

## **Retailers' Vs Customers' views on usage of Sales Promotion as Communication tool**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*The objective of this research paper is to understand the Communication mix strategies adopted by organized retail sector specially related with sales promotion as a communication tool, and to identify and analyze communication gap between the views of retailer and customer regarding the usage of sales promotion techniques as communication tool. From a marketing perspective, sales promotion is one component of promotion. Sales promotions are non-personal promotional efforts that are designed to have an immediate impact on sales. Sales promotion describes promotional methods using special short-term techniques to persuade members of a target market to respond or undertake certain activity. As a reward, marketers offer something of value to those responding generally in the form of lower cost of ownership for a purchased product (e.g., lower purchase price, money back) or the inclusion of additional value-added material (e.g., something more for the same price). For this study researcher consider sales promotion techniques are Price Off, Coupons, Samples, Extra Product, Free Product, Contest, and Product Bundling. While deciding the sample size of retailers, researcher used disproportionate stratified sampling techniques. The actual survey was conducted amongst store managers of supermarkets, department stores and hypermarket in Pune and PCMC area. Along-with, the primary data was collected amongst customers also. Total 63 store managers and 200 customers were covered for this study. Researcher found out that organized retailers commonly used Price off (92%), Extra Product (70%), Free Products (89%) and Product Bundling (80%) to communicate with the customers. In this study, researcher also found out positive & negative communication gap between the views of retailer and customer.*

**Keywords:** Retail sales promotion, Retail Communication Mix, Retail Communication Gap.

### **INTRODUCTION:**

Retailing - The word retail is derived from the French word 'retailier' meaning to cut a piece off or to break bulk. In simple terms, it implies a first-hand transaction with the customer. Retailing involves a direct interface with the customer and the co-ordination of business activities from end to end right from the concept or design stage of a product or offering, to its delivery and post delivery service to the customer. Retailing is evolving into a global, high-tech business. Retailers are using sophisticated communication and information systems to manage their businesses. Sales promotions are non-personal promotional efforts that are designed to have an immediate impact on sales. An activity and or material that acts as a direct support to resellers or salespeople to sell a product or consumers to buy it. Sales promotions are short-term incentives to encourage the purchase or sale of a product or service. Sales promotion describes promotional methods using special short-term techniques to persuade members of a target market to respond or undertake certain activity. As a reward, marketers offer something of value to those responding generally in the form of lower cost of ownership for a purchased product (e.g., lower purchase price, money back) or the inclusion of additional value-added material (e.g., something more for the same price). Sales promotions are often confused with advertising. For instance, a television advertisement mentioning a contest awarding winners with a free trip to a Caribbean island may give the contest the appearance of advertising. While the delivery of the marketer's message through television

media is certainly labelled as advertising, what is contained in the message, namely the contest, is considered a sales promotion. The factors that distinguish between the two promotional approaches are:

1. Whether the promotion involves a short-term value proposition (e.g., the contest is only offered for a limited period of time), and
2. The customer must perform some activity in order to be eligible to receive the value proposition (e.g., customer must enter contest).
3. The inclusion of a timing constraint and an activity requirement are hallmarks of sales promotion.

Usage of sales promotion activities has a direct impact on behavior as it motivates a consumer to buy now rather than in future, enhances value of an offer temporarily till the promotion period, encourages switching, reinforce or reward loyalty etc<sup>104</sup>. Broadly, objectives set for these activities are; i) to generate store traffic, ii) to move excess inventory, iii) to enhance store image and iv) to create a price image (high or low). Traffic building is achieved by special event promotions like Diwali, Rakshabandhan promotions; inventory reduction through end of season sale; creation and building store image through feature advertising and displays and joint promotions and price image by highlighting the discounts. It helps consumer reduce not only financial risk but also psychological and social risk by making consumer confident of his/her purchase, conformation to group norms by shopping at famous stores/brands and possibility of acquiring well known branded apparel during promotions. Promotions may induce non buyers to walk in to the store and loyalty programmes may encourage buying more, more often or upgrading to better quality. Exciting promotions also have tendency to generate positive word of mouth and help consumer feel a smart shopper. Thus not only utilitarian benefits like, saving of money, time or quality upgradation but hedonic benefits like feeling confident, feeling of excitement and entertainment etc.

Sales promotions are used by a wide range of organizations in both the consumer and business markets, though the frequency and spending levels are much greater for consumer products marketers. Sales promotion includes several communications activities that attempt to provide added value or incentives to consumers, wholesalers, retailers, or other organizational customers to stimulate immediate sales<sup>105</sup>. These efforts can attempt to stimulate product interest, trial, or purchase. Examples of devices used in sales promotion include coupons, samples, premiums, point-of-purchase (POP) displays, contests, rebates, and sweepstakes

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE:**

Sales promotion is defined as “a diverse collection of incentive tools, mostly, short-term, designed to stimulate quicker and/or greater purchase of particular products/services by consumers.” (Kotler, 1988 pp. 661). The main purpose of a consumer promotion is to have a direct impact on the purchase behavior of the firm’s customers (Kotler 1988, Blattberg & Neslin 1990).

There have been few empirical or theoretical treatments of how promotions may be classified. One dimension, which has been suggested to classify different promotions, is the price based versus non-price based nature of the promotion (Campbell and Diamond, 1992, Blattberg and Neslin, 1990).

Price based promotions are defined as ‘promotions such as coupons, cents off, refunds and rebates that temporarily reduce the cost of the goods or service’ and non price based promotions are defined as ‘promotions such as giveaways or contests in which value is added to the product at full price’ (Cooke, 1983). A few studies that have compared consumer response to different promotions have followed this classification in differentiating between different types of promotion. Table 1 lists the most commonly used promotions (Blattberg & Neslin 1990, Kotler 1988).

The substantial literature in promotion is composed of several streams of research. The first stream of research focuses on the empirical estimation of promotion effects in terms of a range of outcomes such as sales, market share, purchase acceleration, brand switching, stockpiling (e.g. Guadagni and Little, 1983, Kamakura and Russell, 1989; Neslin, Henderson and Quelch, 1985; Raju, 1992).

The second stream of research examines the impact of price promotions on psychological variables such as consumer’s reference price and brand equity of the promoted product (Shimp and Kavas, 1984, Huff and Alden, 1998, Diamond and Campbell, 1989, Davis, Inman and McAlister, 1992).

Still another stream of research compares consumer response to promotion to price based versus non-price based promotions (e.g. Campbell and Diamond, 1990; Chandon, Wansink and Laurent, 2000; Huff and Alden, 1998).

In the light of the previous review, it is clear that there is a need to study different types of promotions. Also, there is a need to study promotions in different contexts. Most of the literature on promotions has been generated in the context of Western European markets and US and there is a dearth of research on promotions in markets like India. India and China are seen as lucrative markets for the consumer goods and are tipped to be future growth engines for multinationals across the world (Equant, April 2004, The Economist, Feb 19th 2004.) But

before detailed research studies can be done in different contexts with different types of promotions, one must have some knowledge about the promotional trends prevailing in the specific context. This paper is the first study to provide a view of the promotional trends in the Indian market. It is important to note that the Indian market is different from the West in several respects. India, with a population of more than 1 billion consumers and whether the brand had been promoted previously (Kahn and Louie, 1990; Raghbir and Corfman, 1999).

In recent years researchers have attempted to analyze consumer response to different types of promotions such as coupons, rebates, discounts, premiums, sweepstakes and free samples. Several studies have attempted to discriminate consumer responses to price based promotions versus non-price based promotions. Campbell and Diamond (1989) found that price based promotions led to a lower consumer reference price as compared to non-price based promotions such as extra product and premium offers. They also found that price based promotions were more easily noticed by consumers than non-price based promotions and it took a larger non-price based promotion than a price based promotion to make a consumer suspicious of a product. Research on non-price based promotions has also identified a number of hedonic or intangible factors that influence consumer response towards such promotions.

Chandon, Wansink and Laurent (2000) found different types of consumer benefits associated with price based and non-price based promotions. They found that non-price based promotions provided primarily hedonic benefits to consumers (perception of being good or smart shoppers, the feeling of fun and entertainment) while price-based promotions offered primarily utilitarian benefits to consumers (monetary savings, upgradation to higher quality products, reduction of search/decision costs associated with shopping).

In an analysis of sweepstake promotions, Huff and Alden (1998) found that fun and enjoyment of participating in sweepstakes (a non price based promotion) positively affected consumers' attitudes towards sweepstakes. In a comparison of different promotions, Smith and Sinha (2000) found that consumers and a 300 million middle-class, is a rapidly growing consumer market (Appendix 2a). It is one of the six fastest growing economies of the world and fourth in terms of GDP at Purchasing Power Parity. However, as an emerging market, India is different from Western markets in several respects. First, it is at lower stage of economic development as shown by macro economic indicators such as GDP, per capita income. Second, consumer disposable incomes in India are much lower than that of consumers in developed countries (Appendix 2b; Lysonski, Durvasula & Zotos, 1996; Dawar & Chattopadhyay, 2000).

### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES:**

1. To understand the Communication mix strategies adopted by organized retail sector specially related with sales promotion as a communication tool.
2. To identify and analyze communication gap between the views of retailer and customer regarding the usage of sales promotion as communication tool.

### **RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS:**

1. There is a gap between the views of retailer and customer regarding the usage of sales promotion as communication tools.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

The secondary data was compiled through various magazines and journals like journal of retailing, retailers and others. Various websites were also referred. Structured questionnaires were developed and pilot survey was carried out. The questionnaires were then suitably modified and the primary data on various aspects of sales promotion was collected. The actual survey was conducted amongst store managers of supermarkets, department stores and hypermarket in Pune and PCMC area. Along-with, the primary data was collected amongst customers. Total 63 store managers and 200 customers were covered for this study.

While deciding the sample size of retailers, researcher used disproportionate stratified sampling techniques. The retailers' questionnaire was mainly focused on types of retailer (Supermarket, Department store & Hypermarket), objective of retail firm, usage of sales promotion tools of communication. Collection of primary data by interviewing with retailers which includes,

**Supermarket:** Reliance Fresh, More, Spencer's.

**Hypermarket:** Big Bazaar, Pune Central

**Department Store:** Reliance Mart, Shoppers' Stop, Westside, K.K. Bazaar, Vishal Mega Mart, Fabindia.

**RESULT & DISCUSSION:**

The basic Sales Promotion tools used by the retailers in India are Price Off, Coupons, Samples, Extra Product, Free Product, Contest, and Product Bundling. The detail study was carried out by the researcher concerning the various techniques of sales promotion and the explanation is as follows, Table 1

**Table 1: Usage of sales promotion techniques by retailer**

Sales Promotion Schemes	4	5	Total
	(%)	(%)	
Price off	46	46	<b>92</b>
Coupons	32	19	<b>51</b>
Samples	21	13	<b>34</b>
Extra product	49	21	<b>70</b>
Free product	59	30	<b>89</b>
Contest	21	15	<b>36</b>
Product Bundling	48	32	<b>80</b>

The table shows that all retailers commonly used Price off (92%), Extra Product (70%), Free Products (89%) and Product Bundling (80%) to communicate with the customers.

Researcher has conducted the survey of three types of retailer which include Supermarkets, Departmental Stores and Hypermarkets. The priority wise utilization of sales promotion schemes by these types of retailers is as follows, Table 2

**Table 2: Priority wise Usage of sales promotion schemes by retailers**

Priority	Supermarket	% usage of retailer	Departmental Store	% usage of retailer	Hypermarket	% usage of retailer
1	Price off	<b>97</b>	Free Product	<b>96</b>	Contest/Sweepstake	<b>100</b>
2	Product Bundling	<b>90</b>	Price off	<b>92</b>	Product Bundling, Free Product, Extra Product	<b>89</b>
3	Free Product	<b>83</b>	Product Bundling	<b>62</b>	Price off	<b>78</b>
4	Extra Product	<b>67</b>	Extra Product	<b>57</b>	Coupons	<b>44</b>
5	Coupons	<b>50</b>	Coupons	<b>55</b>	Samples	<b>33</b>

From the analysis, table researcher found that the priority wise usage of sales promotion schemes by supermarkets, departmental stores and hypermarkets is as follows,

Supermarkets give priority to price off (97%), product bundling (90%), free product (83%); while departmental stores give priority to free product (96%), price off (92%), product bundling (62%); and hypermarkets give priority contest/sweepstakes (100%), Product Bundling & Free Product & Extra Product (89%) and price off (78%).

**Hypothesis:** There is a gap between the views of retailer and customer regarding the usage of sales promotion as communication tools.

**H0:** There is a no gap between the views of retailer and customer regarding the usage of sales promotion as communication tools.

**H1:** There is gap between the views of retailer and customer regarding the usage of sales promotion as communication tools.

From this hypothesis; the researcher wants to find out the GAP between communication tools used by the retailer for communicating with the customer and the tools used by the customer for collecting the information about the retailer/ store. In this study researcher consider sales promotion as communication tool. Researcher has used percentage method, ranking by calculating variance method to test this hypothesis. And by using Z-test, researcher found out the communication gap for the population. The detail explanation about the gap between the usage of communication tools by retailer and customers is as follows,

The views of retailers and customers about the relationship between Usage of Sales Promotion and different tools/schemes used under sales promotion

**Table 3: Relationship between usage of Sales Promotion & their Schemes**

Sales Promotion Schemes	Retailer's View				Customer's View			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std.Deviation /Mean	Rank	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std.Deviation /Mean	Rank
Price off	4.34	0.74398	0.171061345	2	4.11	1.105	0.268856	2
Coupons	3.28	1.31282	0.39955565	5	3.49	1.22	0.34957	5
Samples	2.93	1.24269	0.423187468	6	3.72	1.1	0.295699	3
Extra product	3.69	1.08709	0.293935215	4	3.77	1.159	0.307427	4
Free product	4.15	0.70038	0.168413206	1	4.21	0.979	0.232542	1
Contest	2.93	1.35448	0.461256598	7	2.91	1.361	0.467698	7
Product Bundling	4.06	0.82056	0.201934293	3	3.15	1.25	0.396825	6
	1.Free Product, 2.Price off, 3.Product bundling, 4.Extra product				1.Free Product, 2.Price off, 3.Samples, 4.Extra product			

**Retailers' View:**

From the above analysis it is observed that the Sales Promotional Schemes preferred by the Retailers are Free Product, Price off, Product Bundling, Extra Product, Coupons, Samples, and Contest.

**Customers' View:**

From the above analysis it is observed that the Sales Promotional Schemes preferred by the Customers are Free Product, Price off, Samples, Extra Products, Coupons, Product Bundling, and Contest.

Hence, it is clear that free product is Ranked 1 and price off is Ranked 2 by Retailers as well as Customers. The other sales promotional schemes used by the customers for collecting the information about the retailers are samples, extra products & coupons. Hence, alongwith free products and price off, the retailers should also use Samples, Extra products & Coupons as sales promotional schemes.

Communication Gap Analysis for Sales Promotion by Comparison of Retailers' Vs Customers' views on the usage of Sales Promotion Schemes as communication tool.

**Table 4: Comparison of Retailer & Customer about the Usage of Sales Promotion Schemes**

Sales Promotion Schemes	Usage of Retailer's Communication Tools			Customer's information collection tools			Communication GAP
	4 (%)	5 (%)	Total	4 (%)	5 (%)	Total	
Price off	46	46	92	22	51	73	Negative communication gap
Coupons	32	19	51	31	24	55	No communication gap
Samples	21	13	34	36	28	64	Positive communication gap
Extra product	49	21	70	25	36	61	No communication gap
Free product	59	30	89	26	52	78	Negative communication gap
Contest	21	15	36	19	17	36	No communication gap
Product Bundling	48	32	80	20	18	38	Negative communication gap

The researcher found out the GAP between Usage of Sales Promotion as communication tools used by the retailer and the communication tools used by the customers for collecting the information about the retailers.

There is communication gap between Retailer and Customer. There are two type of communication gaps;

1. Positive communication gap: Usage of sales promotion as communication tool by the Retailers for communication with the Customers is LESS than the usage of sales promotion as communication tools by the customers for collecting the information about the retailer.
2. Negative communication gap: Usage of sales promotion as communication tool by the Retailers for communication with the Customers is MORE than the usage of sales promotion as communication tools by the customers for collecting the information about the retailer.

The Sales Promotion tools used by the retailers and customers are Price Off, Coupons, Samples, Extra Product, Free Product, Contest, and Product Bundling.

As can be seen from the table; the retailers commonly use Price off (92%), Extra Product (70%), Free Products (89%) and Product Bundling (80%) to communicate with the customers. While Customers mostly collect information through Free Product (78%), Price off (73%), Samples (64%) & Extra Products (61%). Thus, it can

be inferred that the communication tools used by the retailer are different than those used by the customers and therefore the COMMUNICATION GAP is created, which is explained as, the negative communication gap arises in Product bundling (42%), Price off (19%), Free Products (11%) and Extra Product. The positive communication gap arises in Samples (30%) & Coupons (4%). There is no communication gap arises in Contest/Sweepstakes (0%). It means that the retailers' usage of these sales promotional schemes is far more than the usage by the customers and it infers that there is communication gap in following sales promotional schemes Product bundling (42%), Price off (19%), Free Products (11%) and Extra Product (9%). The researcher also found out whether there is a gap between the views of retailers and customers based on the usage of sales promotion schemes. For this researcher tested whether there are differences between two population proportions.

**Table 5: Z-test analysis regarding the usage of sales promotion schemes**

Sr. no.	Sales Promotion Schemes	Z-test $-1.96 < (z\text{-value}) < +1.96$	Communication GAP
1	Price off as Sales Promotion Scheme: Retailer: 92%, Customer : 73%	4.094	Negative communication gap
2	Coupons as Sales Promotion Scheme: Retailer: 51%, Customer : 55%	-0.5545	No communication gap
3	Samples as Sales Promotion Scheme: Retailer: 34%, Customer : 64%	-4.36	Positive communication gap
4	Extra Products as Sales Promotion Scheme: Retailer: 70%, Customer : 61%	1.338	No communication gap
5	Free Product as Sales Promotion Scheme: Retailer: 89%, Customer : 78%	2.24	Negative communication gap
6	Contest/Sweepstake as Sales Promotion Scheme: Retailer: 36%, Customer : 36%	0	No communication gap
7	Product bundling as Sales Promotion Scheme: Retailer: 80%, Customer : 38%	6.88	Negative communication gap

From the above analysis using Z test, the researcher concludes that there is communication gap between the views of retailers & customers for usage of Sales Promotion Schemes.

1. There is communication gap between Retailers and Customers for usage of Price Off, Samples, Free Products and Product Bundling.
2. There is no communication gap between Retailer and Customer for usage of Coupons, Extra Products, and contest/sweepstake.

**FINDINGS OF RESEARCH:**

1. Researcher found out the organized retailers' usage of sales promotion tools in pune city. It was found that the organized retailers commonly use Price off (92%), Extra Product (70%), Free Products (89%) and Product Bundling (80%) as Sales Promotion tools to communicate with the customers.
2. Researcher also found out the priority wise usage of sales promotion tools by supermarkets, departmental stores and hypermarkets. Supermarkets give priority to price off (97%), product bundling (90%), free product (83%); while departmental stores give priority to free product (96%), price off (92%), product bundling (62%); and hypermarkets give priority to contest/ sweepstakes (100%), product bundling, free product & extra product (89%) and price off (78%).
3. To find out the relationship between usage of sales promotion and different tools/schemes used under sales promotion, researcher use ranking technique by using the ratio of mean and standard deviation and found out that there were matching of Sales Promotional schemes between the retailer and customer which include free product & price off as first priority and second priority respectively. The remaining sales promotional schemes used by the customer for collecting the information about the store are Samples, extra products & coupons.
4. To check whether there is communication gap between Retailer and Customer view on the usage of different schemes of sales promotion, researcher use Z-test. The findings includes that the negative communication gap arises in Product bundling (42%), Price off (19%), Free Products (11%) and Extra

Product. The positive communication gap arises in Samples (30%) & Coupons (4%). There is no communication gap arises in contest/sweepstakes (0%). It means that the retailers' usages of these sales promotional schemes are far more than the usage of customer and it infer that there is communication gap of sales promotional schemes which includes product bundling (42%), price off (19%), free products (11%) and extra product (9%).

5. For Supermarket, there is positive communication gap between retailer and customer in terms of samples and contest/sweepstake as sales promotion schemes. There is negative communication gap between retailer and customer in terms of price off, and product bundling as sales promotion schemes. There is no communication gap between retailer and customer in terms of free products, extra products, and coupons as sales promotion schemes.
6. For Department store, there is positive communication gap between retailer and customer in terms of samples as sales promotion schemes. There is negative communication gap between retailer and customer in terms of price off, free products, and product bundling as sales promotion schemes. There is no communication gap between retailer and customer in terms of extra products, contest/sweepstake and coupons as sales promotion schemes.
7. For Hypermarket, there is positive communication gap between retailer and customer in terms of samples as sales promotion schemes. There is negative communication gap between retailer and customer in terms of extra products, free products, contest/sweepstake and product bundling as sales promotion schemes. There is no communication gap between retailer and customer in terms of price off and coupons as sales promotion schemes.

#### **SUGGESTIONS OF RESEARCH:**

1. Researcher found the relationship between usage of sales promotion and different schemes used under sales promotion. It was found that there were matching of usage of sales promotional schemes between the retailer and customer which include free product & price off as first priority and second priority respectively. The remaining sales promotional schemes used by the customer for collecting the information about the store are samples, extra products & coupons. Hence researcher suggested that, the retailer should also use samples, extra products & coupons as sales promotional schemes along with free product & price off.
2. Researcher found the communication gap between retailer and customer view on the usage of sales promotion schemes, which essentially includes negative communication gap. Because of the negative communication gap, researcher suggests that the retailer's, usage of product bundling should be reduced upto 42%, usage of price off should be reduced upto 19%, usage of free products should be reduced upto 11 % and usage of extra products should be reduced upto 9%.

#### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:**

The study was limited to three types of retail formats (supermarket, department store, hypermarket); thus, generalization of the research results is somewhat limited. Secondly, the study was confined to Pune city only while other urban, rural, and semi urban area was not covered. Third, during the pilot study, researcher found that the marketing managers are very busy and are not available; hence researcher developed a questionnaire which can be effortlessly filled by the store managers who are easily available. Fourth, despite best efforts, researcher could not get all the information due to lack of respondents' interest.

#### **SCOPE FOR FUTURE RESEARCH:**

1. To conduct this study on other types of retail formats other than supermarkets, department stores and hypermarkets.
2. To conduct this study in unorganized retail sector.
3. To conduct this study on all India basis including urban, rural & semi-urban markets.
4. To test the framework on a wider scale before implementation.
5. To repeat this study periodically to measure the impact of retail communication elements.

#### **CONCLUSIONS:**

Promotional research primarily has primarily focused on frequently purchased goods and sales promotional strategies for durable and semi durable product categories have hardly been studied (also Raju, 1995). In the light of results of the present study, where durables and semi durables are among top promoted product

categories, more research is needed in these categories. One reason for increasing importance of sales promotion is attributed to the fact that many product categories in the market are in the mature stage and according to the product life cycle theory, sales promotions are extremely effective in maturity stage of the product in boosting sales (Blattberg & Neslin, 1990; Kotler 1988). The present study does not investigate the reaction of both consumers and retailers to different promotional tools and there is a need for detailed research on each type of promotion both from the consumer as well as retailers perspective. From the analysis it is observed that the sales promotion as communication tools used by the organized retailers in pune city, 90% retailers use sales promotion as communication tool for communicating with the customers. The various sales promotion schemes used by the retailers in pune city are Price off, Coupons, Samples, Extra product, Free product, Contest / Sweepstake and Product Bundling. The Sales Promotion tools used by the retailers and customers are Price Off, Coupons, Samples, Extra Product, Free Product, Contest, and Product Bundling

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