

Millennial Generations' Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence: A Case of Personal Care Products Purchases

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ABSTRACT

The consumer susceptibility varies among individuals in terms of making purchases to enhance self-image and is related to the opinions of others, thus forming normative and informational beliefs about a purchase decisions. Amongst all generation cohorts, the millennial generation cohort is said to be more easily influenced by peers than prior generations. Thus, this paper focus on millennial generation's susceptibility to interpersonal influence while purchasing personal care products. To achieve the objective, responses were collected using a questionnaires through convenience sampling technique from 100 millennial generation respondents (aged 16-34 years) residing and purchasing personal care products in Tricity (India) which includes Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula. The questionnaire comprised of 12 – item Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence (CSII) scale developed by Bearden et al. (1989) to measure the normative and informational beliefs of the millennial generation while purchasing personal care products with response options on a 5 – point Likert scale. After scoring, percentage analysis and T – test was applied. T – test indicated significant difference between males and females but no significant difference between younger and older millennials with regards to interpersonal influence while purchasing personal care products.

Keywords: Millennial generation, CSII, normative influence, informational influence, personal care products.

INTRODUCTION:

Social information plays an important role in consumers' purchase decisions. Generally before making a purchase, consumer tries to seek information from others about the same from various sources of information, specially the reference group. The consumer seeks opinion of others to evaluate their choice decisions. In turn, they make choices different from the ones they would have made in the absence of public scrutiny. Consumers often conform to group norms as they desire to create a favorable impression on others. Sometimes, they modify their judgments in order to be accepted in a group. Moreover, they make purchases keeping in mind what others would think about the purchases made. That is why Psychologists and marketers believe that influence of others, or interpersonal influence or real/imagined presence of others can have a significant influence on an individual's behaviour. The extent to which this social information affects consumers' decisions depends on their susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence (CSII) is a measure of the degree to which a person is influenced by real or imagined others, specifically with regard to his or her consumption choices. In short, it describes the influence of peer group, social norms and social institutions on individual's behaviour. CSII is an important concept in consumer behaviour studies, because "an important determinant of individual's behaviour is other's influence". Although susceptibility to interpersonal influence is regarded as an important variable for the study of consumer behavior, the same is very much seen as an infertile area of research in recent marketing studies.

Consumer Susceptibility to Interpersonal Influence:

The consumers' attitudes, norms, values, aspirations and purchase behavior developments are influenced by interpersonal influence. All individuals are susceptible to interpersonal influence, though susceptibility to interpersonal influence is a consumer trait that varies across individuals. According to Bearden et al. (1989), CSII is defined as "the need to identify with or enhance one's image in the opinion of significant others through the acquisition and use of products and brands, the willingness to conform to the expectations of others regarding purchase decisions, and/or the tendency to learn about products and services by observing others and/or seeking information from others". The construct is multidimensional and consists of normative and informational influences. The normative influence is further subdivided into value – expressive and utilitarian influences. The value – expressive influence may be best explained by the 'identification process' in which people are willing to express themselves to the society by making themselves similar to the group that they want to belong to. Thus, one may actively follow a group's values, attitudes and behaviours while neglecting the praises and punishments. The utilitarian influence is reflected in individual's attempts to comply with the expectations of others in order to obtain approval or avoid disapproval (Bearden et al. 1989). Utilitarian influence is operated through the process of compliance. The compliance occurs when people adopt attitudes and behaviours in order to obtain specific rewards or to avoid specific punishments. The third form of interpersonal influence is called informational influence, refers to people's tendency to accept information from others as credible information about reality (Bearden et al. 1989). People may directly request information from knowledgeable others or may acquire it indirectly by observing the behavior of others. The informational influence operates through the process of internalization, which occurs when people adopt attitudes and behaviours because their content is congruent with individuals' value systems.

Bearden et al (1989) developed a 12 item scale to measure all the three facets of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence. Their analyses however indicated that their measure did not discriminate between the utilitarian and value- expressive dimensions. This led to a two-dimensional scale reflecting consumers' susceptibility to normative influence (8 item), including value – expressive and utilitarian components and susceptibility to informational influence (4 item). Thus, Value Expressive influence and Utilitarian influence is grouped under the broader category of normative influence. Both the dimensions of CSII, normative and informative influences, are associated with consumer behavior. CSII is an important variable for the study of consumer behaviour, but unfortunately it is still a quite a neglected area in the marketing literature.

Millennial Generation and Their Susceptibility To Interpersonal Influence:

The generation cohort marketing is gaining a lot of importance these days in defining of marketing strategies as demographics alone are not enough to describe the target market. Out of the various generation cohorts, i.e. Silent Generation (1925-1943), Baby Boomer Generation (1943-1960), Generation X (1961-1981) and Millennial generation (1982-2000), the millennial generation can be called a most powerful consumer group as their purchasing attitudes and patterns have become an important area of interest due to their potential spending power, their ability to be trendsetters, adoption of new products and potential for becoming a lifetime customers (Martin and Bush, 2000).

Millennial generation is also known as Generation Y, Millennials, Echo Boomers, Why Generation, Net generation, Gen Wired, We Generation, DotNet Generation, Nexters, First Globals, ipod Generation and iY Generation (Ordun, 2015). It is a cohort of people born immediately after generation X (Ying San L et al, 2015) and are the children of the "baby – boomers" generation or 'generation X' (Herbig et al., 1993). While there are many discrepancies and debates on the age range of millennial generation, many studies have accepted this generation to be those born between 1982-2000 (Clipper, 2012), (Howe and Strauss 2000). This generation has been considered as the most consumption oriented generation of all times due to the abundance and availability of products and services (Sullivan & Heitmeyer, 2008). This generation consumers tend to be more diverse than the generations before them, because they have extreme confidence, awareness and individuality (Laermer & Simmons, 2007). Individuals in this age group are in market place in great number and have purchasing power that surpasses that of any other group of consumers (Morton, 2002). Millennials have more money at their disposal than any teen group in the history (Kennedy, 2001) and is the largest group of consumers in any economy (Chaston, 2009). Thus, the generation has the tendency to spend on the products and services, made or produced specifically for young generation like them, be it apparels, shoes, jewellery, beauty products, electronic gadgets, smartphones, automobiles, etc.

Also, Social Influence is an important part of the development of Millennial Generation individuals (Csikszentmihalyi & Larson, 1984). Moreover, this generation cohort is said to be more easily influenced by

peers than prior generations (Howe, Strauss, & Matson, 2000) as this generation spend more time in the company of friends and their colleagues (Berndt, 1999). They have grown up with computers, cell phones, and are largely engaged with social networking. Their use of technology is a distinctive characteristic of their identity. They highly value a friend's tweet or product endorsement (Aquino, 2012) and are even influenced by personalized messages or word of mouth for attaining product information (Smith, 2011). Thus, their chances of being susceptible to interpersonal influence are also even more as compared to other generations. Being such an important potential market segment and a largest consumer group of India, there are no empirical studies that specifically focus on millennial generations' susceptibility to interpersonal influence.

Another distinctive feature of this generation is that this generation is more beauty conscious and much concerned of their physical appearance than other generations. They don't mind spending a major part of their incomes on their personal grooming. They love spending on apparels, footwear, beauty and personal care products, out of which personal care industry is least unexplored in India. The personal care industry is growing at a very fast pace in India. The global personal care industry is at \$470 billion, with India accounting for \$10 billion in sales. Moreover, it is a daily need consumer product category, which is being purchased and consumed by the individuals as a part of their daily routine, especially the young generation. Not only females but also the males today are found to be frequent users of these products. Personal care products include the skin care products, hair care products, oral care products, colour cosmetics, bath and shower products, fragrances and shaving products. This study aims to identify the influence of social information on the personal care product purchases of millennials.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:

The present paper is an attempt to study the millennial generation's susceptibility to interpersonal influence while purchasing personal care products.

HYPOTHESIS OF THE STUDY:

The following null hypotheses are framed for the study:

H1: There is no significant difference between genders with regards to their susceptibility to normative influence.

H2: There is no significant difference between genders with regards to their susceptibility to informational influence.

H3: There is no significant difference between Younger millennials (Aged 16-25 years) and older millennials (Aged 26-34 years) with regards to their susceptibility to normative influence.

H4: There is no significant difference between Younger millennials (Aged 16-25 years) and older millennials (Aged 26-34 years) with regards to their susceptibility to informational influence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

To achieve the objective of the study, an empirical research was carried out on the sample of 100 millennial generation individuals, aged 16-34 years, residing and purchasing personal care products in Tricity (India) which consists of Chandigarh, Mohali and Panchkula. The respondents from Chandigarh – a union territory, Mohali – a city in Punjab, and Panchkula – a city in Haryana, will be able to depict the picture of two major states (Punjab and Haryana) and a union territory of India. As the millennials are the individuals who are born between 1982-2000, the sample for the study ranges from 16-34 years of age as an individual born in 1982 will be 34 years of age (maximum) and will be 16 years of age (minimum) in the years of study, 2016. Due to their broader age range, the study will separately study the susceptibility of younger millennials (age 16-25) and older millennials (age 26-34) to interpersonal influence while purchasing personal care products. Here, the younger millennials are college and university students whereas older millennials will comprise of working professionals.

The data required for the analysis has been acquired through the distribution of questionnaire using convenience sampling technique. The questionnaire comprises of a 12 item CSII scale developed by Bearden et al. (1989, used to measure normative (8 – items) and Informational (4 – items) beliefs of purchasing. The scale determines the degree to which a person expresses the desire to conform to others' expectations with regards to purchase decisions. The current study is using 12 item measures with response options on a 5 – point likert – type scale. (1=strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree). The questionnaire comprises of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire comprises of personal profile of the respondents and the second part of the questionnaire aims to

achieve their responses on CSII scale.

The CSII scale is given as under:

	Item Number	Statement
Normative Items	5	I rarely purchase the latest fashion styles until I am sure my friends approve of them
	3	It is important for me that others like the products and brands I buy
	8	When buying products I generally purchase those brands that I think others will approve it.
	11	If other people can see me using a product, I often purchase the brand that they expect me to buy.
	9	I like to know what brands and products make good impression on others.
	12	I achieve a sense of belonging by purchasing the same products and brand that other purchase
	2	If I want to be like someone, I often try to buy the same brands that they buy
	6	I often indentify with other people by purchasing the same products and brands that they purchase.
	Item Number	Statements
Informational Items	4	To make sure I buy the right product or brand, I often observe what others are buying and using
	7	If I have little experience with the product, I often ask my friends about the product
	1	I often consult other people to help choose the best alternative available from a product class.
	10	I frequently gather information from friends or family about a product before I buy.

RELIABILITY TEST:

Pallant (2010) suggested that 0.7 would be considered as the ideal alpha value while expressing the reliability of the scale items. From table 3 it can be observed that the cronbach alpha co-efficient for scale of susceptibility to interpersonal influence is .853, which is above the ideal accepted value.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics of scale items:

Cronbach's Alpha	N of items
.853	12

DATA ANALYSIS AND RESULTS:

Table 2: Frequency Analysis of different demographic components in percentage:

DEMOGRAPHICS		%
Gender	Male	37
	Female	63
AGE	16-25 years (younger millennials)	55
	26-34 years (older millennials)	45

From table 2, it can be seen that among 100 respondents 37% are males and 63% are females. Out of the total millennials, 55% are between 16-25 years of age i.e. Younger Millennials (university/college students) whereas 45% are between 26-34 years of age i.e. Older Millennials (working professionals).

Table 3: T – test showing mean difference in males and females score on interpersonal susceptibility

Factor	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Normative influence	Male	37	3.1182	0.75573	0.001	0.005
	Female	63	2.6250	0.66901		
Informational influence	Male	37	3.4189	0.72422	0.134	0.005
	Female	63	3.2302	0.52036		

Source: This study

P value is significant at 0.05

In the above table 2, t- test was conducted to find out mean difference in males and females score on interpersonal susceptibility. It can be seen that there is significant difference between male and female millennials as regards normative influence ($p = 0.001$, $p < 0.005$) while purchasing personal care products. However no significant difference has been found between male and female millennials as regards informational influence ($p = 0.134$, $p > 0.05$). Therefore, the null hypothesis H1 (There is no significant difference between genders with regards to their susceptibility to normative influence) stands rejected and the null hypothesis H2 (There is no significant difference between genders with regards to their susceptibility to informational influence) stands accepted.

Table 4: T – test showing mean difference in younger millennials (aged 16-25 years) and older millennials (aged 26-34 years) score on interpersonal susceptibility

Factor	Age	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-value	p-value
Normative influence	Younger Millennials	55	2.93	0.742	0.272	0.005
	Older millennials	45	2.89	0.647		
Informational influence	Younger Millennials	55	2.73	0.756	0.154	0.005
	Older millennials	45	2.56	0.655		

Source: This study

P value is significant at 0.05

Table 4 displays the results of the T – test conducted to find out the mean difference in younger and older millennials score on interpersonal susceptibility. The results show that both the age group of millennials is equally susceptible to interpersonal influence when making personal care product purchases. Thus, the hypothesis H3 (There is no significant difference between Younger millennials (Aged 16-25 years) and older millennials (Aged 26-34 years) with regards to their susceptibility to normative influence) and H4 (There is no significant difference between Younger millennials (Aged 16-25 years) and older millennials (Aged 26-34 years) with regards to their susceptibility to informational influence) also stands accepted.

CONCLUSION, LIMITATION AND SUGGESTIONS:

The millennial generation purchase decisions are often influenced interpersonally. Subsequently, the present study examined this very important generations' susceptibility to interpersonal influence while purchasing personal care products residing and purchasing such products in Tricity, India. The study contributed in many ways. Firstly, it was found that peer group has a significant influence on the millenia generations' purchase of personal care products. Secondly, it provides clear understanding of this cohorts' susceptibility to interpersonal influence as regards gender and age. The study concludes significant difference between genders with regards to their susceptibility to normative influence but no difference in the opinion of the genders as regards informational influence. The results of the study are similar to the study conducted by Marclin, W and Hoor Tung D. (2010)ⁱ. The study also concluded no difference in the opinion of the younger and older millennials with regards to their susceptibility to both normative and informational influence. These results are similar to the study conducted by Chakraborty, S. (2016)ⁱⁱ.

The major limitation of the research is that the study is focusing only on a single generation's susceptibility to

interpersonal influence and is covering a limited geographical area. Thus, the study can be conducted in the future making a comparative analysis of different generation or any two generation to have a more clear idea regarding the impact of interpersonal influence while they make purchases. However, the outcomes of the study have important marketing implications for retailers and marketers involved in designing and implementing marketing strategies.

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