

## The Empirical Study of Relationship between Post Purchase Dissonance and Consumer Behaviour

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### Abstract

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The paper focuses on the factors which lead to post purchase dissonance among the consumers. The study done in the paper tends to focus upon the variables which make the consumers feel more anxious about their purchase decisions. The study has tried to gauge the variables which have a significant bearing on the levels of dissonance being experienced by the consumers. The study shows that there is a significant association between income of the consumer and post purchase dissonance. Besides, the personality of the consumers also has a bearing on the dissonance inducing ability of the consumers. Impulse purchases were found to create more dissonance as against the planned ones. Since the consumers spend their time in planned purchases, they tend to be more confident about their purchases and hence tend to feel less dissonance. The consumer is also bound to feel more dissonance when the authority of final decision making lies with him and he tends to be blamed for product's poor performance.

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**Keywords:** consumer behaviour, post purchase dissonance, cognitive dissonance, marketing, buying decision making process

### 1. Introduction

Any conflicting thought in the human mind which arises out of the discrepancy between what the consumer believes in and any information which negates that is referred to as cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). When a purchase transaction is completed, the consumer comes back home and starts assessing the pros and cons of that purchase.

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Such assessment can many a times fill him with anxiety. A consumer is bound to be dissonant if there is a discrepancy between the satisfaction levels he had expected from a product and between the satisfactions; he actually received from the product. It has also been argued that cognitive dissonance not only comprises of cognitive elements but emotional elements as well (Sweeney, Hausknecht and Soutar, 2000). The consumers can find themselves to be emotionally dissonant as well if they are emotionally connected to the product.

Many researchers have argued that cognitive dissonance is mainly experienced through psychological discomfort (Elliot and Devine, 1994). After the purchase gets completed, the consumer might feel that he didn't require the product in the first stage and he could have done without purchasing it (Sweeney, Hausknecht and Soutar, 2000). This thought arises when the consumer starts questioning his own wisdom that whether or not he made the right decision by purchasing the product. The entire process will end up with the consumer feeling dissonant over his purchase. However, it has also been noted by many researchers that when the purchase gets completed and the consumer starts assessing the negative attributes he purchased along with buying the product and positive attributes which he forgo of the products he dint purchase create dissonance in his mind (Kassarjian and Cohen ,1965). Many consumers are also supposed to be susceptible to the feelings of post purchase dissonance if they feel that their purchase decisions have been influenced by the arguments given by the salespersons which made them buy the product (Cummings & Venkatesan, 1976).

## **2. Literature Review**

If the consumers have a certain preconceived notions about a product and if they come back home after buying a product which they feel was entrusted upon them by the salesperson, their level of dissonance felt might be higher.

However, a number of researchers argued against this and stated that ultimately it is a buyer's decision to make the final purchase, so claiming that a consumer's purchase decision which gets influenced by salespeople creates more dissonance cannot be correct in a long run (Oshikawa, 1970). It has also been studied that the greater the number of alternatives available with the consumer where he can weigh the positive and the negative attributes of the products, the greater the dissonance experienced.

Once the consumer starts experiencing the pangs of cognitive dissonance, he tries to reduce it by providing himself with such information which can be used to reducing dissonance, e.g. a dissonant consumer can approach his friends and family to get assured that the purchase he has made is indeed the correct purchase.

Many researchers have also claimed the presence of the cognitive dissonance not only in the post purchase stage but in the pre purchase stage as well where the myriad of product options which are provided to the customer through the various advertising tools and promotional strategies instill confusion in him regarding which product to purchase and which not to purchase (Koller and Salzberger, 2007). Cognitive dissonance has proved to be a major marketing obstacle for the marketers all over the world as well. They seem to be having difficult time coping with the changing variations in the degree of dissonance felt by the consumers as they move from the pre purchase stage to the post purchase stage. Keeping a tab on the dissonance levels of the consumers remain a prerogative of the marketers as they feel that they can lose their loyal clientele to the effects of dissonance. The companies need to assure their customers that they have indeed made the right purchase from time to time to avoid the risk of them doubting their decisions. One of the most imperative tasks being hurled at the after sales team of any company is to keep the dissonance levels of the consumers in control so that they don't switch to other brands.

### **3. Research Methodology**

In order to conduct the research, the researchers resorted to the method of primary collection of data and selected a sample size of 60 using the non probability sampling technique known as Quota sampling. The research was conducted in the area of New Delhi.

The questionnaire contained questions regarding the choices of the consumers with respect to the cognitive dissonance in order to gauge and analyse the understanding of the consumers regarding the subject. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that the questions were easy to assess and understand and the respondents were given enough time to read the questionnaires fully, understand the questions and then answer them with maximum confidence.

The following quotas were made on the basis of gender, age, education and income to authenticate the research.

Gender Quota	Age Quota	Education Quota	Income (p.a.) Quota
Male	18-25 years	Undergraduate	Less than 1,00,000
Female	26-30 years	Graduate	1,00,000 - 3,00,000
	31-40 years	Postgraduate	3,00,000 - 5,00,000
	41-50 years		5,00,00 - 7,00,000
	More than 50 years		7,00,000 - 9,00,000
			More than 9,00,000

The data collected from the respondents was checked twice in order to discard any incomplete forms. SPSS 16 Software package was used to derive the main values so as to accept or reject the formed hypotheses and in order to make sure that the results obtained from the research are accurate to the maximum possible level.

#### 4. Hypotheses

A number of researches have been conducted by researchers worldwide to analyze the impact of post purchase dissonance on the decision making behaviour of the consumers and to study the factors which lead to dissonance among the consumers. This paper will also try to identify those variables through constructive hypotheses which affect the variations of post purchase dissonance felt by the consumers and the factors responsible for causing them.

Many a time consumers feel that they are often lured into buying products through advertising and marketing practices of the company. This makes the consumers doubt their purchase decisions and make them wonder if the marketing gimmicks used by the sellers are responsible for having them purchase a certain product.

H<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant association between income and dissonance felt after purchase

The income of the consumers is a significant parameter for the consumers to leave them feeling anxious post purchase. It is a common logic that the have's tend to be more confident about their purchase decisions as against have not's. However, the same could not be hold as a studied observation until and unless it is being supported statistically.

Whether low income plays a crucial role in giving more guilty pangs to the consumers post purchase remain to be studied. And, hence, this hypothesis will bring in light the same.

H<sub>2</sub>: No significant association between authority to make decisions and post purchase dissonance

The authority to make a final call in the decision can have an impact on the feeling of post purchase anxiety being experienced by the consumer. As the final authority to make the purchase decision is also accompanied by the responsibility of the product's functioning and its failure, it can be interesting for the marketers to be aware of the repercussions of making a final purchase call on the dissonance levels of the consumer.

H<sub>3</sub>: The personality of the consumer does not have any bearing on the feeling of dissonance felt by him after purchase

The concept of dissonance is bound to have some effect and relative inferences with the personality of the consumer. It is usually assumed that consumers with stronger and confident personalities can deal with various anxious and dissonance creating situations better. But it can also be inferred that those with confident personalities might get more anxious if their purchase decisions turn out to be wrong.

H<sub>4</sub>: Planned decision making creates more post purchase dissonance

Impulse buying decisions can have an impact on the dissonant feelings which consumers might experience after the completion of their purchase transaction. Some researchers argue that impulse buying would lead to more dissonance post purchase while others refute to believe so. Planned decisions are always taken in tandem with the customer's expectations from a product and are capable of creating higher degree of dissonance in the consumer if those expectations are not met.

## 5. Analysis and Interpretation

Some of the major findings of the survey conducted are mentioned below –

### Frequency – Gender

	Frequency	Percent
Male	30	50.0
Female	30	50.0
Total	60	100.0

The survey was conducted among 60 respondents in Delhi, out of which 30 were females and 30 were males.

### Age

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 18 years	6	10.0
18 – 25 years	11	18.3
26 – 33 years	16	26.7
34 – 41 years	15	25.0
42 – 49 years	7	11.7
50 years and above	5	8.3
Total	60	100.0

The respondents were divided into sections of six age groups. 6 respondents were surveyed in the survey who was less than 18 years of age. This age group helped us in gauging the responses of the younger generation and helped in finding out the dissonance levels in their age group. 11 respondents were surveyed from the age group of 18-25 years whereas 16 respondents were surveyed from the age group of 26-33 years. The age group of 34-41 years had 15 respondents, while 42-49 age group had 7 respondents and 5 respondents surveyed fell in the age group of 50 years and above.

### Profession

	Frequency	Percent
Student	6	10.0
Working Professional	21	35.0
Self employed	18	30.0
Homemaker	13	21.7
Not working	2	3.3
Total	60	100.0

Among the respondents surveyed, 6 were students. The 21 respondents from 60 were working professionals whereas 18 were self employed. The 13 respondents were homemakers and the rest of the 2 were not working.

### Education

	Frequency	Percent
Under graduate	5	8.3
Graduate	31	51.7
Post graduate	24	40.0
Total	60	100.0

From the 60 respondents surveyed 31 were graduates, 24 were post graduates while the rest 5 were undergraduates. This data can be used to study the effect of educational qualifications on the level of post purchase dissonance being experienced by the consumer.

### Income

	Frequency	Percent
Less than 1,00,000	20	33.3
1,00,000 – 3,00,000	4	6.7
3,00,000 – 5,00,000	11	18.3
5,00,000 – 7,00,000	5	8.3
7,00,000 – 9,00,000	13	21.7
More than 9,00,000	7	11.7
Total	60	100.0

Among the income quota, 20 respondents questioned were from category less than 1, 00,000. The next 1, 00,000-7, 00, 00 category had 20 respondents as well whereas the rest 20 belonged to more than 7, 00,000 per annum income group.

### Analysis

$H_1$ : There is no significant association between income and dissonance felt after purchase

## Think about purchase

	Always	Often	sometimes	Seldom	Never	Total	Percentage
Less than 1lac	100%	6.6%	33.3%	0	0	20	33.3%
1,00,000-3,00,000	0	0	13.3%	13.3%	0	4	6.7%
3,00,000-5,00,000	0	40%	26.6%	6.66%	0	11	18.3%
5,00,000-7,00,000	0	13.3%	13.3%	6.66%	0	5	8.3%
7,00,000-9,00,000	0	0	13.3%	46.6%	57.1%	13	21.7%
More than 9lac	0	0	0	26.6%	42.8%	7	11.7%
Total	8	15	15	15	7	60	100.0

## Mann Whitney Test

	Think about purchase	Reassess your purchase
Mann Whitney U	5.000	7.000
Wilcoxon W	215.000	217.000
Z	- 2.835	- 2.662
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.005	.008
Exact Sig.[2*(1-tailed Sig.)	.003	.007

The survey revealed that those customers who fall in the low earning bracket tend to think about their purchase more often and are used to reassessing their purchase decisions more often than not. Since, the consumers believe that a significant portion of their income is involved in any kind of purchase; they tend to get more dissonant post purchase.

Thus, the study found that there is positive relationship between income and post purchase dissonance with  $p < .05$  and this has made income to be a significant ( $p \leq .05$ ). Hence null hypothesis rejected.

Hence, the hypothesis that there is no significant association between income and post purchase dissonance is uprightly rejected. The value of p came out to be .003 which is lesser than .05 indicating a significant association between income and post purchase dissonance in the form of customers constantly thinking about and reassessing their purchase.

Result: There is a significant association between income and post purchase dissonance.



H<sub>2</sub>: No significant association between authority to make decisions and post purchase dissonance

The authority to make a purchase decision also affects the level of post purchase dissonance being experienced by the consumer. The survey revealed that those consumers who make the final call while making the purchase decision might have higher degree of dissonance as against those who don't enjoy the authority of making a final call.

Besides, the survey also revealed that the decision makers are often burdened with the failure of the product as well if the product fails to meet the expectations of the consumers. And this feeling of uncertainty might give the consumers more dissonance. The autonomy on behalf of the consumer to make the decision might not drive him to dissonance but the constant fear of not being able to choose a high quality product would make him highly dissonant.

Thereby, the study found that there is a positive relationship between the authority to make a decision and post purchase dissonance ( $p < .05$ )

The chi square test was used to statistically prove the same and the value of p came at .010 which is lower than .05, hence depicting significant association between post purchase dissonance and the final decision making authority.

#### Chi Square Test

	Authority to make buying Decision (more dissonance)	Blame of product's failure (more dissonance)
Chi square	13.333	12.000
Df	4	4
Asymp. Sig.	.010	.017

## Think about purchase

Authority to make de	Always	Often	Sometime	Seldom	Never	Total	Percenta
Always	12.5%	13.3%	0	13.3%	0	5	8.3%
Often	37.5%	33.3%	33.3%	26.6%	28.5%	19	31.7%
Sometimes	25%	26.6%	33.3%	20%	57.1%	18	30.0%
Seldom	25%	20%	13.3%	20%	14.2%	11	18.3%
Never	0	6.6%	20%	20%	0	7	11.7%
Total	8	15	15	15	7	60	100

Result: Significant association between authority to make decisions and post purchase dissonance

H<sub>3</sub>: The personality of the consumer does not have any bearing on the feeling of dissonance felt by him after purchase

## Reassess your purchase\*what kind of shopper are you

	Confident shopper	Positive shopper	Inspiring shopper	Confused shopper	Nervous shopper	Negative shopper	Guilt ridden shopper	Total	%
Always	8.33%	12.5%	25%	33.3%	25%	16.6%	0	10	16.7%
Often	25%	18.7%	37.5%	0	12.5%	33.3%	25%	13	21.7%
Sometimes	16.6%	12.5%	12.5%	16.6%	25%	0	0	8	13.3%
Seldom	41.6%	43.7%	12.5%	50%	37.5%	33.3%	25%	22	36.7%
Never	8.33%	12.5%	12.5%	0	0	16.6%	50%	7	11.7%
Total	12	16	8	6	8	6	4	60	100.0%

	Think about purchase	What kind of shopper are you
Pearson Correlation	1	.018
Think about purchase Sig. (2 tailed)		.002
N	60	60
Pearson Correlation	.018	1
What kind of shopper are you Sig. (2 tailed)	.002	

The survey revealed that the confident shoppers very rarely reassess their purchase decision and thereby experience lower dissonance post purchase. Those with the pessimistic personalities seem to have more negative feelings post their purchase and would be more to post purchase dissonance as against positive and confident shoppers.

There is found to be a significant relationship between the post purchase dissonance and the personality of a buyer with  $p=.002$  which is lesser than .05 indicating that different personality types will affect the levels of post purchase dissonance to be experienced by the consumer.

Result: Significant association between personality and degree of post purchase dissonance

H<sub>4</sub>: Planned decision making creates more post purchase dissonance

What kind of shopping gives you maximum satisfaction

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Impulse buying always gives me maximum satisfaction	14	23.3	23.3	23.3
Impulse buying often gives me maximum satisfaction	5	8.3	8.3	31.7
Impulse buying sometimes gives me maximum satisfaction	9	15.0	15.0	46.7
Impulse buying seldom gives me maximum satisfaction	5	8.3	8.3	55.0
Impulse buying never gives me maximum satisfaction	5	8.3	8.3	63.3
Preplanned buying always gives me maximum satisfaction	7	11.7	11.7	75.0
Preplanned buying often gives me maximum satisfaction	1	1.7	1.7	76.7
Preplanned buying sometimes gives me maximum satisfaction	2	3.3	3.3	80.0
Preplanned buying seldom gives me maximum satisfaction	5	8.3	8.3	88.3
Preplanned buying never gives me maximum satisfaction	7	11.7	11.7	100.0
Total	60	100.0	100.0	

## Chi Square Test

	What kind of buying gives you maximum satisfaction
Chi – square	23.871
Df	8
Asymp. Sig	.002

The survey revealed that those customers who follow impulse buying technique tend to have more dissonance creating feelings as against those who make planned decisions. Majority of the consumers agreed that pre planned buying gives them maximum satisfaction and satisfaction is directly linked with less dissonance. Hence, the hypothesis that planned buying gives more dissonance is right away rejected.

The buyers making the impulse decisions on purchases said to have higher dissonance levels as against pre planned buyers with the value of  $p=.002$  which is lesser than .05, thus indicating positive relationship between impulse buying and higher post purchase dissonance.

Result: Pre planned purchases create lesser post purchase dissonance.

## 6. Discussion

Post purchase dissonance has always been linked with the psychological behaviour of the consumer. Hence, this creates the ground for dissonance levels to be distinctively varied from person to person. The personality of the consumer has been undertaken as the basis for ascertaining the factors creating dissonance among the consumers. This pretty much explains that why does confident and positive shoppers find it much easier to tackle post purchase dissonance. Those consumers who have confident personalities and are always positive about their decisions do not succumb to any kind of negativity whatsoever being associated with a product whereas confused and negative shoppers often find themselves in dilemma when it comes to experiencing feelings of post purchase dissonance. Cognitive dissonance being a psychological theory finds its origin deeply grounded in the personality of the consumer. The personality of the consumer also makes him more inquisitive about the product's features while shopping, thereby entailing the degree of involvement on behalf of the consumer while purchasing a product.

The detached customers tend to follow avoidant decision making style where they prefer making the final purchase decisions at someone else's behest. But those customers who are deeply involved in entire process of decision making and buying experience higher degrees of post purchase dissonance. The authority of making the final buying decision also affects the dissonance levels of the consumers with those making the final decisions upholding the blame of product's functional failure as well. The fear of being blamed in case of product's faulty functioning often makes the customer fall prey to higher degrees of post purchase dissonance. The study also revealed that the impulse purchases create more dissonance as against the planned purchases. The impulse purchases are the result of the on the spot decisions and usually leave the customers more anxious about the performance of the product after it has been purchased.

## 7. Future Research

The relationship of the post purchase dissonance with the consumer behaviour can still be studied and explored to a greater level. The fact that there aren't much studies being done on the topic is a huge literature gap which needs to be filled. The future researchers can further explore the other variables causing post purchase dissonance and can even try to find out the ways of fighting with it.

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