

Marketing Approach for Industrial Consumables in India

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Abstract:

Industrial consumable products are the products which are generally consumed by an industrial organization but they are not used as raw material for final product. Though being named as consumables the characteristics of these products are not same as commodities and moreover the marketing strategies are more linked towards core industrial products than a general consumable product. Since the subject is vast hence, we will analyse in context to only one consumable product i.e. switchgear as it will reflect the behaviour of whole category & will be a relevant sample as its used widely & irrespective of the final finished product of that particular industry. The purpose of this paper is to analyse and understand the nature of the product & the applied marketing strategies for the same. The paper will also draw a limited comparison of these approaches in contrast to a typical consumer product marketing approach.

Paper Type: Literature Review

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I. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:

This paper will be based on the current and historical literature review. The conventional as well as modern approaches for the marketing have been considered and since the research material is available in global context hence an Indian context is attempted to be drawn. This paper uses descriptive research methodology and the literatures reviewed involves both industrial as well as consumer product marketing approach domain.

II. FINDINGS:

The findings of the paper suggest that Industrial consumable products have similar characteristics as a core industrial product and its marketing approaches also have to be adopted keeping its view of an industrial or engineering derived product. It has certain influences of consumer products like retail set up for final point of sales or increasing wave of commoditization but the most appropriate marketing strategies for this segment are still a lot different than the consumer durables or consumer products.

Limitations:

The paper is based upon the literature available in the public domain & websites of switchgear manufacturers along with the current and historical literature available on the internet portals and other online resources. The available resources have been used as secondary data for the paper and hence the future scope can be to extend the research as an empirical research by collecting primary data and drawing conclusion based on the data analysis.

Research Gap:

While switchgear represents a good sample as its use is wide & doesn't depend on the final product of industry but it is still a field of specialization & has limited manufacturers. There are very limited research papers which are focused on the switchgear market. Also, the entry of new players and the reconciliation by means of merger & acquisition between existing players also impacts the ever evolving distribution model. The available literature & other publications may not be directly linked with then switchgear market but a bridge has been built between two so that the findings of one can be utilized in other without impacting the sanctity of the subject. The researchers of the paper have attempted to bridge the gap by discussions on available piece of information and its real-life comparison with the practices of Industrial world as well as widely practised consumer product marketing approaches.

Research Objectives:

Marketing approaches are the guiding pillars of any organization as these are the basis of any action in market & generally are directly derived from the long-term strategy of the organisation. Marketing is generally confused with promotions or advertisement but that's possibly the smallest part of the whole exercise, perhaps marketing is linked with anything & everything which is associated with product & especially in Industrial products a marketing approach can mould or change drastically in context to the portion of the value chain which would be the target audience in that action like the way product will be promoted to an End User will be different than the way it will be for a System integrator and so on. The purpose of this research is to identify the best suited marketing approach for an Industrial consumable product. The secondary objective is to gauge the importance of these approaches and also to analyse its relevance with respect to the consumer products marketing approaches. The major research objectives of the paper can be summarized as:

- To analyse various available marketing approaches / strategies adopted for distribution network and determining their impact on industrial consumable product's distribution network.
- Its contrast with the typical consumer marketing approaches & citing the major differences.

III. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research paper involves exploratory and descriptive research methodology. The researchers have tried to explore as many online and offline research papers and other available and accessible literatures on switchgear manufacturers and the scenario for adoption of this strategy over other available strategies. The aim of the deliberation is to study the distribution models adopted by electrical consumable companies and the cause & effect of the same.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

The literature review has been divided in to various parts where we will first explore briefly about the Industrial consumable products and followed by analysing the globally practised marketing approaches for this market and at last we will analyse impact and importance of those in context to the model with consumer goods.

Industrial Consumable Products

Industrial consumable products as defined by Directorate General of Foreign Trade in India's Exim Policy (Chapter 9, Clause 9.15) states that "Consumables" means any item, which participates in or is required for a manufacturing process, but does not necessarily form part of end-product. Items, which are substantially or totally consumed during a manufacturing process, will be deemed to be consumables.

Different usages of industrial consumable products classify them in various categories like the products which are used for providing energy to machines are classified as fuels, the products which are used in preventive maintenance against regular wear & tear are termed as lubricants.

In terms of economics the industrial consumables have zero elasticity or inelastic demand as irrespective of the economic front or the price points the consumption pattern doesn't changes much. It has similar characteristics as coarse food grains (Praduman Kumar, Anjani Kumar, Shinoj Parappurathu and S.S. Raju, 2011) as the staple food grains have inelastic or even negative demand and while we understand the impact of marketing strategies for distribution network, it would be worthwhile to analyse the demand elasticity of Switchgear as Industrial consumable product.

Business to Business Approach in Industrial Consumable Product

Although these products are used as consumable products but they still fall in the category of industrial products family and have the similar characteristics of a business to business (B2B) scenario where two organizations work together in order to fulfil the needs of one as customer & the other one as supplier. As per Cambridge Advance Learner's Dictionary & Thesaurus the B2B is defined as "Describing or involving business arrangements or trade between different businesses, rather than between businesses and the general public".

The discipline of the business to business marketing has a long history (Hadjikhani and LaPlaca, 2013) and for almost as long researchers have sought to understand and explain how business to business market operate (Hunt, 2013; Moller, 2013; Sheth, et al.1988; Connor, 1991). However, for the greater part of the 20th century, the bulk of academic research in the field of marketing has focused on consumer products (LaPlaca and Katrichis, 2009) rather than business markets. It only started in 1971 with the introduction of Industrial Marketing Management (IMM), the first journal dedicated to business to business was made available (LaPlaca, 2013)

Researches still agree that branding in Industrial markets is still an under researched area (e.g. bendixen at al. 2004; Benerland et al. 2007; Lynch and De Chernatony, 2004; Mudambi, 2002; Mudambi et al., 1997) and the major cause as well as implication for the same is that the brands mean very little to industrial customers and this may be the reflection of the assumption that industrial purchasers are more rational then the purchasers in

consumer goods setting (e.g. Murphy, 1990) however on the contrary the brands are also hypothesized to play a significant role in the purchase behaviour of the industrial end customer (e.g. Bendixen et al. 2014; Mudambi, 2002).

Distribution Network for Industrial Consumable Products and Marketing Strategy

For the last few decades, close inter-firm relationship in various stages of value chain gained serious popularity in practise and research, and a substantial number of studies on close channel relationship have been published in recent times (Anderson and Narus, 1990; Anderson and Weitz, 1989; 1992; Frazier et al., 1988; Morgan and Hunt, 1994)

Manufacturers are increasingly leveraging the capabilities of the channel members in recognition of the values that accrues when partnership magnifies strength and benefit (Sink and Langley, 1997) and it's not inaccurate to say that today's distributors, standing between production and consumption (Merritt and Newell, 2001; Shipley and Jobbers, 1994). These distributors also function as the manufacturer's marketing arm, transferring knowledge of customer's needs and market trends back to manufacturer (Paun, 1997) while enhancing customer satisfaction (Mudambi and Aggarwal, 2003) and with this exchange of information and market insights the manufacturer can gain benefits from a committed distributor such as easier access to market information (Fites, 1996), stronger support for its product (E. Anderson, Lodish and Weitz, 1987) and reduced promotion of competing brand (E. Anderson and Weitz, 1992).

Distribution network or channel business is the essential part of a companies' strategy plan and it is critical for sustainable growth for any organization, it is impossible to define the distributor's role in marketing strategy if the marketing strategy is not clearly developed (Frederick E Webster Jr, 1976). Generally, every organization has a long-term strategy plan and distribution is essential part of it as not only this gives the depth or penetration in market but also gives strong insights of market with current as well as future trends and orientation.

Value Proposition of Distribution Network:

The value of distribution channel consists of two parts, "Value of its own" and the "Value in use" (Hanssens, Rust and Srivastava, 2009) which is a bilateral relationship and based on above explanation, the channel is an invaluable component of business value chain where the value of its own emphasizes the basic function of a distribution channel that creates value for a firm directly through making markets and executing transactions (Anderson and Coughlan, 2002) whereas value in use is the essence of customer freaking out about the whole experience (Dr. Barclay Burns, 2015)

Value creation and value appropriation are two processes whereby distribution channel strategy contributes to firm value (Mizik and Jacobson, 2003). The value creation process contributes to the "Size of pie", which is the value basis from which channel members taking a "share of the pie" through a value appropriation process (Jap, 2001). The value of distribution channel strategies to a firm is determined by the amount of value created during the distribution process and by the value appropriated by the firm (Collis and Montgomery, 2008)

Industrial Buying Behaviour

In order to be successful in business to business the sellers or the industrial distribution organizations needs to understand the Industrial organizational buying behaviour (Bunn, 1993; Johnston and Lewin, 1996), as the understanding of the behaviour impacts the overall performance of both buyer and seller.

While this understanding is important, this is also true that arriving at such understanding is a difficult task and that's predominantly because of the dynamic and complex nature of process (Bunn, 1993) and the ever changing external factors like Price disruption, competition, political & social environment, technology changes make it even more complex (Kraljic, 1983; Lindgreen et al., 2013)

Being such a dynamic field, it attracted lots of interest in study of organizational buying behaviour and past research work identified range of variable which affect or influence these decisions in a variety of industries (Bunn, 1993; Johnston and Lewin, 1996; Moon and Tikoo, 2002), however every research is focused on certain aspects of cause and effect relationship and produces contradictory or mixed results (Bunn 1994, Lewin and Donthu, 2005) and because of this there is no universal tropology available or been agreed upon. Most of the research work has happened in matured economies like USA and hence there is lack of study in emerging markets like India (Bunn, 1993, 1994; Brashear et al., 2011)

Theoretically the buying behaviour is grounded in following three models:

- 1) BUYGRID framework developed by Robinson mentions that there are different buying situations which affect buyers' behaviour, such as new purchases or task, changed or altered repeat purchase and no change

repeat purchase (also mentioned as New Buy, Modified Re-Buy and Straight Re-Buy by Robinson et al., 1967)

The Buy-Grid Framework: Participation in the Buying Stages of the B2B Buying Process

Buying Stages	New Buy	Modified Re-Buy	Straight Re-Buy
1. Recognize problem	Yes	Perhaps	No
2. Determine product characteristics	Yes	Perhaps	No
3. Determine product specifications	Yes	Yes	Yes
4. Search for suppliers	Yes	Perhaps	No
5. Evaluate proposals	Yes	Perhaps	No
6. Select supplier	Yes	Perhaps	No
7. Specify quantity needed	Yes	Yes	Yes
8. Review the supplier/product performance	Yes	Yes	Yes

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Figure 1: BUYGRID Framework

- 2) General framework which is also known as skeleton model (Webster and Wind,1972), assumes that organizational buying is a complex process that involves many people and departments, multiple goals and potentially conflicting decision criteria, often taken over a long period of time, require information from multiple sources and involve many inter-organizational relationships

EXHIBIT 2

A model of organizational buying behavior

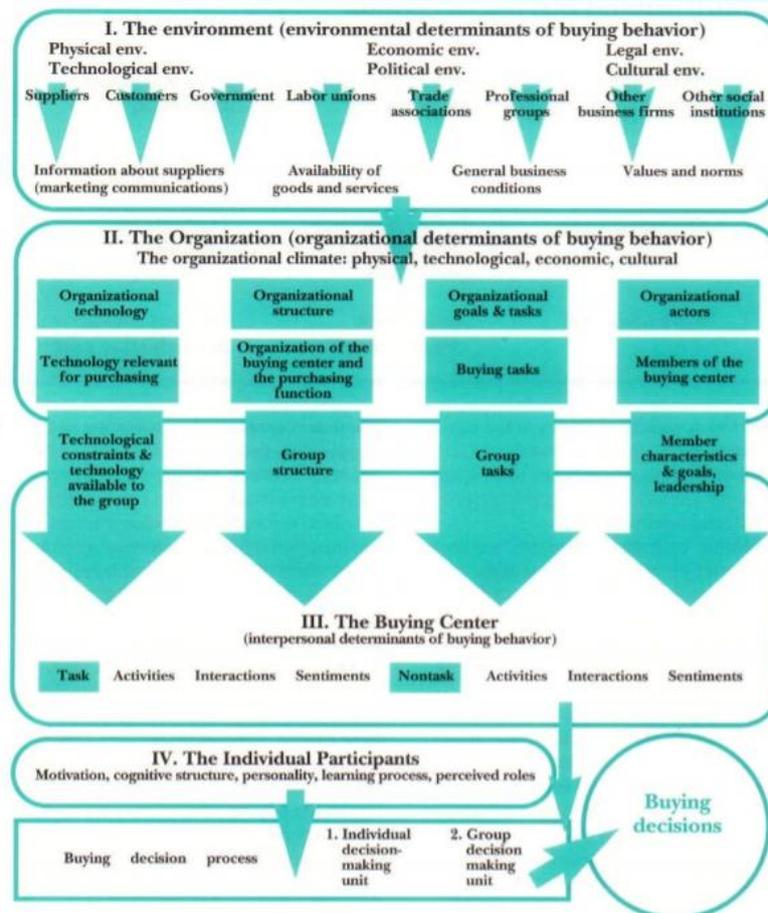


Figure 2: General / Skeleton Framework

3) Sheth developed a model based on three distinct aspects of organizational buying behavior, the psychological world of the individuals involved in organizational buying decisions, the conditions for joint decisions among these individuals and a process of joint decision-making marked by inevitable conflict among the decision makers and the resolution of disagreements by resort to a variety of tactics (Sheth, 1973).

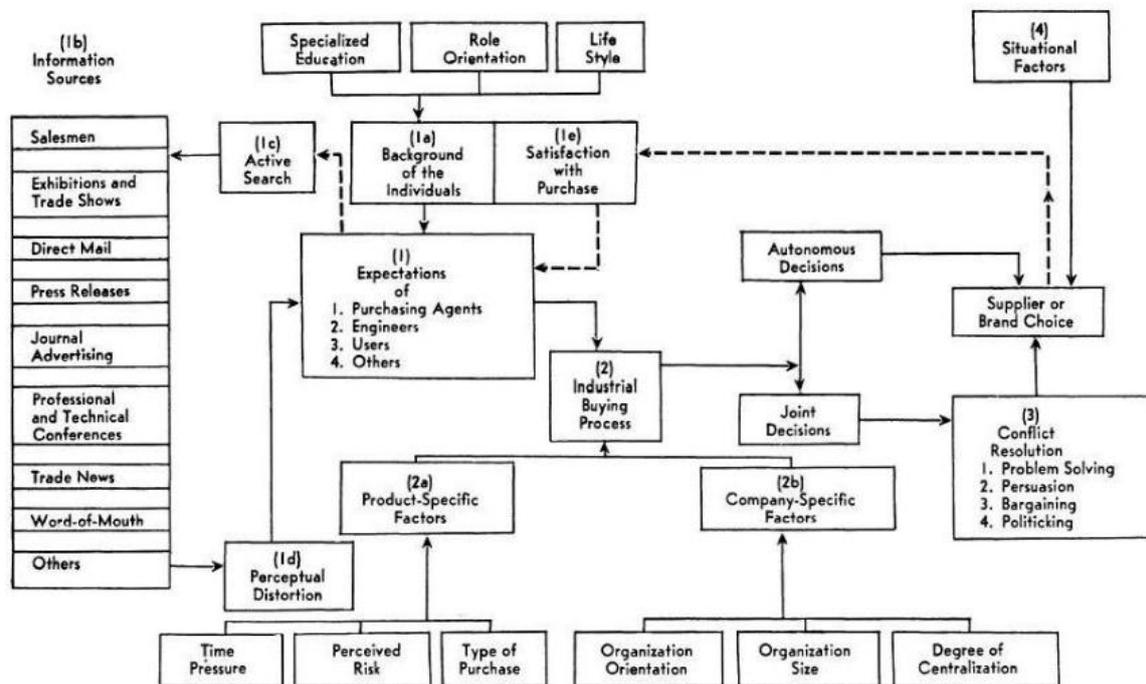


FIGURE 1. An integrative model of industrial buyer behavior.

Figure 3: Sheth’s Hybrid Framework

Few years later, an integrative framework proposed by Johnston and Lewin (1996) incorporates the original constructs suggested by Robinson *et al.*, Webster and Wind and Sheth in their framework, and adds two new factors: decision rules and role stress.

Their model contains purchase characteristics, organizational characteristics, group characteristics and participant(s) characteristics, and describes organizational buying behavior as a process which consists of eight stages:

- 1) Need recognition determination of characteristics.
- 2) Establishing specifications.
- 3) Identification of potential sources.
- 4) Request for proposals.
- 5) Analysis of proposals.
- 6) Evaluation of proposals.
- 7) Selection of supplier.
- 8) Post-purchase evaluation.

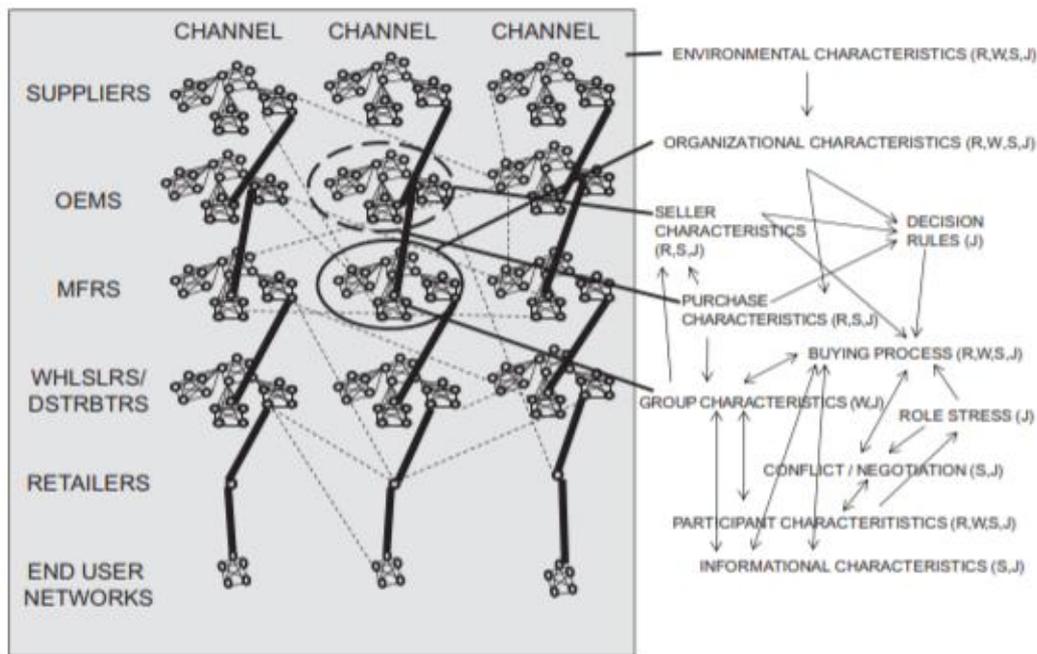


Fig. 3. An Integrated Model of Organizational Buying Behavior (Based on Johnston & Lewin, 1996).

Figure 4: Integrated model of organizational buying behaviour.

Since there has not been enough research material available on emerging markets hence, we would consider the integrative framework proposed by Johnston and Lewin (1996) as the closest model for our study and after the study of the customer buying behavior.

Based on all the above explanations & analysis we can conclude that an Industrial product marketing approach needs to touch the following points & till the same is not been done it will not be considered as a success marketing approach, for the benefit of drawing contrast, we have also highlighted the consumer goods approach to achieving the same under the same head.

Marketing Effort on the Product (Awareness)

For the industrial products the value chain is much longer than a consumable product where an individual choice or at max choice of family makes the decision & generally a domain expert is never involved, in Industrial products a consultant is hired to make the evaluations and even the executors like OEM or System integrator plays a vital role in making the selection hence the awareness only to End User or one aspect of value chain may not serve the purpose. Even in the value chain every influencer has a different motivation and hence the marketing approach has to be adopted to suit the needs of that entity like a consultant may need compliance to standards or coordination with other devices or products however a system integrator will look for ease of fitment and also the potential saving in terms of size or adaptability, the end user who will eventually use the product will look more for life and potential replacement availability, in such case one size fits all won't work and as a result a segment or entity oriented knowledge based awareness campaign would be required & a TV or media advertisement may not work at all.

Availability or interchangeability of the Consumable Component

Since the industrial districts are normally outside the populated areas and the public access is also not convenient hence use of a product which may not be available at the time of need or in event of urgency then the whole point of the product usage goes down the drain. Keeping the production in plant and running it without any interruptions is the primary motive of organization hence the marketing approach propagating the availability or promoting the Point of Sales (POS) becomes even more critical than any other product, in contrast to the same the consumer good products can be placed at significant places where the 4Ps can be satisfied and customers can either travel to malls or superstores or even order them at home using online mode while the same cannot be done for industrial products. In case of the industrial products the availability can sometimes be compensated with interchangeability of the products and this can be an excellent marketing

approach while the same may not work for consumer goods and in those cases the choices are driven by personal performances and even with availability of substitutes doesn't makes them potential replacement.

Criticality & Reliability of Consumable Component

The marketing campaigns for industrial products across entities emphasizes on the reliability and versatility of usage as these products are at critical locations and every such product has a specific role with almost no back up hence criticality of application and reliability of components is the most preferential marketing attribute and even the approach is to promote and communicate this function, while in consumer products approach the preference and taste defines the purchase paradox and the whole approach is drafted around these.

Point of Sales Operations

Point of sales operations is the most important aspect in any of the marketing approaches & irrespective of industrial or consumer products, this aspect is the most celebrated venue for implementation or measurement of effort in marketing approaches. In consumer products the sense is achieved by branding with posters and ensuring that even the secondary sales network including the retail shop of neighbourhood has access to it, the marketing approaches are focused on the individual purchasers and aimed at the aesthetical aspects of the product while the POS branding for industrial products is more focused on unique selling points, reliability, criticality and availability of the products.

Findings & managerial implications:

On the basis of the literature review and various industrial and consumable product marketing approaches it can be suggested that the marketing approaches of industrial marketing approaches even for consumable products are much different than the consumable products, while the industrial products focus more on the criticality, reliability, versatility and availability of the products and have an entirely different approach toward every entity of the value chain and the every audience gets a tailor made treatment and designed to cater their specific needs however the consumer products have a single view of consumers and design all the strategies around them, the system of review and feedback is not detailed and the revamping of approach is generally not done.

Limitations & future Research:

The paper is based upon the available literature on the websites of switchgear manufacturers and the current and historical literature available on the internet portals and other online resources and hence can be considered as secondary research only. The future research can be on one of the specific cases in form of a case study where we discuss and analyse each aspect of marketing actions in detail.

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