

# Evaluating the Influence of Media on Consumer Purchase Decision: An Exploratory Study

Rajeshwari Panigrahi\*

## ABSTRACT

*Consumer psychology research is gaining importance with the dilemma that marketers have, as to what is the ideal way to keep a customer informed about the product and drive competition away. Planning an ideal communication strategy which can simplify the consumer-search process and enhance the brand value of a product by making the product familiar is a challenge in the present circumstances. It's also equally difficult to maintain a competitive edge as any new strategy is easily copied by competitors. Continuous differentiation and communication is the only solution to get identified, resulting in ever increasing communication expenses. Burgeoning growth of adspend by the corporates has instigated the need for examining the influence of media and the potential of various methods of advertising in terms of their influence in consumer "information search" behavior. This study is an attempt to bring forth the influence of all those forms of communication, viz, print and broadcast, digital electronics, displays etc. on consumer psychology.*

## Introduction

The influential role played by the mass media in society results in understanding the psycho social mechanisms through which symbolic communication influences human thought and action is of considerable importance (Bandura, 2001). "Media" in general, refers to various means of communication. For example, television, radio, and the newspaper are different types of media. The term can also be used as a collective noun for the press or news reporting agencies. Advertising, sales promotion and public relations are mass-communication tools available to marketers. As the name suggests, mass communication uses the same message for everyone in an audience. The mass communication tools trade off between the advantages of personal selling which also enables the marketer to tailor a message for each prospect, for the advantage of reaching many people at a lower cost per person (Etzel 1997).

Kotler et.al (2009) defines media as "all those forms of communication consisting of Print media (News Papers and Magazines), Broad Cast Media (Radio and Television), Net Work Media (Telephone Cable and Satellite, Wireless), Electronic media (Audio Tape, Video Tape, Video Disc, CD ROM, Web Page) and Display Media (Bill Boards Sign Board and Posters)". Broad cast media is generally low

involvement media and print is a high involvement media (Batra, Myers, and Aaker 1995; Chauduri and Buck 1995; Krugman 1969). Television in particular produces low personal involvement because the rate of viewing and understanding is out of the viewers' control. In fact, television is a non selective medium that reaches a mass audience, offers sound, light, motion and colour, and has an intrusive power to force itself to viewer (Nylen 1986).

Different kinds of media like television, newspaper, radio, internet etc. play a very important role by influencing the common people. Mass media has the capability to educate people through its audio-visual clippings and advertisements. Newspaper is only for educated people, Television and Radio are for all human folk literate and illiterate, they also have a wide reach.

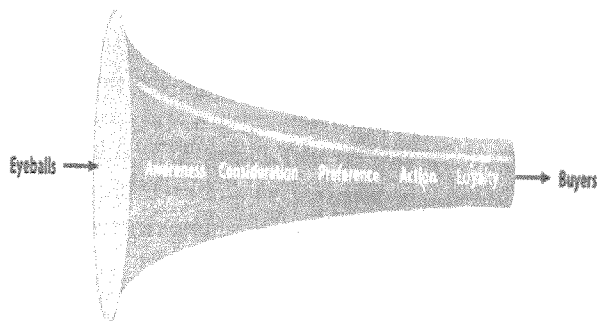
Television is the most popular medium because of its audio-visual input, which acts as a catalyst in instigating learning (Priya & Shibu, 2008). Traditional measures of the effectiveness of marketing communication focus on measuring the achievement of marketers objectives following a specific process by which the marketers take action and make the consumers Respond (Stewart et. al 1983). A study by doubleclick.com presents a new trend that is "the internet as a medium is gaining momentum with

\* Associate Professor in GITAM University, Viskhapatnam, Andhra Pradesh, India.

technology finding an important place in today's world". It plays a vital role in the purchase decisions of virtually all product and service categories. Consumers normally adhere to the information which they get from the internet while they make a search for the product information and details. The importance of the internet is growing at a faster pace and is the most influencing medium in the consumer purchase decisions, increasing at a fast pace and has surpassed TV and print, the erstwhile popular media.

Marketers' intent to reach consumers and influence their purchase decisions is the reason companies look in for a proper display of the products not only in shops but also in the websites which consumers refer to, before making up their mind to purchase a product. Therefore, some websites like amazon.com covet to recommend products to customers logged into the website, having a specific need and are ready to purchase. The consumer decision funnel explains the consumer decision process which says that consumers start with so many options of brands in mind (the wide end of the funnel). Marketing efforts are directed to narrow down the number of choices as they move through the funnel and emerge with only one choice, nevertheless, today the funnel concept fails to ensnare all the touch points and key buying factors resulting out of array of product choices and digital channels, coupled with the emergence of an increasingly discerning, well-informed consumer who navigates the marketer through a way much more complicated than what the funnel addresses. This development exists irrespective of the geographic market consisting of different kinds of media, internet access and wide product choice including emerging markets such as China and India (David Court et.al 2009)

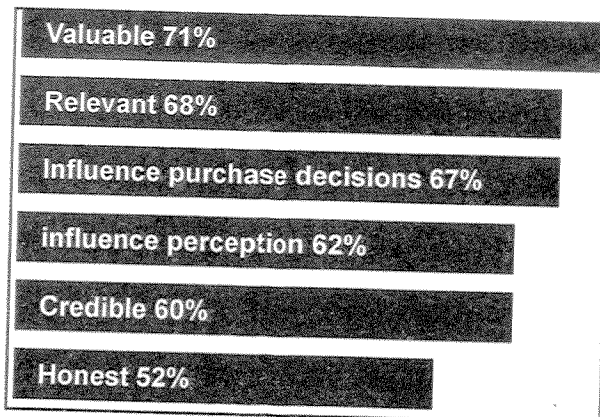
**Purchase Decision Funnel**



Purchase decision funnel shows the steps in consumer decision process and it begins with awareness where media has got a very important role to play. All other steps are to be followed only after awareness is created. Organisations use a mix of media elements so as to create awareness for the product and heighten the need for the consumers to look in for product alternatives and all other steps are to be taken thereafter.

Word of mouth, which used to be more of a direct communication with the users to know product feedback mostly from known source is also taken over by the internet where social networking websites and product review sites have show, their influence.

**Attitudes toward recommendations and information provided by consumers online**



*(WOM Research results 2007)*

Word of mouth (WOM) does not necessarily mean sharing product information with acquaintances, but it can also be between complete strangers connected by the World Wide Web via social networking sites which have opinions from the reviews posted online entailing consumer confidence on the product or brand.

Websites like mouthshut.com, Indiareports.com, consumerdaddy .com etc are the websites which make this possible. In a nutshell, it can be concluded that word of mouth is no longer the direct communication. With the advent of technology the reach of WOM has increased multi-fold. So, a dissatisfied consumer is an increased cause of concern for organisations.

A survey by Dave Senay & Fleishman Hillard

(2010) provides an evidence that internet is at the centre of the consumer decision process today. The study examined several key aspects of consumers like use of the internet, media, consumption patterns, degree of adoption of various digital behaviours and involvement with online social networking. Marketers have to plan strategies which put digital influence at the centre of their marketing effort in order to leap frog competitors. Media is an important source of information for consumers in the wake of competition and ever increasing consumer needs and expectations. Companies are motivated in the present scenario to try out a mix of elements which will enable them to reach the prospective consumers and influence their awareness, attitudes and buying behaviour. Advertising is a huge budget and claims a large chunk of financial resources and aims at keeping individuals and markets informed about the product and possibly create a desire in the consumers mind. To succeed in the objective aiming at such huge ad spend, marketers need to understand what makes potential customers behave the way they do. The advertiser's goal is to get enough relevant market data to develop accurate profiles of the buyers to find the common group for communications this involves the study of consumer behaviour i.e the mental and emotional process and the physical activities of people who purchase and use goods & to satisfy particular needs and wants (Arens, 1996).

A study by Hill & Knowlton (2009) prioritizes the most influential communication channel in technology purchase. When it comes to generating and short-listing the vendors, online media ties with traditional media for technology purchases. Results reveal that word of mouth and industry analyst is second, first being the personal experience when it comes to influencing the vendor short-listing. Various product criteria and channels of communication also influences the technology purchases.

The above quoted studies clearly indicates that the internet has occupied a central position in creating consumer awareness, providing them the required information about the product and also a consumer can know the feedback of the product, which is posted on-line by users. Thus, it's evident that in this era of

technology revolution and the internet plays a very important role in purchase decisions.

**Research Problem-**An in depth analysis of the review brings to light the tendency to use internet as the major marketing communication mode by advertisers in view of its popular usage by consumers. The research question is the validity of using a similar model of marketing communication in India and its acceptance by the consumers which has a relationship with the computer literacy and internet savvy skills of the consumers. The study, therefore, is an attempt to explore through a primary research whether the same situation exists in India as well.

#### Objectives'

1. To study the importance of media in respect of time and attention given by the consumers.
2. To examine the influence of the internet as a medium on consumer purchase decision.
3. To understand the role of gender in facilitation of the internet as a channel of marketing communication.
4. To identify the mode of communication that has a larger influence on consumer decision making.

#### Methodology

The study is totally dependent on primary data collection from the respondents. Mostly the new generation is surveyed because of their exposure to almost all types of media. As the sample comprises youth in the age group of 20-25years, to a total of 130, widely spread across the universe and, therefore, is representative. Data is collected through a structured and pretested questionnaire and suitable statistical tools are used for better understanding and interpretation of the data.

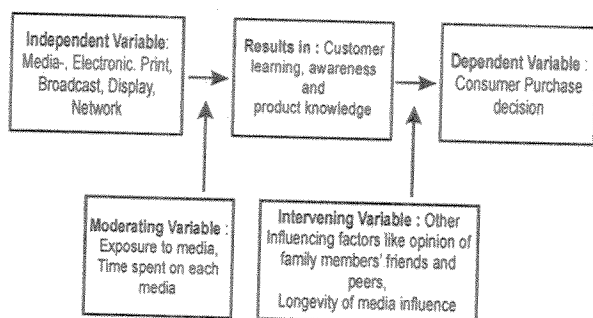
#### Limitations

Constraint of time and resource has limited the study to 130 respondents who are in the age group 20 to 25 years and the outcome of the study is only limited to the opinion across that group which could differ if collected across other generations and groups.

## Evaluating the influence of Media on Consumer Purchase Decision:- An Exploratory Study

### Theoretical Framework

Theoretical framework is the logical sequence of approaching the study and the following independent dependent and moderating variables are identified and an attempt is made to depict the framework for a sequential flow of the study.



### Analysis

Data collectors are left with 130 complete responses comprising 84 (65%) male respondents and 46(35%) female respondents. The questionnaire which is used mainly comprises questions intending to elicit respondents' opinion on influence of media on their purchase decision.

Table 1. Effect of advertisements

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Recall	31	23.8
Positive impression	29	22.31
Interest	45	34.6
Desire to purchase/explore	25	19.23
Total	130	100

From Table 1, respondents' opinion makes it quite evident that 'Ads' are able to generate interest in a product, keeps the product fresh in customers' mind and also creates positive impression which could help in brand building which is always a long term goal of any organization leading to future prospects. Yet as seen in the table response to advertisements does not

lead to purchase decision automatically.

Table 2. Longevity of Ad-impact

Response	No. of respondents	Percentage (%)
Few hrs	48	36.92
One- Day	33	25.38
One -Week	37	28.46
One-Month	66	50.77
More than a Month	6	4.62
Total	130	100

50% of respondents opined that impact of ads lasts for about one month followed by 28% who opined it lasts for week 36% of the respondents also opined that ads just last for few hours. Table-2 shows the clear longevity of ad impact exists within the respondents. An advertisement having such long impact is a positive sign for marketers who spend huge amount expecting positive results which means increasing consumption and brand value but the other dimension also portrays a contradictory view where respondents say that the impact is only for a few hours indicating the existence of two divergent views. The cause of such a contradiction could be the overexposure to ads leading to clutter.

Table 3. Media Attention

Media option	Response	Percentage
Print	30	11
Radio	17	6.64
Television	89	35
Word of Mouth	50	20
Internet	46	17
Cell Phone	24	9
Total	256	100

One of the most important dimensions to be tested in the study is to understand which media

attracts the maximum attention and the amount of time customers are willing to spend on these media (Table 3). For the customer to choose from there were six media options provided viz., television, print, radio, word of mouth, cell phone, internet. Some of the respondents even choose multiple media options which left us with 256 combinations of customer preferences. It's evident from the respondents opinion that out of all other media options television gets maximum attention because of its ability to attract through its video and audio inputs. The 89 (35%) respondents opined that they give maximum attention to television. Followed by 50 (20%) who said they depend a lot on word of mouth to get product information, which shows respondents dependence on personal sources of information, other sources like the internet 46 (17%), print 30 (13%), cell phone and radio 24(9%) has a only 17 (7%) positive responses.

Attention to a particular medium & time spent are the two important dimensions, which play an important role in understanding the dimension of its influence on purchase decisions.

Table 4 (a). Time Spent on each Medium

Media-Options	< 1 hr	1-3 hrs	>3 hrs	Total
T.V	60	50	9	119
Radio	70	5	1	76
Print	80	26	3	109
Internet	13	20	20	53
Cellphone	24	0	0	24

Respondent's opinion on time spent on each medium is the other dimension which is important to understand the influence of each medium on consumer decisions. Table 4 (a) respondents also opined that they devote more time to television viewing than any other medium with 50 respondents opining that they spend about 1 to 3 hrs viewing T.V, followed by 26 respondents who opined to have devoted equal time on print (newspapers & magazines) and internet holds the third position after television and print. It proves that dependence is comparatively low as time spent on this medium is once again noticeably low in comparison with television and radio.

For understanding the exact picture of the time spend weights are given so as to calculate the weighted total time spent weight 3 is given for respondents who spend more than 3 hours, 2 for those who spend between 1-3 hrs and 1 for who those spend less than 1 hour. It's evident from Table 4 (b) that television emerges as an unchallenged leader followed by print and the internet holds a third position and then radio, and cell phone has the least time spent on it as per the respondents opinion.

Table 5 presents respondents opinion on the frequency of watching ads on various media. 48 (36.92%) Respondents out of 130 opined that they always watch television ads followed by 34(26.15%) respondents indicated print ads are being watched. WOM 26(20%), internet 18(13.85%) followed by radio and cell phone with a small number of positive responses' bird's eye view of the data presented in the table shows that TV, print, internet and word of

Table 4 (b). Weighted Total Average Time Spent on each Medium

Media- Options	< 1 hr W=1	W-1	1-3 hrs	Weighted hrs (W=2)	> 3 hr	Weighted hrs W=3	Total weighted hrs
T.V	60	60	50	100	9	27	187
Radio	70	70	5	10	1	3	83
Print	80	80	26	52	3	9	141
Internet	13	13	20	40	20	60	113
Cellphone	24	24	0	0	0	0	24

Table 5. Respondents Opinion on Various Purchase Influencing Factors (Values in the Bracket indicate percentages)

	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never	Total
Print	34(26.15)	31(23.85)	41(31.54)	18(13.85)	6(4.62)	130
Radio	16(12.3)	14(10.77)	43(33.08)	40(30.77)	17(13.07)	130
Television	48(36.92)	44(33.85)	34(26.15)	4(3.07)	0(0)	130
Word of mouth	26(20)	44(33.85)	42(32.31)	16(12.31)	2(1.5)	130
Internet	18(13.85)	40(30.77)	5(3.85)	23(17.69)	44(33.85)	130
Cell phone	6(4.62)	17(13.08)	0(0)	2(1.5)	44(33.85)	130
Effect of advertisements leading to purchase decision	13(10)	30(13.08)	67(51.54)	17(13.07)	3(2.30)	130
Respondents making a purchase choice as shown in the ad	17(13.08)	23(17.69)	31(23.85)	32(24.62)	7(5.38)	130
Respondents getting motivated by radio to try a product	6(4.62)	16(12.31)	32(24.62)	37(28.46)	39(30)	130
Capability of hoardings to attract customer attentions	25(19.23)	41(31.54)	51(39.23)	11(8.46)	2(1.5)	130

Note : The above data is in terms of, no. of persons (%).

mouth are the important sources of customer information as indicated by the respondents and considerable amount of time is spent on them. 52% of the respondents believe that it's only sometimes when advertisement is able to influence their purchase decision followed by 23% presuming that it is influencing their purchase decision quite often. It's quite clear from the data that advertisements have the capability of making the product familiar and heighten the need. Thus, it can be inferred that the decision to buy a particular product is influenced by other factors also and not just media, which is further confirmed by the respondents' opinion on purchase of products as shown in the advertisements, 39% of respondents opined that it is only sometimes when they go and buy the product that's shown in advertisements and 25% said they rarely buy the products shown in ads which further confirms that the media at large (all modes of marketing communication) does not really influence a consumers product decision but necessarily creates a demand by instigating a purchase desire.

Reviews of the studies on media influence projects an outcome that internet television and, to some extent, print has an influence on the consumer

behavior by creating need and providing them with product knowledge. The most untouched and unexplored area is hoardings & radio which is picking up with the new channels, "FM" coming up and available on cell phones and consumers happen to use especially on move. This study also delves into the influence of this unexplored medium on consumer decisions. It's clear from the response that hoardings are not unnoticed with 31.54% respondents opining that hoardings often catch their attention and 39% opined its only sometimes that hoardings attract them. It's positive indication for the marketers to use hoarding as a mode of communication.

Despite all developments radio lacks the magnetizing capability as a majority (28%) of the respondents affirm that radio rarely motivates them to make a purchase decision and 25% of the respondents stated that its only sometimes when they get motivated by radio ads.

Television is an unsurpassable leader as opined by both male and female respondents with about 38% male and 72% female respondents opining in favour. Male respondents also opined that they too get influenced by print media and 28% affirmed print as

Table 6. Cross Table Gender and Media Responses

Type of Media	Male	Percentage	Female	Percentage
Print	24	27.58	5	11.62
Radio	06	6.89	02	4.65
Television	33	37.93	31	72.09
Word of mouth	15	17.24	03	6.97
Internet	09	10.34	02	4.65
Cell Phone	00	00	00	00
Total	87	100	43	100

their choice. Responses show that in case of female only television is the unchallenged option.

Gender influences on attention to media is tested by adopting hypotheses which is tested by using a t-test based on the data given in Table 6. The hypothesis has been framed to identify if there is any variation

H0: (Null hypothesis)-There is no significant difference between gender on attention to media

T value = 0.31482

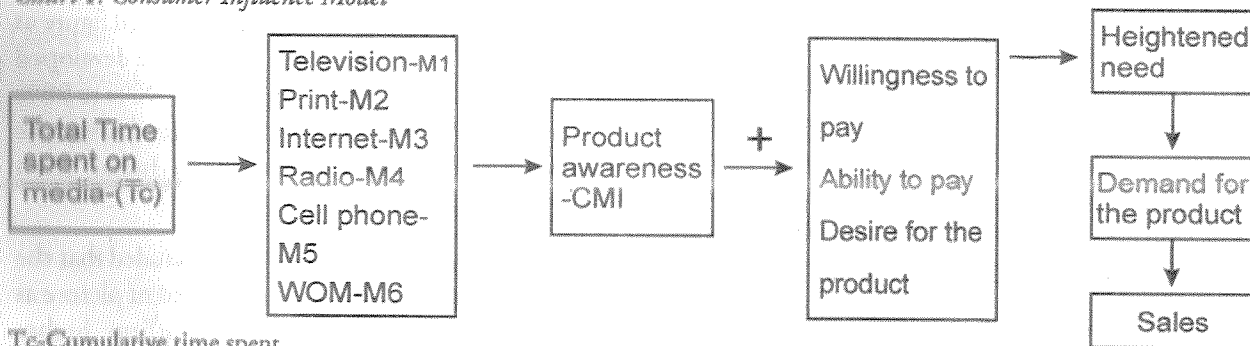
The resultant critical t value at 0.5 level of significance is 2.015. As the calculated value is less than the critical value, the null hypothesis is accepted. Result of the t-test shows that the difference between gender in regard to attention given to media is not significant which means that both male and female give equal attention to media. Thus, Media Specially television and print hold an important position in the decision making process of the consumers by making the product known to the consumers and creating a

desire for the product. Media also plays an important role in brand building of a product as perceived by the consumers.

**Key findings**

1. The study reveals that respondents don't necessarily purchase a product shown in the advertisement.
2. Advertisement is unable lead to a consumer decision but repeated communication can heighten a consumer desire to purchase a product and helps in the search process of the consumer decision.
3. Television is the most influencing Media followed by print and Internet
4. Advertisements last long in the consumer memory.
5. Hoardings too get noticed but place of hoarding makes all the difference

Chart 1. Consumer Influence Model



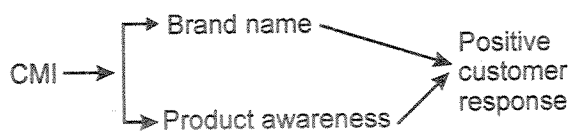
Tc-Cumulative time spent  
CMI-Cumulative media influence

6. Radio advertisements are mostly unnoticed
7. The difference between gender and attention to media is insignificant.

**Consumer influence model** (Chart 1) shows the process of demand creation by communication. Communication process starts with the time spent on media i.e. television, print, internet, radio, cell phone, WOM (word of mouth) and the ultimate influence of media depends on the time the respondent spends or gets exposed to each of them. Exposure to media results in product awareness which gets converted into a heightened need if the consumer has a desire for the product, willingness to pay and ability to pay. This heightened need over a period of time gets converted into demand which results in increase of sales volume. The outcome of the study is simplified and presented in the Consumer influence Model which depicts the cumulative effect of media on consumer purchase decision in which 'M' denotes Media, television is (M1), Print (M2), Internet (M3), Radio (M4), Cell Phone (M5), WOM (M6). Time is denoted by T.

$$CMI = M1 \times T + M2 \times T + M3 \times T + M4 \times T + M5 \times T + M6 \times T$$

CMI-Cumulative Media Influence



(CMI) Cumulative media influence results in building brand name and product awareness which can lead to positive customer response. The positive customer response is a sign of increased sales for the Marketer.

**Discussion**

A majority of the studies fortify that the internet plays a primary role in consumer purchase decision but this study refutes those findings. In the Indian context this study proves that respondents still continue to hold forth television as the most sought after medium. This is quite different from the earlier quoted findings.

The study is mainly confined to the respondents in the age group 20-25 and residing in urban areas the

reason being that, this group is very much prone to technology and ought to be using internet in their day-to-day life. Despite having an access the results of this study reveals that Indians still depend a lot on television information, unlike other countries. This typical situation may be due to the environment and culture in India which is yet to root out television which has been embedded in the Indian system for a long time and would take some more time to be replaced by the internet.

The study reveals that this situation is pertaining to urban areas and consumers who have access to technology. So, other parts of the country (rural and semi-urban) would give a still cloudy picture. The probable reason could be inaccessibility to the internet and illiteracy (Literacy has traditionally been described as the ability to read and write) and also computer literacy which is a very important dimension which would popularize internet usage in any country. In comparison to other developed countries, for the internet to catch up, India has to develop its literacy and penetration of internet to every corner of the country which would take a long time with the present statistics.

As per the statistics available in the year 2010, only 8, 10, 00,000 Indians which is 6.9% of the total estimated population (1,173,108,018) have access to the internet (India internet Usage stats and telecommunications Market Report), whereas the internet penetration in Europe is 58%, North America 77%, Oceania/Australia is 61%, Asia 21% & the world average is 29%. Data clearly presents that internet penetration in India is much lower as compared to other countries

As per the latest available reports, the literacy rate in India in 2007 is 68% which is a dismal figure as compared to other countries. Most of the developed countries have literacy rate ranging from 90% to 98% including China (98.9%) and Srilanka (90%) the world average is 88% (Literacy in India, from Wikipedia, and the free encyclopedia).

Thus, in a nutshell, it can be concluded that the influence of media in India shows a different picture as compared to other studies, which affirm higher influence of internet. The present study proves that in



India, television still continues to lead in terms of attracting, motivating, and influencing consumers. The current study is based on a small sample of 130 persons in the age group of 20-25 years. The findings of the study, therefore, may not hold good if applied to a general situation. The study, if extended to other demographic variables may gain inputs leading to its generalization and result in wider applicability.

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