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Influential Aspect of Reference Group on Mobile Phone Customers in Rural Haryana

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Abstract - The purpose of the paper is to find out the Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers in rural Haryana. Methodology adopted will be a structured questionnaire was used to collect the respondent response. The data was collected through convenience sampling method from 769 respondents of rural Haryana. Statistical tool like factor analysis, t-test etc. were used to analyze the behavior of the respondents. The results of the study are showing that consumers' demographics age, gender, income, education, occupation does not significantly differentiate reference group influence on purchasing decision of mobile phone customers. The study is explaining that reference groups have similar kind of influence on buying decisions of consumers' irrespective of the demographics of the respondents. The results depicts that purchasing decisions of mobile phones have been moderately influenced by the reference group influence. So marketers should focus on these reference groups to improve their market share.

Keywords- *Reference group, Influence, Consumer decision making.*

I. Introduction

The group can be defined as interaction of two or more people to achieve their individual or mutual goals. Reference group is a group or individual whose behavior or opinions affect the purchasing decision of others. Purchasing decision of an individual is influenced by both types of reference groups either formal or informal. In a group individual influence depend upon the extent of the power they possess in the society (Solomon, 2010).

The word reference group was first time used by Hyman (1942) when he was collecting the information from the respondents for the comparison of individual and groups. With passage of time the term broadened and the research meaning of reference group include not only the individual or group whom an individual have direct contact but also include the group that an individual does not have direct contact with or does not have a membership (Hawkins et al., 1997). The seven influence factors have been found by Witt and Bruce (1972) namely perceived conspicuousness, nature of the

product, perceived risk, individuals need for social approval, attractiveness of the purchaser's reference group, anticipated satisfaction, and experience of the reference.

According to marketing definition of reference group means the group which affects the purchasing decision of an individual. The meaning of reference group has broadened with the passage of time. In earlier stage the term reference group was associated with only those groups which have direct interaction with the individual but with the passage of time the concept gradually has broadened and the term including the both direct and indirect groups (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007).

The term reference group is associated with an actual or imaginary group which have direct influence upon an individual's purchasing decision. Either an individual is a member of group or not a member of that particular group, but want to become member of that group, he or she will consider the group behaviour when forming attitudes, beliefs and behaviour aspects (Lessig and Park, 1977).

Moutinho (1987) considered that that any individual or group whether it is real or imaginary is a source of reference for the customers can be termed as reference group. The reference has influence on the individual's beliefs, attitudes and choices. The family is to be considered as the most powerful reference group for an individual's as it creates values, expectation and attitude. The reference groups include family, peers, work colleagues, friends, religious and ethnic groups, formal social and leisure groups, trade unions, neighbours, teachers, and celebrity (Moutinho, 1987; Childers and Rao, 1992; Khan and Khan, 2005).

Reference group consider all the groups that have a face-to-face or indirect influence on an individual's attitudes or behaviour (Kotler, 2003). Escalas and Bettman (2003) defined reference groups as social groups that helps a consumer to compares himself or herself with others and in forming attitudes ,beliefs and attitudes.

Schiffman and Kanuk (2004) find out that a reference group is a group or individual which helps to an individual in forming either general or specific values, attitudes, or behaviour or attitudes. From a marketing point of view, reference groups mean the group that helps individuals in their purchase decisions.

Cowan et al. (1997) categorised three types of reference groups on the basis consumers' point of view – peer group, contrast group and inspirational group. Blackwell et al.(2001) considered eight types of reference groups, including: primary, secondary, formal, informal, membership, inspirational, dissociative and virtual groups.

Reference groups can be termed as normative and comparative reference group. Normative group include parents, peers, teachers and co workers who provide us the values, ethics and attitudes or whom we have direct interaction (Bristol and Mangleburg, 2005). Comparative group include sports hero and entertainment celebrity whom we don't have direct interaction but try to compare our self with them and they motivate to the customers in different ways (Martin, 2000).

II. Literature Review

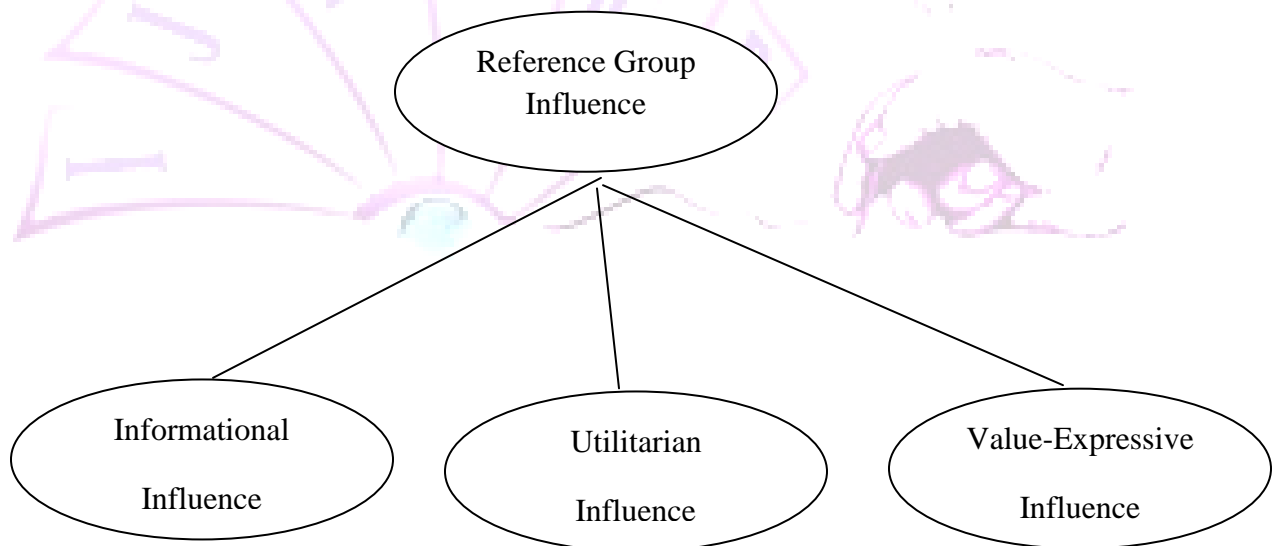
Kelman (1961) in his study found that the reference group influence is more in case an individual is getting information regarding their surroundings. Reference group influence plays an important role and is more sensitive in case when the individual regard the behavior and value of the reference group members. When the consumers don't have information regarding the products then the credibility of the reference group is high.

Roselius (1971) found that sometime consumers confused regarding the purchase decision of the product, at that time customers hesitate to buy because he/she does not have the information regarding the products and they fear about the risk of suffering some type of loss. In such type of situation reference group plays an important role and customer relies more on the information provided by the group to take their decision.

Moschis (1976) found that the purchasing decision of the consumers not only influenced by new technology, the relative price, phone design etc. but the decision of the consumers also influenced by the reference group information for purchasing a specific brand or model of the product.

Park and Lessig (1977) found that reference group influence is high on American students in comparison to the American housewives while taking the purchasing decision regarding various products. The promotional and advertising group have direct influence on purchasing decision of the consumers. The study revealed that there are three dimension of reference group namely informational, utilitarian, and value-expressive. In case of uncertainty informational influenced is considered as the customers tried to find out the information regarding the product from the reference group. Utilitarian influence is used by an individual seeking to gain rewards or avoid punishment by complying with the expectations of others. Value-expressive influence is considered when individuals require a psychological association with a group or person.

Figure 1: Dimension of reference group influence



Bearden and Etzel (1982) research study revealed that the purchase decision of customers in case of mobile phone purchasing is influenced by the reference group. Customer's decision making process is influenced by social system (Ratner and Khan, 2002).

Bearden and Etzel (1982) study found that the consumers' observe reference group behavior to take a purchase decision and an individual brand choice is depend upon reference group choice. In case of products which are used for luxury purpose reference has more influence in case of such products.

Moutinho (1987) study revealed that during travel decisions of traveller reference group influence is more significant. The culture and reference group are the most important aspects in case of a traveller travelling decision. The products and services which are used by the reference group is also considered by an individual.

Bearden et al. (1989) observed that influence of reference group varies from person to person. The spokespeople are the main medium to get important information regarding products and services. The demand of an individual for a product or services is also influenced by the demand of the other consumer due to reference group influence (Becker, 1991).

Wong and Ahuvia (1998) study found that in of luxury product which was used to show social status and Wealth reference group have significant consideration especially in East Asian countries.

Mehta et al. (2001) study observed that the informational influence is a powerful tool in case of services which affects the purchase decision of the consumers. Service marketers should focus on the informational reference group influence. The one form of informational reference group is word of mouth. The study revealed that most of buying decision in case of services is taken by someone direct recommendation. Utilitarian influence has strong effect in case of luxury services and the services whose results are highly socially visible. The influence of value expressive reference was found high in case of publicly consumed services.

Escals and Bettman (2003) found that consumers are motivated by self need and reference group influence plays an important role to purchase a specific brand. The consumers are value expressive and they purchase the brand which image match with their reference group image (Escals and Bettman, 2005).

Kumar (2004) observed that some of the hottest issue such as mobile phone industry and its trend in 21st century, mobile market and m-commerce is used by an individual on the recommendation of reference group. In this study the researcher has made a comparison between US mobile market with European and Asian markets considering the different aspect such as characteristic of handsets, protocols and airtime carriers etc.

Yang et al. (2007) found that reference group has strong effect on consumers purchasing decision. The study reveals that the effect of reference group influence is more on Chinese consumers in comparison to American customers especially in case of mobile phone purchasing behavior.

Mackgosa and Mohube (2007) research found that peers have the strongest influence on purchasing decision of young adults and it varies from product to product. Informative and normative influence has different influence on the adult in the product selection.

Pentina et al. (2008) found that communities have the influence on purchasing decision of their members. The cognitive identification, affective commitment and positive evaluation increase the influence of community on purchase decision of the consumers. The affective component is most influential component in community which affects the buying behavior of the members.

Lin and Chen (2009) research shows that the influence of different reference group is positive between purchase intentions and repurchase intention of a consumer.

III. Objective:

1. To study the influential aspect of reference group on purchasing decision of mobile phone customers in rural Haryana.
2. To find out the most influential factor which affect the purchase decision
3. To provide suggestions to marketers for their marketing strategies.

IV. Hypothesis of the current study

- H₀1:** There is no significant difference in views of Value Expressive Influence, Utility Influence and Informational Influence between different age groups.
- H₀2:** There is no significant difference in views of Value Expressive Influence, Utility Influence and Informational Influence between different educated groups.
- H₀3:** There is no significant difference in views of Value Expressive Influence, Utility Influence and Informational Influence among various income groups.
- H₀4:** There is no significant difference in views of Value Expressive Influence, Utility Influence and Informational Influence between different respondents on the basis of occupation.
- H₀5:** There is no significant difference in views of Value Expressive Influence, Utility Influence and Informational Influence among male and female.
- H₀6:** There is no significant difference in views Value Expressive Influence, Utility Influence and Informational Influence among married and unmarried groups.

V. Research methodology

Sampling and Data Collection

The data has been collected from four districts of Haryana which were chosen randomly and from these districts two villages are chosen in such a way that the distance of one village is less than 25 km from district headquarter and other one is more than 25km away. From each village more than 100 respondent were selected on the basis of convenience sampling. A total of more than 900 questionnaires were distributed in these villages out of which 769 questionnaire were found fit for the data analysis. While collecting the all type of demographic profiles of the respondent was considered, so that the better results of the study can be find out. The statistical software SPSS was used to examine the nature of the data.

For the purpose of data collection a structured questionnaire was used to collect the primary data. Questionnaire was divided into two parts. First part of the questionnaire measures the influence of reference group on mobile phone purchasing. For this Park and Lessig (1977) scale was used. Second part measures the demographic characteristics of the respondents.

Statistical technique frequency distribution was used to analyze the demographic profile of respondents (Table 1). Total sample size is 769. The table 1 is showing the different demographic profile of the respondents.

Table1: Demographic Profile of the respondents

Demographics		Frequency	Proportion of the sample (%)
Gender	Male	523	68
	Female	246	32
	Total	769	100.0
Marital Status	Married	555	72.2
	Unmarried	214	27.8
	Total	769	100
Age	18-25	307	39.9
	26-35	256	33.3
	36-45	132	17.2
	46-55	74	9.6
	Total	769	100.0
Education	Up To 10th	140	18.2
	12 th	216	28.1
	Graduation	280	36.4
	P.G.	133	17.3
	Total	769	100.0
Income per year	0-50,000 Rs	190	24.7
	50,000-1,00,000 Rs	179	23.0
	1,00,000-1,50,000 Rs	168	21.8
	1,50,000-2,00,000 Rs	60	7.8
	above 2,00,000	172	22.4
	Total	769	100.0
Occupation	Private Services	314	40.8
	Govt. Services	137	17.08
	Business	31	4
	Agriculture	89	11.6
	Student	128	16.6
	Other	70	9.1
	Total	769	100.0

(Source: Primary data)

Statistical Techniques

To check the reliability of the scale statistical technique cronbach's alpha (Schmitt, 1996) was used in present study. Besides these techniques, mean, variance and standard deviation was used at various in the present study. To check the reliability of the scale all the 14 statements of questionnaire were put in alpha test of reliability; the cronbach's alpha result for 14 statements was 0.666 showing that scale is reliable. The sample adequacy was checked with the help of Kaiser Meyer Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy technique with value 0.818.

Table 2: Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers

Variable Number	Factor and Variables	Factor loading
Informational influence (Chronbac α= .674)		
V 7	I will collect cell phone information from those friends, neighbours, relatives, or work associates (such as how Brand A cell phone's performance compares to Brand B)	.705
V 9	The preferences of family members can influence my choice of cell phones	.479
V 5	I seek information from those who work in the cell phone industry	.636
V 13	My choice of cell phone is influenced by other consumers' word of mouth or some evaluation reports from an independent testing agency. (e.g., online cell phone reviews)	.506
V 10	If I see the cell phones' brand or model which are used by cell phone R&D people or cell phone retailers, I may change my mind	.354
Value Expressive influence (Chronbac α= .582)		
V 1	I would search information about various cell phones' brands and models from an association of professionals or independent group of experts	.303
V 8	I feel that it would be nice to act like the type of person which advertisements show using the cell phone of a particular brand or model	.590
V 12	I think that the people who purchase the cell phone of particular brand or model (e.g., palm One Treo 650, Motorola A1000) are sometimes admired or respected by others	.632
V 11	To satisfy the expectations of classmates or fellow work associates, my decision to purchase a cell phone is influenced by their preferences.	.555
V 14	Using the cell phone of a particular brand or model helps me show others who I am, or who I would like to be (such as a successful businessman, a female professional, etc.)	.586
Utilitarian influence (Chronbac α= .569)		
V 6	Other people's recommendation may influence my final decision	.636
V 4	I feel that those who purchase or use the cell phone of a particular brand or model possess the characteristics which I would like to have	.501

Source: Primary data

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Rotation Method: Varimax with Kaiser Normalization

The three factors which were extracted named Informational influence, Utilitarian Function and Value Expressive Function.

Data Analysis and Findings:

The data was analyzed to study the reference group influence on different set of categories of the respondent. The different categories of the respondents creates variation among the respondents, the reason behind that every person have different set of thinking leads to variation in their behavior.

The data was analyzed to study the reference group influence on purchasing decisions on the basis of demographic factors like age, gender, education, income and occupation in case of mobile phone.

Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers

Education and Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers

Table 3: ANOVA test statistics on Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis of Education of the respondent

	Informational influence	Value expressive influence	Utilitarian Influence
F	8.302	4.717	.570
Sig.	.000	.003	.004

Source: Primary data

The above table explains the relationship between the education of the respondents and the three dimension namely informational influences, value expressive influence and utilitarian influence. After analyzing the data it was found that there is significant different in the response of the respondents in case of all the factors. So there is a significance difference in the response of the respondent in all the three dimensions. So it rejects the assumption null hypothesis H_0 .

Table 3 is showing the results that there is significant difference in case of all the three dimensions namely informational influence, value expressive influence and utilitarian influence.

Table 4: Comparison of Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis of Education of the respondents

Education of the Respondent	Informational influence	Value expressive influence	Utilitarian Influence
Up To 10th	3.1043	3.1843	3.1143
12th	3.3583	3.4519	3.2963
Graduation	3.0800	3.4557	3.3643
P.G.	3.1835	3.4571	3.4248
Total	3.2086	3.4055	3.3114

Source: Primary data

Income and Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers

Table 5: ANOVA test statistics on Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis of Income of the respondent

	Informational influence	Value expressive influence	Utilitarian Influence
F	8.005	6.303	4.895
Sig.	.000	.000	.001

Source: Primary data

The above table depicts the response of the respondents on the basis of their income groups. After examine the above table results are showing that there is significant different for the above

mention factors. All the three factors are showing the significant difference on the basis of various income groups. So it rejects the null hypothesis H_03 .

Table 6 is explain the comparison of the three dimensions namely informational influences, value expressive influence and utilitarian influence.

Table 6: Comparison Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis of Income of the respondent

income of the Respondent	Informational influence	Value influence	Expressive	Utilitarian Influence
0-50,000 Rs	3.1232	3.2779		3.2132
50,000-1,00,000 Rs	3.4011	3.5464		3.3575
1,00,000-1,50,000 Rs	3.3655	3.5321		3.5792
1,50,000-2,00,000 Rs	3.2500	3.5100		3.4333
above 2,00,000	2.9349	3.2395		3.1657
Total	3.2086	3.4055		3.3114

Source: Primary data

Age and reference group influence on mobile phone customers

Table 7: ANOVA test statistics on Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis of age of the respondent

	Informational influence	Value influence	Expressive	Utilitarian Influence
F	.047	.586		.934
Sig.	.987	.625		.424

Source: Primary data

To examine the response of the respondent in case of reference group influence on purchasing decisions for mobile phone customers one way ANOVA was applied. After analyzing the results from the above table it was found that age does not play any significant role in consumers' purchasing decisions. The three factors namely informational influence, value expressive influence and utilitarian influence reference groups have almost same influence irrespective of the age of the respondents which support the null hypothesis H_01 .

So study revealed that age does not contribute any significant variation in the response of the influence of reference group on purchasing decisions of the mobile phones customers (Table 8).

Table 8: Comparison of Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis of age of the respondents

Age of the Respondent	Informational influence	Value influence	Expressive	Utilitarian Influence
18-25	3.1967	3.3752		3.3583
26-35	3.2078	3.4164		3.3008
36-45	3.2273	3.3985		3.2841

46-55	3.2270	3.5054	3.2027
Total	3.2086	3.4055	3.3114

Source: Primary data

Occupation and reference group influence on consumers' purchasing decisions

Table 9: ANOVA test statistics on Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis Occupation of the respondent

	Informational influence	Value Expressive influence	Utilitarian Influence
F	3.851	3.690	2.076
Sig.	.002	.002	.066

Source: Primary data

The above table explains the variation in the respondent's behavior on the basis of occupation. After examine the result it was found that there is significant difference for Value Expressive Influence dimension and informational influence dimension in case of different occupation of the respondents. The remaining factor does not explaining any significant difference on basis of different occupational group which rejects null hypothesis H_0 .

So study explains that respondent's behavior is same for the dimensions named Utility Influence. While in case of Value expressive Influence and informal influence there is significant difference for different category of occupation (Table 10).

Table 10: Comparison Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis of Occupation of the respondent

Occupation of the Respondent	Informational influence	Value Expressive influence	Utilitarian Influence
Private Services	3.3318	3.4911	3.3328
Govt. Services	3.1781	3.4394	3.2591
Business	3.3484	3.4452	3.6290
Agriculture	3.2202	3.4225	3.2978
Student	2.9359	3.3141	3.3477
Other	3.1371	3.0829	3.1286
Total	3.2061	3.4055	3.3114

Source: Primary data

Gender and Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers

Table 11: t-test statistics on Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis of Gender of the respondent

	t-test for Equality of Means		Mean Difference
	T	Sig. (2-tailed)	
Informational influence	0.712	.477	.04968
	0.600	.549	.04968

Value Expressive Influence	-1.043	.297	-.06250
	-1.017	.310	-.06250
Utilitarian Influence	.561	.575	.03356
	.556	.578	.03356

Source: Primary data
Significant at .05 level of significance

Table 11 results shows that there is no significant difference between male and female for the dimensions namely informational influence, Value Expressive Influence and Utilitarian influence. Gender is not playing any significant difference regarding these dimensions, which support null hypothesis H₀₅.

Table 12 is explaining the comparison regarding the influential aspects of mobile phone customers on the basis of gender.

Table 12: Comparison Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis of Gender of the respondent

Gender of the Respondent	Informational influence	Value expressive influence	Utilitarian Influence
Male	3.2245	3.3855	3.3222
Female	3.1748	3.4480	3.2886
Total	3.2086	3.3055	3.3114

Source: Primary data

Marital status and Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers

Table 13: t-test statistics on Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis of Marital status of the respondent

	t-test for Equality of Means		Mean Difference
	T	Sig. (2-tailed)	
Informational influence	1.395	.163	.10124
	1.596	.111	.10124
Value Expressive Influence	-1.000	.318	-.06236
	-.887	.376	-.06236
Utilitarian Influence	-.296	.767	-.01836
	-.277	.782	-.01836

Source: Primary data
*significant at .05 level of significance

Table 13 explains the variation between married and unmarried respondent response regarding reference group influence on purchase decision. The results explain that there is no significant difference in opinion regarding dimensions namely Informational Influence, Value Expressive Influence and Utility Influence which support null hypothesis H₀₆.

So there is no variation in the response of the respondents on the basis of their marital status. For all the dimensions there is no significant difference in the opinion of married and unmarried customers (Table 13).

Table 14: Comparison Influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers on the basis of Marital status of the respondent

<i>Marital status</i>	Value Influence	Expressive	Utilitarian Influence	Informational influence
Married	3.2368		3.3881	3.3063
Unmarried	3.1355		3.4505	3.3248
Total	3.2086		3.4055	3.3114

Source: Primary data

VI. Conclusion

So study vehemently revealed that there is no significant difference on the basis of the age of the respondent. The age does not contribute any significance variation in the opinion of the respondent of different age group. On the other hand education is playing a significant role on influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers. The three factors namely informational influence, Value Expressive Influence and Utilitarian influence have significant difference on the basis of education of the respondents. If we see the income side of the respondent all the three dimension is showing significant difference on influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers. The result of the study is showing that on the basis of occupation of the respondents two factors informational influence and value expressive influence has significant difference while in case of third factors there is no variation in respondent response. The marital status and gender difference is not showing any variation in respondent response. So occupation and income group have significance difference on influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers.

VII. Future research direction

The present study is elementary and general in nature. In this study various demographic dimension of the respondent has been taken to study the influential aspect of reference group on mobile phone customers. The study is focusing only a very few aspects there may be many more factors like consumers' perception of price, brand name, promotional strategy of company etc. which affects the customers purchase decisions. Study of these additional influential factors will further help to understanding of reference group influence on customers purchase decisions. In the present study only a few dependent variables were considered, so the findings may not apply to all customers. Furthermore, other explanatory variables can be considered which may account for the more findings. So some more variable can be used for further study.

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