-mix were refined for the essential food items. Findings: Through a survey of 600 respondents residing in six highly dense slum area of Delhi (India), 4 Ps marketing-mix instrument was redefined and empirically tested through exploratory factor analysis. The resultant marketing-mix for BOP segment comprised of four dimensions renamed as Core product, Price Sensitivity, Social sources of information and Place Loyalty. Practical implications: For managers, this research suggests a set of guidelines for designing an efficient marketing-mix for core food items in consumer-sensitive manner. Social Implications: Recommendations will lead to inculcating a long forgotten market in mainstream, economy and improving the standard of their living by providing significant choices. Originality Value: This paper makes an original contribution in direction of revival of existing western marketing-mix based on the BOP consumer survey. Research limitation- The food items consumed by BOP market is further pronged into two categories- Core and Non-core Food items. This study is limited to understanding the purchase behavior for core or essential food items. This study was conducted in six densely populated urban slum areas of Delhi. Paper type: Empirical Research Paper*

Keywords: *Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP), BOP advocates, Core food items, Consumer-Centric marketing- mix, Urban BOP Consumer and Exploratory Factor Analysis.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Poverty alleviation or at least reduction has always been a matter of grave concern for various stakeholders in the society. Hitherto, government and the rich at the top of the pyramid (TOP) have sought to help the poor at the Bottom of the Economic Pyramid (BOP) through aid programs and charity donations respectively. However, even after many years to this 'aid- approach' problem of poverty still persists and nothing seems to have changed much [1]. In this concern, C.K. Prahalad coined a new theory to alleviate poverty named as Bottom of the Pyramid (BOP) proposition. He made an assertion that the poor people lie at the Bottom of world's economic Pyramid, represents a significant market opportunity for MNCs. Over four billion people live at 'bottom of the pyramid' or 'subsistence marketplace' and consists of people whose annual per capita income (Purchasing Power Parity (PPP)) is less than \$1, 500. In his book 'The Fortune at the bottom of the pyramid (2004)', C.K. Prahalad [2] wrote that 'Four billion poor can be the engine of the next round of global trade and prosperity'. The BOP proposition coined by Prahalad can be summarized as 'MNCs by selling to the poor consumer will not only eradicate poverty but bring significant profits as there is untapped purchasing power at BOP'.

BOP assertion has not so easy acceptance as it challenged many traditional and economic tenets of western market. But the promise of fortune elicited the interest of many firms. Thus, based on the estimates of economic potential, some firms entered BOP market in pursuit of 'Fortune at the BOP'. With the failure of preliminary attempts in quest of proclaimed 'Fortune', BOP sceptics questioned the validity BOP assertion and revised economic estimates of BOP market, downwards[3] [4]. The main reason behind failure of initial attempts to enter BOP market was the use of flawed westernised marketing strategies. Almost all the firms started with a western product offered at the lesser price to satisfy the needs of subsistence consumers.

Gradually, companies questioned the marketing strategies; especially the marketing-mix approach used to enter BOP market. Further, westernised promotional-mix was considered irrelevant in 'media dark' BOP market; existing strategy for determining right price which ensures appropriate profit margin found inefficient in this market with irregular income earning pattern; applicability of conventional place-mix was questioned in the absence of no formal marketplace; and westernizes product offerings failed to create demand in BOP market with different need structure.

For redefining an apt marketing-mix, it became imperative to extend the discussion on subsistence marketplaces beyond the advocacy for increased market engagement. It was felt that companies were ill-equipped to serve the poorest consumers. So it was necessary for the marketers to understand BOP consumers and their peculiar needs; thereby formulate an appropriate marketing-mix. However, previous decade witnessed more research in direction of understanding needs of BOP or subsistence consumers [5] [6] [7] [8] [9] and influence of marketing strategies on BOP consumers' buying decision [9] [10].

Researchers in BOP segment employed qualitative investigation design based on the in-depth interview; ethnographic observations and case study methods for understanding consumption behaviors of BOP consumers. There is a lack of focus on using quantitative data [11], which is a big research gap to be addressed. Since, there is a lack of quantitative data oriented studies, seeking deliberation, current research focuses on quantitative research and strives to develop a reliable and valid BOP consumer-centric marketing- mix for the core or essential food items.

The current research study reviews the existing marketing- mix elements for the western food market (Product, Price, Place and Promotion). Thereby, based on the exploratory factor analysis existing elements of marketing-mix is refined for the essential or core food items in the context of subsistence marketplace.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FOUNDATION

2.1 Bottom of Pyramid

Different authors use distinct definitions of the term BOP. However, with these different definitions, it becomes difficult for companies to target the BOP market and orient their strategy to this market. There are different views on empirically defining the BOP or subsistence marketplace. However, all the researchers and companies working on the BOP agrees that it is difficult to draw consensus on the actual size and classification but it is an important market which requires increased research [9]. Whilst literature provides variant definition of the BOP [7] [12] [13] [14] but there are four main classifications which have emerged to describe the market - World Bank global income classification modified by Rangan et al (2007)[15], Hart (2002)[14] Classification, Hammond, Kramer et al (2007) [13] classification and Viswanathan et al., classification (2010)[16]. The emergence of BOP concept brought various critics into the picture insisting on specific criteria for defining BOP consumers. However, researchers who consider BOP market with latent needs [10] [16]. stressed on the use of socio-economic based definition. Thus, keeping the socio-economic realities in mind subsistence marketplace or BOP can be defined as:-

- Subsistence market place consists of Household earning less than Rs. 8000 per month [10] [16]
- Live in rural villages or urban slums and shantytowns
- Absence of proper water and sanitation services, electricity, and basic supporting infrastructure [13]
- There exists one-to-one interaction between small neighborhood storeowners and local consumers, strong social relationship [7]
- The BOP consumers' mainly satisfy basic needs such as food, water, shelter. According to the WRI's report (2007), out of \$5 trillion market potential of the BOP segment, food accounts \$2895 billion of purchases.
- Limited or no access to formal educations.
- Difficult to reach via conventional distribution, credit, and communications and offered with low quality and quantity of products and services.

2.2 Food market at world's BOP

According to WRI report (2007), major categories on which BOP consumers spend their income are (Figure 1) – Food (58%), Energy (9%), Housing (7%), Transportation (4%), Health (3%), ICT (1%) and Water (1%) (Figure 1). The BOP segment spends a substantial part of their meagre income on food consumption. On the basis of available data, total BOP household food market (36 countries) in Africa, Asia, Eastern Europe, and Latin American and the Caribbean had an estimated worth of \$2.89 trillion. Asian BOP food market is largest with a concentration of 1.49 billion people representing worth of \$1.1 trillion.[17]

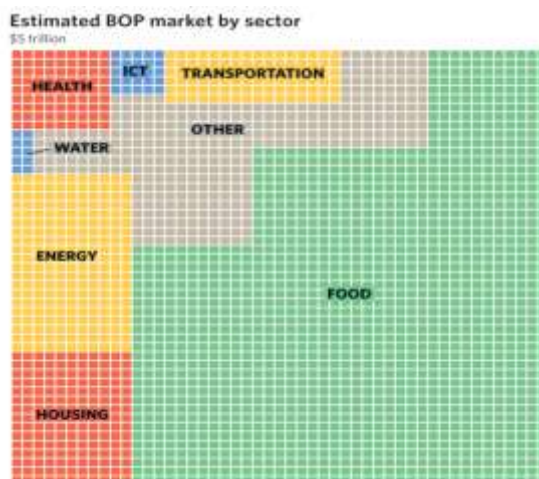


Figure 1: Major categories of income allocation at BOP (Source: WRI 2007)

2.3 Marketing-Mix for food retailing

The marketing mix paradigm has dominated marketing thought, research and practice [18] since its conception. McCarthy (1964) summarized four Ps frameworks and defined the marketing mix as a combination of the four factors, namely product, price, promotion and place. Marketing scholars identify marketing-mix as the controllable parameter that firms use to influence consumer buying process. Since the current study involves food retailing thus literature relates to marketing-mix in food and retailing. Each element of the marketing-mix is reviewed in the context of food purchase behaviour so as to determine the adequacy of the current state of marketing-mix framework and the modifications required to accommodate BOP consumer's needs. Thus based on the review of literature of four Ps of Marketing-mix in context food market can be operationalized as given in Table 1.

Table 1: Operationalisation of Marketing-Mix elements in Context of Food Retailing

Marketing Mix	Construct Operationalization	Authors
I. Product		
PRD1	i).Varieties/ Brands offered	[19] [20] [21]
PRD2	ii).Degree of essentiality	
PRD3	iii).Reasonable quality offered	
PRD4	iv). Freshness of food items	
PRD5	v).Availability in Small quantity/ Sachets	
PRD6	vi). Nutritional and health content provided	
PRD7	vii).Accurate measurement of quantity	
PRD8	viii). Packaging of product	
PRD9	ix). Food label/ Safety Mark	
PRD10	x). Availability of product	
II. Price		
PRC1	i). List Price (MRP)	[8] [16]
PRC2	ii).Price charged less than List price	
PRC3	iii).Price per unit charged when bought product in small quantity	
PRC4	iv). Discount offered	
PRC5	v). Availability of product on credit	
III. Place		
PLC1	i). Nearness of the shop/Less Travelling	[8] [16]
PLC2	ii). Credit Facility	
PLC3	iii).Courteous Treatment	
PLC4	iv).Standard price and quality	
PLC5	v) Product Knowledge of shopkeeper	
PLC6	vi). Trust/ Familiar local Shopkeeper	
PLC7	vii). Wider Choice	
PLC8	viii). Easy Return Policy of the shopkeeper	

Marketing Mix	Construct Operationalization	Authors
PLC9	ix).Bargaining opportunities	
IV. Promotion		
PRM1	i). Packaging	[8] [16]
PRM2	ii). Shopkeeper	
PRM3	iii). Family/friends	
PRM4	iv). Groups	
PRM5	v). Neighbours	
PRM6	vi). Market interaction	
PRM7	vii). Bulletin boards	
PRM8	viii). Newspaper	
PRM9	ix). TV	
PRM10	x). Radio	
PRM11	xi). Internet	
PRM12	xii). Community Leaders	
PRM13	xiii). NGOs	
PRM14	xiv). Government	

III. RESEARCH CONTEXT

The current research study defines subsistence marketplace as clusters of households earning less than Rs. 8000 per month with the lack of civic infrastructure. Thus, urban slums and shantytowns, clustered with household earning fewer than Rs 8000 considered is the sampling frame. In order to understand the food offering at subsistence marketplace, report by National Sample Survey Office (NSSO) [22] on Household Consumer Expenditure is analysed. NSSO report considers more than 250 food items for consumption. For this research, the food items considered can prong into two broad categories-

Core Food Items

Non-core Food Items

1) Core Food Items

It includes food items which form a staple diet for bottom fractile classes in India. Core items are imperative and easily accessible to this market or made easily accessible by governmental initiatives as considered to be essential for living. In India consumption of rice, wheat and sugar are made available to below poverty line consumers at subsidised rate through Fair price shops, known as Public Distribution System. These shops may be owned by the government, local government, a government undertaking, the proprietor of a firm, co-operatives or private persons (individually or jointly) or other bodies like the club, trust. Further Core items are generic in nature and not much brand choices offered for these to BOP or subsistence market segment. However, perishable food items are not considered as requires a different marketing mix, which can't be generalized for this segment.

2) Non-core food items

This category includes the components infused by NSSO 68th round [22] under the head of “beverages, refreshment and packaged processed food”. Beverages include tea, coffee, mineral water, soft drinks, fruit juice soda water, and other beverages such as cocoa.

This research study is limited to understanding the purchase behavior for core food items. This study was conducted in densely populated urban slum areas of Delhi of households earning less than Rs. 8000 per month.

IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In order to redefine the marketing-mix in the context of BOP segment for Core or Essential food items, an empirical study was undertaken based on the well-chalked methodology.

4.1 Pre-Test and Pilot Study

Pre-test and Pilot studies are both essential parts of questionnaire survey design, in order to validate instrument and to ensure that the survey questionnaire is free of errors. In this research study, the pre-test was conducted by distributing questionnaires to 10 eminent professors in related fields. The changes suggested thereafter were accommodated in the questionnaire. Integral insights provided were in terms of the definition of BOP consumers, Homogeneity in consumption habits of BOP consumers and fearful behavior of BOP community towards the surveys. In addition, 15 respondents selected on the basis of judgmental sampling from the slum area Delhi meeting the definition of BOP consumers. They were asked to suggest potential problems with the questionnaire design. This allowed translation of the survey instrument in local Language (Hindi).

4.2 Pilot Study

The pilot study was conducted in slum areas of Mangol Puri and Kathputli colony (Urban slums, Delhi) on the 100 Households earning less than Rs. 8000 per month. The sample comprised of 44 females and 56 males respondents with 64 respondents in the income bracket of Rs. 20001-4000. Out of the total of 100 households, 88 were covered under the Public Distribution Scheme (PDS) and were reaping the benefits from Fair market shops. In this pilot study, the reliability of the measures items used in the questionnaire was assessed using the internal consistency test Cronbach's alpha. Cronbach's alpha estimate value above 0.70 is considered as acceptable [23]. All of the measures used in the pilot study showed an adequate reliability with Cronbach's alpha values of Product (0.951), Price (0.931) and Place (0.885) except Promotion (0.659). In order to ensure Cronbach's alpha for Promotion to be greater than 0.70 PRM5 (Neighbours) was dropped from final survey instrument. After deleting PRM5 the internal consistency increased to 0.729 (above 0.70).

V. DATA COLLECTION

For the final data collection, 675 were identified in 5 zones comprising of 4.33 Households with the reported population of 21.60 lakh [24] across Delhi. Thereafter, six highly dense slum clusters (Density of the slum/ No. of slum areas) were identified. These six slum clusters included Mangol Puri, Kathaputali Colony, Zakhira, Nangloi, Peeragahri and Tigri from where survey of 600 households was conducted.

A convenient sampling approach was adopted to verify the hypotheses. A paper-and-pencil questionnaire survey was administered among slum area respondents. The time of data collection was chosen carefully. The sample is composed of 600 respondents, coming from six different regions of Delhi. The sample comprised of 286 (47.7%) of female and 314 (52.3%) male respondents with equal across different slim areas. Within the age group of 25- 44 years about 83 % of the respondents are covered and on extreme ends i.e. below 24 years and above 55 years, only 5.2% and 4% respondents are included. (Table 2)

Table 2: Demographic profile of the respondents across different slum areas

Demographics	Categories	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	314	52.3
	Female	286	47.7
Slum Area	Mangol Puri	100	16.7
	Kathaputali Colony	100	16.7
	Zakhira	100	16.7
	Nangloi	100	16.7
	Peeragahri	100	16.7
	Tigri	100	16.7
Age (Transformed to Categorical variable)	Below 24	31	5.2
	25-34	255	42.5
	35-44	243	40.5
	45-54	47	7.8
	55 And Above	24	4.0
Year of Schooling	No Schooling	6	1.0
	Below 4 Years	159	26.5
	Below 8 Years	218	36.3
	Below 12 Years	217	36.2
	12 Years And Above	0	0
Household Income	Below Rs. 2000	6	1.0
	Rs. 2001-Rs.4000	156	26.0
	Rs. 4001-Rs6000	208	34.7
	Rs.6001-Rs8000	230	38.3
Marital Status	Married	588	98.0
	Unmarried	12	2.0
Family members	0-2	72	12.0
	3-5	411	68.5
	5 above	117	19.5
Ration card	No Ration Card	221	36.8
	Yellow Ration Card	229	38.2
	Red Ration Card	150	25.0

VI. ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

Data collected were analyzed through a series of validated tools and procedures. The critical step involved factor analysis of the collected data followed by the assessment of the reliability of constructs. Thereafter, validity (Construct and Discriminant) of measurement scale was assessed by using SPSS v 21. The results and findings of the analysis can be described in the following sub-sections.

6.1 EFA for Redefined Marketing- Mix of Core Food Items

EFA using Principal Component Analysis with Varimax rotation was performed to see if the observed variables loaded together as expected and meet criteria of reliability and validity. KMO measure of sampling adequacy was 0.854 and Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant (Sig. < 0.05) (Table 3). Thus the, significant result indicates the variables do relate to one another enough to run a meaningful EFA. Therefore, twenty-two items of marketing-mix can be classified into four factors in case of the core food items.

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's test for marketing- mix of core food items

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		.854
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	17432.268
	Df	210
	Sig.	.000

It was found that all the items have communalities greater than 0.40, whereby the lowest communality is for PRC1. Further, four factors were extracted (Scree Plot) and explained 83.218 % of the total variance. The same can be depicted by scree plot having a kink at fourth factor (Figure 2).

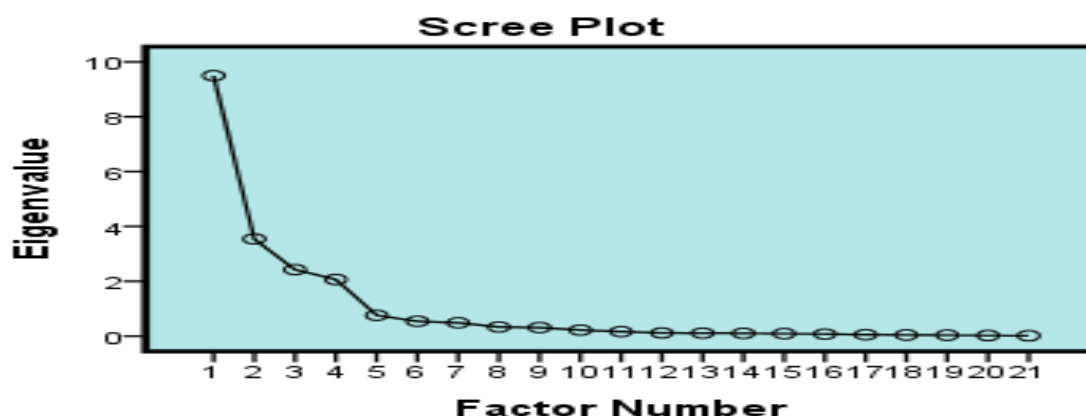


Figure 2: Scree plot showing extraction of four factors for core food items

6.2 Factor Structure

Factor structure refers to the intercorrelations among the variables being considered in the EFA. The pattern matrix below illustrates that variables grouped into four factors. The items having low communalities, low factor loading and substantial cross loading were deleted to retain item forming highly correlated four constructs. Table 4 represents factor structure having convergent and discriminant validity, evident by the high loadings within factors and no major cross-loadings between factors.

Table 4: Rotated component matrix for core food items

Codes	Place Loyal	Core product	Price Sensitive	Social sources	Items
PLC1	.862				Nearness of the shop/Less Travelling
PLC2	.932				Credit Facility
PLC3	.935				Courteous Treatment
PLC4	.749				Standard price and quality
PLC5	.930				Product Knowledge of shopkeeper
PLC6	.810				Trust/ Familiar local Shopkeeper
PLC7	.858				Wider Choice

PLC8N	.914				No Easy Return Policy of the shopkeeper
PRD4		.704			Freshness of food items
PRD5		.733			Availability in Small quantity/ Sachets
PRD7		.892			Accurate measurement of quantity
PRD8		.929			Packaging
PRD9		.919			Food label/ Safety Mark
PRC2			.860		Price charged less than List price
PRC3			.934		Price per unit charged when bought product in small quantity
PRC4			.909		Discount offered
PRC5			.817		Availability of product on credit
PRM3				.766	Family/friends
PRM4				.858	Groups
PRM11N				.763	No Internet
PRM14N				.704	No Government

The first factor consists of eight variables and named as ‘Place Loyalty’, the second factor consists of five variables and is named as ‘Reasonably essentials’. The third factor consists of four variables which are named as ‘Price sensitivity’. The fourth factor represents the ‘Social sources’ to reach BOP consumers.

6.3 Convergent Validity

Factors in Table 4, demonstrate sufficient convergent validity, since their corresponding loadings are above the minimum threshold of 0.350 [25]. The factors also demonstrate sufficient discriminant validity, as the correlation matrix shows no correlations above 0.700, and there are no problematic cross-loadings.

6.4 Discriminant Validity

The component transformation matrix for core food products depicts sufficient discriminant validity because the correlations between factors do not exceed 0.7.

6.5 Reliability of the Construct

Cronbach's alpha for all the factor is above 0.7 (Table 5); although, *ceteris paribus*, the value will generally increase for factors with more variables, and decrease for factors with fewer variables. This suggests sufficient reliability of the constructs.

Table 5: Cronbach's alpha for factors generated after EFA

Factors	Mean	Variance	N of items	Cronbach's Alpha
Reasonable	2.846	.685	5	0.941
Price Sensitivity	3.134	1.279	4	0.917
Place Loyalty	4.114	1.118	8	0.970
Social Sources	3.413	0.908	4	0.779

VII. DISCUSSIONS

After performing EFA it was evident that in the context of the core food items the product- mix comprised of five items *Freshness of food items, Availability in Small quantity/ Sachets, Accurate measurement of quantity, Packaging and Food label/ Safety Mark*. These items depict that BOP consumers are not much sensitive towards variety and brand instead they want the basics or core layer of product to reasonably meet their wants. Thus, Product-mix is named as reasonable or essentials. The core food items are purchased in small quantity which corroborates with the existing findings which insist that small packages are more affordable and thereby provides choice to consumers and allow consumers to easily switch product with negligible switching cost. The assertion that the poor care about brands [2] violated in case of the core food items.

Existing studies suggest BOP consumers are price sensitive and their basic concern is to satisfy the physiological need in best possible way. In the case of core food items BOP consumers exhibited a high level of price sensitivity and price mix comprised of four items i.e., Price charged less than List price, Price per unit charged when bought product in small quantity, Discount offered and Availability of product on credit. Thus, the price-mix for core food items is named as Price sensitivity index. This finding corroborates with the existing

findings done in the field of BOP. The low-income consumers considers price as dominant factor whilst making a purchase[7]. In respect of the Current study, place manifested to be the most important factor leading to the purchase of the core food items. The place- mix for core food item thus can be redefined to include- Nearness of the shop/Less Travelling, Credit Facility, Courteous Treatment, Standard price and quality, Product Knowledge of shopkeeper, Trust/ Familiar local Shopkeeper, Wider Choice and Not much consideration to easy Return Policy of the shopkeeper. However, the major gap not highlighted in the previous BOP researches are presence of fair market shops or ration shops for procuring core food items. This resulted in less negotiating power in hands of BOP consumers. As a result, the redefined place- mix for core food items is named as Place loyalty aspects.

Firm faces a challenge of lack of adequate communication infrastructure [9]. BOP is a media dark area. For the core food item major sources of information included Family/friends, Groups, absence of Internet usage and No Government sources. This indicates reliance on social sources of information so this media- mix is named as social media- mix.

VIII. CONCLUSION AND RESEARCH IMPLICATIONS

The items having low communalities, low factor loading and substantial cross loading were deleted to retain item forming four constructs which constituted the redefined marketing- mix for core food items. The first factor comprised of eight items and was named as Place Loyalty, the second factor of five variables and named as “Reasonables/ essentials”. The third factor consists of four variables which are named as “Price sensitivity”. Fourth factor represents the “Social sources” to reach BOP consumers. The factors demonstrated sufficient convergent and discriminant validity. The Cronbach's alpha for all the factor was reported to be above 0.7; depicting reliability of the constructs.

The questionnaire framework was really challenging to create it is suggested that, the questions asked to BOP segment should not be too long and time consuming. The BOP consumers are an unknown target for marketers this is why more questions (both complex and personal) might have conducted to clearer results and emphasize some trends. Further, it is suggested to use 3 to 5 point Likert scale, translated questionnaire in local language to enhance understandability. Although the research study is non- contrived but results were observed to get improved when discussion on the other related aspects were encouraged. In spite of precautions, the researcher experienced some problems such as the religion of some respondents that deter them from answering to all the questions. Future researches should forecast such constraints and adopt its questionnaire.

The macro-environmental constraints such as inflation, role of Govt., other environmental factors, are prevalent in India. These constraints could potentially influence purchase decision by BOP consumers. Future studies are expected to be in direction of macroeconomic factors. Another research opportunity lies in furthering the research on the differences in the impact of below and above the line direct marketing activities on consumer purchase. Culture is an integral aspect of consumer buying decision in India, where there is are varied religions and culture, thus it becomes imperative to integrate its influence on application of consumer behaviour theory across various market.

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