

Consumer Sentiments towards Marketing and Their Linkages with Consumer Satisfaction, Perceptions of Business Philosophy and Government Interventions: An Investigation in The Indian Context

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Abstract

The present study aims at ascertaining consumer perceptions of prevailing marketing practices in the country, assessing relative importance of marketing mix elements, analysing consumer satisfaction with marketing, evaluating their attitudes towards business philosophy, and examining role of government regulations and consumerism in India.

The study is based on primary data that were collected through a survey of 477 consumers located in and around Delhi.

In contrast to attitudes prevailing in other countries, the study finds consumers in India to be holding relatively more favourable sentiments towards marketing. These attitudes, however, differ in magnitude and direction not only across the marketing

mix variables, but also across the consumer groups. Results, moreover, indicate consumer sentiments to be having significant impact on consumer satisfaction with marketing practices and perceived need for government interventions and regulations.

Since the survey covered only the consumers located in and around Delhi, findings of the study cannot be generalized to the population of the country as a whole. Studies covering other cities and rural areas are needed to arrive at more valid findings.

The present study constitutes the first ever effort made to assess consumer sentiments towards marketing in India through use of a purified version of Gaski and Etzel's (1986) scale derived after its reliability and validity testing in the Indian context. The other salient feature of the study is that it examines alongside anent issues such as consumer satisfaction with marketing,

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their perceptions of business philosophy, and need for government intervention so as to develop a more holistic picture about consumer attitudes towards marketing in India and thus establishes side by side the nomological validity of the consumer sentiment scale.

Keywords: *Marketing in India, Sentiments towards marketing. Marketing mix, Consumer satisfaction with marketing, Consumerism, Government intervention*

Introduction

Since 1991 when the process of liberalisation and globalisation started in the country, India has fast emerged as a highly attractive market for a variety of durable and non-durable products in the world. The country today ranks as the third largest nation in the world in terms of GDP based on purchasing power parity and eleventh largest country in terms of nominal GDP (World Bank, 2010). Having attained relatively faster growth rates during the last two decades, it today holds the distinct position of being the second fastest growing nation of high net worth individuals in the Asia-Pacific region. According to a study by the Mckinsey Global Institute (MGI), India will emerge as the world's fifth largest (from twelfth) consumer market in the world by 2025 (IBEF, 2008). Large and growing market has drawn considerable interest of the overseas firms. More than 200 of the top 500 multinational firms already have operations in India (IBEF, 2005) and many more have plans afoot to soon enter the Indian market.

With the entry of a large number of both the domestic and foreign firms into the Indian market, the competition has considerably increased. Unlike the situation prevailing in the pre-liberalisation era, consumers today have a wide

array of products and brands to choose from. With the Indian market increasingly getting transformed from a seller's to a buyer's market, consumers have become more demanding and choosy. Like in other emerging markets, consumerism is on the rise and consumers have started increasingly airing their grievances publicly against the erring companies and resorting to courts for redressal of their complaints.

With ongoing economic development taking place in the country, consumers are expected to become much more critical of the marketing performance in future. This prediction is quite in consonance with the *consumerism life cycle theory* that postulates an inverse relationship between economic development and consumer attitudes towards marketing (Barksdale et al., 1982; Kaynak, 1985; Kaynak and Wilkstrom, 1985; Kaynak, 1986; Barker, 1987; Kaufman and Channon, 1973; Starver, 1977; Thorelli, 1981; Varadarajan and Thirunarayana, 1990; Lysonski and Durvasula, 2003; Jain and Goel, 2011).

In the wake of growing consumer awakening and consumerism the world over, interest in research studies examining consumer sentiments towards marketing has grown considerably over the years (Gaski and Etzel,

1986; Wee and Chan, 1989; Chan *et al.*, 1990; Treise *et al.*, 1994). In the United States, interest in such studies has got heightened to the extent that consumer sentiments towards marketing are assessed on a periodical basis through longitudinal studies (Gaski and Etzel, 1986). Efforts to understand consumer sentiments have been initiated even in countries like China (Chan and Cui, 2004) and Bangladesh (Ferdous and Towfique, 2008). It is, however, unfortunate that no such up-to-date and comprehensive studies exist in the context of a big emerging market like India. A few past studies undertaken in the country are not only outdated (Varadarajan and Thirunarayana, 1990; Bharadwaj *et. al.*, 1991), but also suffer from having not made any explicit efforts to test the reliability and validity of their findings. It is, therefore, high time that the efforts be initiated in the country to understand consumer sentiments towards marketing and glean insights for evolving marketing strategies as capable of meeting consumer expectations and adding to their quality of life.

The present study constitutes a modest attempt in this direction. The study is based on the data that were collected through a survey of 477 consumers located in and around Delhi during the period 2008-2009. Gaski and Etzel's (1986) consumer sentiment scale was employed to gather information about consumer attitudes towards marketing. The collected data were subjected to reliability and validity testing before employing them in the present study. Additional data were also collected and employed in the study in order to ascertain consumer perception of relative importance of 4Ps, assess their satisfaction with marketing, and analyse their attitudes towards business philosophy, role of government regulations and consumerism in India.

The paper is organized into five sections. With a backdrop to the study in the present section, the next two sections are devoted to a discussion of conceptual framework and methodology used in the study. Findings of the study are presented and discussed along with their managerial implications in the succeeding two sections. The paper ends with a discussion of study limitations and directions for future researches.

Conceptual Framework

Understanding Consumer Sentiments toward Marketing: Significance and Past Studies

Growing consumerism and resulting supremacy of consumers in the market has considerably heightened the interest of marketing scholars and research firms alike to undertake researches in the area of consumer sentiments towards marketing. Consumer attitudes towards marketing in the past studies have been reported as significant determinant of consumer satisfaction with marketing practices. Past studies also show a significant relationship existing between the consumer sentiments towards marketing and the perceived need for government interventions and the government regulations for protecting consumer interests. Researches in the area across countries differing in economic development have led to the evolution of *consumerism life cycle* theory that states that greater the economic development of a country, more the consumers would perceive the need for government interventions and regulations. That being the case, consumers in the emerging markets are likely to become more critical of marketing activities in future. As the consumers become more educated, informed of their interests and rights, and the legal infrastructure gets more intensified and widespread; consumers are expected to start behaving more proactively to safeguard their interests.

Gaining knowledge about consumer attitudes towards marketing activities in such an event becomes important from both the theoretical and managerial perspectives (Barksdale and Darden, 1972; Barksdale and Perreault, 1980; Barksdale *et al.*, 1982; French *et al.*, 1982; Gaski and Etzel, 1986; Chan *et al.*, 1990; Chan and Cue, 2004; Jain and Goel, 2008, 2011). From a theoretical view point, consumer attitudes are crucial as these constitute the most basic building block of buying behaviour. Consumer purchase goods and services based on their attitudes which to a great extent are influenced by the actions of marketers (Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007).

Managerially speaking, marketing is the most visible business function that provides a link

between firm and its consumers. Since marketing strategies and practices tend to reflect mentality and ethicality of the business firms (Starver, 1977), it is crucially important for the management to know as to what the consumers' expectations are and how the consumers perceive various marketing practices. Such an insight can be helpful to business firms in devising marketing strategies and policies that are capable of providing utmost satisfaction to their customers and contributing to their well being.

As Chan and Cui (2004) have rightly pointed out, knowledge about consumer attitude towards marketing can be helpful in forecasting future tasks and challenges and restructuring marketing strategies in line with the contemporary consumer sentiments. Proactive marketing managers are supposed to be attentive to consumer problems much before these reach a crisis level. In contrast, reactive managers would wait until these problems reach a critical stage before they decide to alter their practices. If consumers are found to be having a negative or sceptical attitude towards marketing activities, marketing managers can determine the source of this negativity and its threat to future business actions and take appropriate and timely actions (Lysonski and Durvasula, 2003).

Surveys to gauge consumer perceptions of marketing on a periodical basis can serve as a barometer of 'how marketing is doing' in the eyes of the consumer and public and how much the public feels satisfied with marketing establishments. Such a practice is already in vogue in the United States where data are periodically collected and published in the form of indices to enable the decision and policy makers to gain insights about the consumer sentiments towards and satisfaction with marketing practices over time. Need of the hour is to start such longitudinal studies in other countries too. Availability of such information on a periodic basis can sensitise the marketers to changing consumer perceptions and help them identify nature of public relation tasks that their marketing departments need to undertake. For the firms that are doing well at this front, such periodic attitudinal surveys hold the potentials to communicate to the consumers and

general public that the firm cares about them, thus adding to the firm's brand equity and consumer franchise (Jain and Goel, 2011).

Knowledge of consumer attitudes toward marketing can also be useful to other stakeholders such as marketing researchers, consumer activists, trade and industry associations and government agencies. As consumer perceptions significantly affect their behavioural responses to marketing activities, consumer attitudes toward marketing can be linked with other key macroeconomic variables and these together can be used for making economic forecasts (Chopin and Darrat, 2000). Consumer sentiment survey, moreover, can provide a criterion measure to the market researchers for identifying discontented consumers and ascertaining underlying causes of their dissatisfaction. These studies can also be beneficial to the government agencies in identifying and focusing on areas that deserve utmost attention from the point of view of consumer protection and well being.

Information of about consumer sentiments in terms of each of the constituent marketing mix elements can greatly help consumer welfare advocates, marketing strategists and public policy makers in identifying sources of prevailing satisfaction or dissatisfaction among the consumers. Also of potential use can be the information pertaining to relative importance of each of the four marketing components. This can assist marketers with scarce resources and time to focus on such one or two marketing mix elements which the consumers in the target market perceive as being the most important to them.

It is perhaps in recognition of these theoretical and managerial underpinnings that several studies have been carried out during the last four decades in the United States and several other countries. Barring a few exceptions, majority of the studies report consumers in both the developed and developing countries to be having negative attitudes toward marketing. An attitudinal analysis at the level of individual marketing mix element, however, presents a somewhat different picture. While consumer attitude, in general, has been found to be

favourable with product quality and distribution/retailing, it has been found to be negative with pricing and advertising practices (Barksdale and Darden, 1972; Barksdale and Perreault, 1980; Barksdale *et al.*, 1982; French *et al.*, 1982; Gaski and Etzel, 1986; Barker, 1987; Lysonski and Zotos, 1989; Wee and Chan, 1989; Chan and Yau, 1990; Varadarajan and Thirunarayana, 1990; Darley and Johnson, 1993; Uray and Menguc, 1996; Lysonski and Durvasula, 2003; Chan and Cui, 2004; Ferdous and Towfique, 2008).

A comparative assessment of the findings of past studies bring to the fore an interesting inference. Consumer attitudes towards marketing appear somewhat related to the level of economic development. In general, consumers in the advanced countries have been found, in the past studies, to be having less favourable/ more negative attitudes than consumers in the developing countries. The plausible reason seems to be that people in the developed countries with higher levels of income are more discerning and have higher expectations from business firms, and hence level of their dissatisfaction with the marketing system is also higher. This, however, is only a tentative inference and needs further investigation (Jain and Goel, 2011).

Research Issues and Hypotheses

Consumers in India today are living in a marketplace that is quite different from the one that prevailed two decades back. As against the era of limited supplies and scant varieties available in the market during the controlled economy regime in the eighties and earlier, Indian marketplace today is buzz with a variety of products and brands. Newer forms of marketing and promotion channels have fast emerged on the marketing scene. Alongside the supply-side transformation, consumers too have undergone significant metamorphosis. With a rise of disposable income and greater exposure to local and international media, consumers have become more deliberative and demanding. They have also become more aware of their needs and rights. If one subscribes to the consumerism life cycle prophesy, consumers with further advancement and development of the economy are likely to become much more mature and sophisticated in the years to come.

Customer satisfaction and delight can be ensured only if the firms have sufficient knowledge about customers with whom they interact in the marketplace. Having product specific knowledge about the consumer needs and wants alone cannot guarantee success. The management must be fully aware of the consumer perceptions of marketing activities and the problems that they face in the marketplace.

Notwithstanding far reaching changes that have taken place in the Indian market, reliable and valid data on consumer sentiments are conspicuously absent in the country. It is against this backdrop that the present study has been conceived. The study needs to be viewed as a humble step in the direction of building reliable and valid data base about the consumer sentiments toward and satisfaction with marketing in India.

Besides ascertaining consumers' attitudes toward and satisfaction with marketing, the study aims to analyse consumer perception of importance of individual marketing mix elements, consumer beliefs about the philosophy of business firms that guide their marketing operations, consumers attitudes toward government interventions and regulations, and consumer perceptions about consumerism in India. Assessment of the relationship of consumer sentiments with other constructs under investigation is also one of the major objectives of the present study. A theoretical backdrop to the relationship of consumer sentiments to other constructs and accompanying hypotheses are as follows.

Several past studies have found consumer attitudes toward marketing to be varying across not only countries at various stages of economic development, but also across demographic factors within a country (Gaski and Etzel, 1986; Chan *et al.*, 1990; Treise *et al.*, 1994; Chan and Cui, 2004). Even the four marketing mix elements have been found to be differing in their importance and satisfaction perceptions among the consumers. Following hypotheses are, therefore, proposed for empirical testing in the present study:

H_{1a}: Consumer sentiments towards marketing vary across marketing mix variables.

H_{1b}: Marketing mix elements vary in their importance in the opinion of consumers.

H_{1c}: Consumer sentiments towards marketing vary across consumer demographics.

H_{1d}: Consumer satisfaction with marketing varies across marketing mix elements.

Consumer sentiments towards marketing and consumer beliefs about business philosophy have been reported in many past studies as a major determinant of consumer satisfaction with marketing (Varadarajan and Thirunarayana, 1990; Webster, 1991; Nwachukwu *et al.*, 1997; Chan and Cui, 2004, Ferdous and Towfique, 2008). It is, therefore, proposed that:

H_{2a}: Consumer satisfaction with marketing depends on consumer sentiments towards marketing.

H_{2b}: Consumer satisfaction with marketing depends on consumer beliefs about business philosophy.

With rise in consumerism, the dichotomy between consumer and business interests gets more sharpened, giving further impetus to the cause of consumerism and demand for government interventions in the market to protect consumer interests. Need for business regulations can be examined from two perspectives: one from the point of view of business firms and the other from the point of view of consumers. Because of being more organised, business firms have been much earlier able to pressurise government for enactment of legislations to protect their interests. Consumers, on the other hand, have become more organised and start demanding regulations to protect their interests only during the crusading stage of consumerism life cycle (Darley and Johnson, 1993). There is always a clash of interests between the consumers and business firms. Consumers want to maximise their utility which clashes with profit maximisation objective of the business firms. More the consumers become concerned with maximisation of their consumption utility (construed as implying less profit for the business), more they come in conflict with

business firms, and hence more they start building pressure on the government to intervene in the market and enact legislations to safeguard their interests. Through government mediation, consumers hope to get some of the business surplus passed on to them (Kaynak, 1985).

Since consumer movement in the developing countries is not that strong and consumers on their own are not able to safeguard their interests, they heavily depend upon government regulations and interventions for getting their grievances redressed with the business firms. As per consumerism life cycle theory, the demand for government mediation is expected to be higher among the consumers which are at relatively more advanced stage of consumerism. Because of their relatively lower level of satisfaction with marketing practices and institutions, unfavourable/ less favourable attitudes towards business philosophy and less favourable sentiments towards marketing, consumers in the emerging big markets are more likely to perceive greater need for government regulations. Ferdous and Towfique (2008) in their recent study have found perceived need for the government regulations significantly associated with both the consumer sentiments towards marketing and consumer satisfaction with marketing practices in Bangladesh. It is, therefore, hypothesised that:

H_{3a}: Consumer perceptions about the need for government regulations depend on consumer satisfaction with marketing.

H_{3b}: Consumer perceptions about the need for government regulations depend on consumer beliefs about business philosophy.

H_{3c}: Consumer perceptions about the need for government regulations depend on consumer sentiments towards marketing.

Research Design

The Instrument

The present study is based on the primary data collected from a survey of consumers through the use of a 'structured-disguised' questionnaire. The questionnaire was developed keeping in view the scales that have been employed in the past studies. A brief discussion of various scales used in the

study is as follows. The latter sections provide more detailed information about these scales and their reliability and validity assessments.

Consumer sentiments towards marketing:

A 28-item scale developed by Gaski and Etzel (1986) was used for measuring consumer sentiments towards marketing. The scale comprised four sub-scales, each measuring consumer attitudes towards product quality, pricing, advertising and retailing activities of the business firms. These sub-scales somewhat correspond to 4Ps of marketing, and hence can be viewed as representing corresponding marketing mix elements. Each sub-scale comprised seven items, anchored on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from '2 = strongly disagree' to '2 = strongly agree'. The scale was subjected to reliability and validity testing and the items finally retained for use in the study are listed in **Appendix - I**.

Consumer satisfaction with marketing:

Consumer satisfaction with marketing activities was assessed by asking consumers to indicate their level of satisfaction with four statements, pertaining to each of the Ps on a 5-point Likert scale, with '1 = very dissatisfied' to '5 = very satisfied'. Consumer satisfaction with marketing has been determined in a similar manner (e.g., Gaski and Etzel, 1986; Chan et al., 1990, Chan and Cui, 2004) in the past studies.

Consumer beliefs about business philosophy:

Consumer attitudes towards the guiding business philosophy have been ascertained through use of a four-item scale adapted from the study of Barksdale and Darden (1972) and Gaski and Etzel (1986). A 5-point Likert scale anchored on '2 = strongly disagree' to '2 = strongly agree' was used.

Importance of marketing mix elements:

An approach similar to the one used in the past studies (e.g., Gaski and Etzel, 1986; Chan et al., 1990, Chan and Cui, 2004) was employed for ascertaining importance of marketing mix variables. Consumers were asked to indicate their perception of importance of each marketing mix element on a 5-point scale, with '1 = not at all important' to '5 = extremely important'.

Consumer perceptions of the need for government interventions and regulations:

Consumer attitude towards government interventions and regulations was measured through a four-item scale adapted from the study of Barksdale et al. (1982). Consumer responses to the scale were obtained on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from '2 = strongly disagree' to '2 = strongly agree'.

Consumer attitudes towards consumerism:

A three-item scale was adapted from the study of Barksdale et al. (1982) for measuring consumer attitude toward consumerism. A 5-point Likert scale anchored on '2 = strongly disagree' to '2 = strongly agree' was used.

The Sample

The questionnaire so developed was first pilot tested on a few consumers. Based on the comments and observations of the respondents, a few minor modifications were made in the questionnaire. Using quota sampling method, the final draft of the questionnaire was personally administered to 570 consumers during the period 2008-2009. A total of 503 filled in questionnaires were received, thus constituting a response rate of about 88.25 per cent. Of these, however, only 477 questionnaires were found suitable for use in the present study.

Table 1 contains information about the profile of respondents. It can be observed that the male and female respondents are more or less in a similar proportion (47.4 per cent and 52.6 per cent respectively). Age-wise too, respondents almost equally comprised three age groups: less than 25 years (34.0 per cent), 25-44 (39.4 per cent) and 45-64 (26.6 per cent). Education-wise, sample is found highly skewed towards graduates (89.1 per cent). There were very only few respondents with postgraduate (9.0 per cent) and professional (1.9 per cent) qualifications in the sample.

Table 1: Profile of Respondents

Characteristics	Percentage (n =477)
Gender:	
Male	47.4
Female	52.6
Age (years):	
Less than 25	34.0
25-44	39.4
45-64	26.6
Education:	
Graduate	89.1
Post-graduate	9.0
Professional qualification	1.9
Occupation	
Student	22.6
Housewife	28.1
Business	11.9
Professionals	30.6
Others	6.7

Source: Based on data collected through a survey of consumers in India.

Occupationally, the sample can be seen to comprise persons from different walks of life. While students constitute 22.6 per cent of the sample, the percentage shares of housewives, business persons, professionals and others are 28.1 per cent, 11.9 per cent, 30.6 per cent and 6.7 per cent respectively.

The collected data have been analysed with the help of various statistical techniques. The next section provides a brief description of the statistical measures used in the study along with the study findings.

Data Analysis and Results

Consumer Sentiment toward Marketing: Scale Reliability and Validity Assessment

Gaski and Etzel's (1986) 28-item scale has been used in the present study for measuring consumer sentiments towards marketing in India. The scale comprised four sub-scales, having seven items each to assess consumer attitudes towards four marketing Ps, viz., product quality, price, advertising and retailing/selling. Since the

scale has been found sensitive to differences across cultures in the past studies, an attempt was made to first assess its reliability and validity before putting it to use in the study.

Reliability and validity of Gaski and Etzel's (1986) scale were tested by employing the procedure used in the past studies (e.g., Gaski and Etzel, 1986; Wee and Chan, 1989; Chan *et al.*, 1990). First, the *reliability coefficients* for each of the four sub-scales were computed (after necessary re-coding of the scale items, wherever required). Though Cronbach alpha values for each of the scales were found above the threshold level of 0.70 as suggested by Nunnally (1978) for preliminary researches, the item-to-total correlation for one scale item (related to retailing/selling) was found to be lower than 0.40. This item was, therefore, dropped from the scale.

With a view to test the *discriminant validity*, remaining twenty-seven items were subjected to factor analysis, using principal component method with varimax rotation (eigen value > 1). Initially, a six-factor structure emerged, with as many as seven items (three from advertising sub-scale, two from quality sub-scale and one from retailing/selling sub-scale) having poor or cross loadings. These items were dropped from further analysis. The remaining twenty items were once again factor analysed. The analysis this time produced four distinct factors, with each factor having items pertaining to only a specific P and loading neatly on it, thus implying *construct validity* of each of the sub-scales.

Cronbach alpha coefficients were once again computed for each of the purified sub-scales. From the results presented in Table 2, it can be observed that each of the purified sub-scales is having a reliability coefficient greater than 0.70, thus indicating sufficiently high reliability of each of the sub-scales.

Table 2: Gaski and Etzel’s Consumer Sentiments towards Marketing Scale: Scale Purification and Reliability Coefficients

Scale	Items retained after purification	Number of scale items	Cronbach alpha (α) value
Product quality	3,4,5,7	4	0.84
Price	1,2,3,4,5,6,7	7	0.89
Advertising	1,4,5,7	4	0.77
Retailing	1,2,3,4,6	5	0.84

Source: Same as in Table 1.

Note: 1. A full description of the scale items retained in the present study is provided in Appendix - I.

Consumer Sentiments towards Marketing: Overall and Marketing Mix Elementwise Scores

Having purified the Gaski and Etzel scale and established its reliability and validity, overall score of consumer sentiments towards marketing was computed by adopting the approach suggested by Gaski and Etzel (1986). The following formula was used for computing the overall consumer sentiment towards marketing:

$$CSM(\text{overall}) = \sum_{j=1}^n (w_j \sum_{i=1}^m x_{ij})$$

where:

- x_{ij} = response to scale item i in category j ,
- w_j = importance weight for the marketing mix category j ,
- m = number of items in a category
- n = number of categories, viz., product, price, advertisement and retailing

The score calculated above relates to sentiments of an individual respondent. The mean scores across all the respondents were then computed as a general measure of consumer sentiment.

Since Gaski and Etzel’s scale after purification was based on four sub-scales with five items each, mean scores as per their computations range from -200 to 200. Because the number of items in each sub-scale after purification in this study is not five, an adjustment was required to be made in the formula so as to make the CMS scores of this study comparable to those of Gaski and Etzel’s scale. Chan et al (1990) have suggested a formula to arrive at comparable

scores. However, the formula could not be applied verbatim in this study due to variations in number of missing values across the scale items. A modification was, therefore, made in the formula to explicitly take care of the varying incidence of missing values across scale items. The objective was accomplished by replacing the part of the formula related to ‘division of total sum score of each individual by a fixed number equivalent to the number of items retained in the purified scale’ by ‘the mean score of the purified scale for a given individual respondent’. In the SPSS package, mean score computed for each individual was itself able to take care of the problem of missing value. The modified formula used in the present study to arrive at the scores comparable to those of Gaski and Etzel’s (1986) consumer sentiment scores is as follows:

$$CSM(\text{overall}) = \sum_{j=1}^n 5 * (w_j \bar{x}_j)$$

where:

- \bar{x}_j = mean score of responses to scale items in category j ,
- w_j = importance weight for the marketing mix category j ,
- n = number of categories, viz., product, price, advertisement and retailing

The CSM score so arrived represents the sentiments of an individual respondent. The mean sentiment score across all the respondents were calculated by summing up the individual scores and dividing the sum by the number of respondents. The results along with the mean perceived importance scores for each of the

marketing mix elements are reported in Table 3. An overall mean sentiment score of 19.85 is a pointer to a somewhat favourable attitude prevalent among the surveyed consumers towards marketing practices in India. Though on a scale of -200 to 200, the consumer perceptions about marketing do not appear to be that salutary, performance of marketing as per the judgement of

the consumers is nonetheless not that bad when viewed on a comparative basis with much lower or even negative scores (e.g., 2.97 for Hong Kong in 1989, - 26.15 for Australia in 1990, - 4.51 for the United States in 2001 and - 0.84 for China in 2002, - 8.62 for Bangladesh in 2008) reported in respect of other countries in past studies by Chan and Cui (2004) and Ferdous and Towfique (2008).

Table 3: Sentiments towards Marketing and Importance Perceptions about Marketing Mix Elements

	Mean scores	
	Consumer sentiment towards marketing ¹	Perception about marketing mix element importance ²
Product quality	6.50	4.73 (0.55)
Price	-10.01	4.42 (0.95)
Advertising	6.00	3.74 (1.20)
Retailing	18.26	3.36 (1.40)
Overall	19.85	-

Source: Same as in Table 1.

Notes: 1. While the range of mean sentiment scores for individual marketing mix elements is -50 to 50, it is -200 to 200 for the overall marketing sentiment index.

2. Scale used for assessing respondents' perception of importance of each of four Ps was anchored on '1 = not at all important' to '5 = extremely important'. Values within parentheses are standard deviations.

Past studies report variations in consumer attitudes towards marketing across marketing mix elements (e.g., Chan *et al.*, 1990; Chan and Cui, 2004; Jain and Goel, 2008; Ferdous and Towfique, 2008). Result of the present study too point to such variations (see Table 3). Retailing emerges as the most favourably perceived activity, followed by product quality and advertising. Pricing is found to be the only marketing area which the respondents have viewed negatively in the present study. A mean score of -10.01 implies consumer dissatisfaction with the marketers' contemporary pricing practices in India. Findings of this study thus support H_{1a} that variations exist in consumer sentiments towards four Ps.

Results presented in Table 3 also reveal variations present in the perceived importance of different marketing tools. In the perception of the respondents, product quality is the most important factor. Pricing comes next in order of

importance. Retailing and advertising are also important in the perception of the surveyed consumers, but the importance attached to these two marketing tools is relatively much less. The results thus lend support to H_{1b} that four Ps differ in their importance to the consumers.

Consumer Sentiments towards Marketing: Cross-sectional Results

Past studies have found consumer sentiments towards marketing to be varying across consumer demographic characteristics (Chan *et al.*, 1990; Chan and Cui, 2004; Ferdous and Towfique, 2008). Significance of variations in consumer sentiments towards marketing across four major demographic characteristics, (viz., gender, age, education and occupation) were examined in the present study with the help of ANOVA technique and the results are presented in Table 4. While gender is not found to be significantly related to consumer attitudes toward marketing, significant

variations ($p \leq 0.001$) can be observed among consumers belonging to different age, education and occupation groups. Attitudes towards marketing are most favourable for the consumers who are in the age group 25-44 years or are more qualified, have postgraduate degrees or professional qualifications. Furthermore, it is the professionals and persons having their own

business who can be seen to be holding most favourable opinion about the marketing practices in the country, with their sentiment scores being as high as 30.68 and 59.99 respectively. The attitudes of persons from other occupational groups such as students and housewives are much less positive or even negative. Findings of the study are largely in support of H_{1c} .

Table 4: Consumer Sentiments towards Marketing: ANOVA Results

Characteristics	Overall mean score	F-value	Sig. (p-value) ¹
<i>Gender:</i>			
Male	23.19		
Female	16.31	1.64	0.20
<i>Age (years):</i>			
Less than 25	13.53		
25-44	33.76		
45-64	7.90	9.15	0.00***
<i>Education:</i>			
Graduate	15.86		
Post-graduate	55.65		
Professional qualification	54.88	10.28	0.00***
<i>Occupation:</i>			
Student	6.25		
Housewife	-10.78		
Business	30.68		
Professionals	59.99		
Others	-1.98	38.86	0.00***

Source: Same as in Table 1.

Note: 1. Asterisk marks indicates the level of significance: *** $p \leq 0.001$

Consumer Satisfaction with Marketing

Consumers were asked to report their level of satisfaction with each of the areas of marketing. Single-item scales anchored on a 5-point Likert scale ('1 = very dissatisfied' to '5 = very satisfied') were used to measure consumer satisfaction with each marketing mix variable. A reliability analysis was performed on the four-item scale and it revealed scale to be having a lower reliability (Cronbach alpha value being just 0.60). Even the item-to-total correlation for as many as three of the four scale items has turned out to be lower than 0.40. Dropping all the three items would have made the scale meaningless. Since even in

previous study the same scale has been used, it was decided to retain this four-item scale for measuring consumer overall satisfaction with marketing. The results of the study in respect of relationship of consumer overall satisfaction with marketing, however, need to be interpreted cautiously.

Table 5 reports the mean scores for each marketing element as well as for all the elements taken together. The overall mean satisfaction score is 2.99, indicating a feeling of indifference prevailing among the consumers. Similar is the case with product quality element that has a mean score of 2.95. In respect of other marketing areas,

however, consumers appear satisfied. Retailing is the element which in the opinion of the respondents is the most satisfying marketing activity. The mean satisfaction score for retailing is 3.50. Advertising comes next in terms of satisfaction level (mean score being 3.13).

Consumers have expressed only marginal satisfaction with pricing element (mean score being 2.39). Presence of varying levels consumer satisfaction with marketing mix elements provides support to H_{1d}.

Table 5: Consumer Satisfaction with Marketing

	Cronbach alpha value (α)	Mean	S.D.
Product quality		2.95	1.37
Price		2.39	1.27
Advertising		3.13	1.57
Retailing		3.50	1.34
Scale reliability and mean score	0.60	2.99	0.94

Source: Same as in Table 1.

Note: 1.Consumer satisfaction with each of four Ps was measured on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from '1 = very dissatisfied' to '5 = very satisfied'.

Consumer Beliefs about Business Philosophy

Consumer attitudes towards business philosophy have been measured through four-item scale adapted from the previous studies (Barksdale and Darden, 1972; Gaski and Etzel, 1986). Since the items included in the scale closely related to the domain of consumer oriented marketing practices, these attitudes in the past studies have also been referred to as consumer beliefs about 'marketing in general'.

A preliminary analysis of the scale items revealed all the items to be having item-to-total correlations greater than 0.40 and all these items loaded on a single factor in the factor analysis. Hence, all the four items were retained. Cronbach alpha value of the scale was found to be 0.88, thus

signifying a fairly high level of scale reliability.

An overall mean score of -0.62 points to negative attitudes prevalent among the consumers about the business philosophy (see Table 6). Feelings are similar even in respect of each of the four scale items. While the consumers have expressed their disagreement with the first statement 'most firms operate on the philosophy that the consumer is always right' (mean score being -0.42), their agreement with the rest of the three statements imply that firms are not responsive to the consumer needs and interests. In the opinion of the surveyed respondents, business firms are rather guided by the philosophy of 'let the buyer be beware'. The firms, moreover, shirk responsibility towards consumers and are perceived to be more preoccupied with making profits rather than serving consumers.

Table 6: Consumer Beliefs about Business Philosophy

Scale item/scale ²	Cronbach alpha value (α)	Mean	S.D.
Most firms operate on the philosophy that the consumer is always right.		-0.42	1.38
Most firms are guided by the philosophy that 'Let the buyer beware'. (R)		0.65	1.28
Most firms seldom shirk their responsibility to the consumer. (R)		0.58	1.33

Most firms are more interested in making profits than serving consumers. (R)		0.83	1.22
Scale reliability and mean score³	0.88	-0.62	1.11

Source: Same as in Table 1.

Notes: 1. Consumer beliefs about business philosophy/ marketing in general have been assessed on a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from '-2 = strongly disagree' to '2 = strongly agree'.

2. Scale items marked 'R' in parentheses are the ones that have been reverse coded at the time of computation of mean scale scores.

3. Mean score rather than a summated scale score has been reported so as to facilitate a direct comparison of overall score with the individual item mean scores.

Consumer Perceptions Regarding Need for Government Interventions and Regulations

Consumer attitudes towards government interventions and regulations were measured through use of a four-item scale adapted from the study of Barksdale et al. (1982). The scale is found to be reliable, with Cronbach alpha value being 0.81. Item-to-total correlations for all the four items were found to be higher than 0.40. A factor analysis of these items produced a simple one factor structure. All the four items, therefore, were retained in the final analysis.

An overall mean score of 1.78 suggests a strong perception among the consumers about the need for government interventions and regulations to protect their interests. Be it supply of information about the product quality on a comparative basis, laying down of minimum quality standards, greater regulation of product price, advertising, sales and other marketing activities, or serving consumer interests through a central consumer protection agency – all such government interventions in the opinion of the surveyed consumers are imperative for safeguarding the consumer interests.

Table 7: Consumer Perceptions of Need for Government Interventions and Regulations

Scale item/scale	Cronbach alpha value (α)	Mean	S.D.
The government should test competing brands of products and make the results of these tests available to consumers.		1.82	0.54
The government should set minimum standards of quality for all products sold to consumers.		1.75	0.52
The government should exercise more responsibility for regulating the prices, advertising, sales and other marketing activities.		1.73	0.55
- A central agency for consumer protection at national level is needed to protect and promote consumer interests.		1.79	0.79
Scale reliability and mean score²	0.81	1.78	0.42

Source: Same as in Table 1.

Notes: 1. Consumer perceptions of need for government interventions and regulations have been assessed on a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from '-2 = strongly disagree' to '2 = strongly agree'.

2. Mean score rather than a summated scale score has been reported so as to facilitate a direct comparison of overall score with the individual item mean scores.

Consumer Attitudes towards Consumerism

A three-item scale was adapted from the study of Barksdale et al. (1982) for measuring consumer attitudes toward consumerism. During the reliability analysis phase, however, one item was found to be having lower than the threshold level of item-to-total correlation. Hence, that item was dropped. The rest of the two items were factor analysed and found to be loading on a single factor. Cronbach alpha value was once again

computed for the two-item scale and it was found to be fairly high, i.e., 0.80.

The results presented in Table 8 amply point to the beliefs prevalent among the surveyed consumers that exploitation of consumers by the business firms is a grave concern and needs to be dealt with more seriousness. Consumers, moreover, are the opinion that protection of consumer interest is likely to gain further momentum in future.

Table 8: Consumer Attitudes towards Consumerism

Scale item/scale	Cronbach alpha value (α)	Mean	S.D.
The exploitation of consumers by business firms deserves more attention than it receives.		1.61	0.70
In future, protecting consumer interest will be more important.		<u>1.64</u>	<u>0.62</u>
Scale reliability and mean score²	0.80	<u>1.63</u>	<u>0.60</u>

Source: Same as in Table 1.

Notes: 1. Consumer attitudes towards consumerism have been assessed on a 5-point Likert Scale, ranging from '-2 = strongly disagree' to '2 = strongly agree'.
 2. Mean score rather than a summated scale score has been reported so as to facilitate a direct comparison of overall score with the individual item mean scores.

Consumer Satisfaction with Marketing: Regression Analysis

Past studies report consumer satisfaction with marketing being dependent upon consumer sentiments towards marketing and consumer beliefs about business (Chan and Cue, 2004; Ferdous and Towfique, 2008). With a view to examine the impact of these two latter variables on customer satisfaction with marketing construct, multiple regression analysis of customer overall mean satisfaction scores on the consumer sentiments towards marketing (overall mean scores) and consumer beliefs about business philosophy (overall mean scores) was carried out.

The results are presented in Table 9. Adjusted R² value is 0.39 and is significant ($p \leq 0.001$), implying thereby that the two independent variables taken together are able to significantly explain about 40 per cent of the variations present in the consumer satisfaction with marketing. Both the independent variables are positively and significantly ($p \leq 0.001$) related to customer satisfaction, with consumer beliefs about business philosophy acting as a more important determinant. The results thus provide support in favour of H_{2a} and H_{2b}.

Table 9: Consumer Satisfaction with Marketing: Regression Results

	β	t-statistic	Sig. (p-value) ¹
<i>Dependent variable:</i>			
Consumer satisfaction with marketing			
<i>Independent variables:</i>			

- Consumer sentiments towards marketing		0.20***	5.29	0.00
- Consumer beliefs about business philosophy		0.53***	13.66	0.00
Model statistics	Adjusted R ² = 0.39, F = 150.60***, p = 0.00			

Source: Same as in Table 1.

Note: 1. Asterisk marks indicates the level of significance: *** p ≤ 0.001

Consumer Perceptions Regarding Need for Government Interventions and Regulations: Regression Analysis

Consumer perceptions of the need for government regulations are expected to depend on consumer satisfaction with marketing. With a view to determine the statistical significance of this relationship, mean scores of the consumer

attitudes towards government interventions and regulations were regressed on the mean scores of consumer overall satisfaction with marketing. The results presented in Table 10 in respect of Model-I fail to support this relationship (H_{3a}). Not only the value of adjusted R² is nil and insignificant, even the beta value of the regression coefficient is very low and insignificant.

Table 10: Perceived Need for Government Regulations: Regression Results

	Model-I			Model-II		
	β	t-statistic	Sig. (p-value) ¹	β	t-statistic	Sig. (p-value) ¹
<i>Dependent variable:</i>						
Perceived need for government interventions and regulations						
<i>Independent variables:</i>						
- Consumer satisfaction with marketing	0.02	0.89	0.37	0.05	0.86	0.39
- Consumer beliefs about business philosophy				-0.19	-3.33	0.00***
- Consumer sentiments towards marketing				0.25	5.03	0.00***
Model statistics	Adjusted R ² = 0.000, F = 0.80, p = 0.37			Adjusted R ² = 0.06, F = 10.82***, p = 0.00		

Source: Same as in Table 1.

Note: 1. Asterisk marks indicates the level of significance: *** p ≤ 0.001

In order to further investigate the possibility of influence of satisfaction variable in juxtaposition with two other independent variables, another set of regression analysis was performed. The dependent variable (i.e., perceived need for governmental interventions and regulations) was this time regressed on a set of

three independent variables, viz., consumer satisfaction with marketing, consumer beliefs about business philosophy and consumer sentiments toward marketing (overall mean scores). Model-II represents a marked improvement over the previous regression analysis (see Table 10). The value of adjusted R² is

significant ($p \leq 0.001$), but it is very low (just 0.06 per cent), thus implying an overall poor explanatory power of the multiple regression analysis. While the independent variable 'consumer satisfaction with marketing' continues to remain insignificant, the two other independent variables emerge as highly significant determinants ($p \leq 0.001$) of consumer perceptions of the need for government regulations. As expected, consumer beliefs about the government philosophy are found negatively related to consumer perceptions of government interventions. But the results in respect of other independent variable (consumer sentiments toward marketing) are somewhat surprising. Though the variable 'consumer sentiments toward marketing' turns out to be a more important determinant, it bears a positive relationship with the dependent variable, implying thereby that more favourable the consumers are in their attitudes towards marketing, more strongly they feel the need for government regulations.

We thus find that while H_{3a} is not accepted, the results of the study are in support of H_{3b} and H_{3c} .

Discussion and Managerial Implications

The Indian marketplace has undergone a substantial metamorphosis during the last two decades. Due to its huge population and rapid growth in GDP, India today has emerged as one of the big emerging markets. Competition has considerably increased from both the local and international sources. Newer and more cost effective channels have emerged to communicate with the customers and deliver product and services to them. Alongside there has been a surge in the consumerism in the country. Consumers have become more demanding and choosy over time. In such a changed scenario, it becomes imperative to assess as to what consumers think about prevailing marketing practices and to glean insights that can be helpful in evolving marketing strategies that are conducive to the satisfaction and welfare of the consumers in future in the country.

It is against this backdrop that a survey of consumers located in and around Delhi was carried out. The analysis of the collected data yield a mean consumer sentiment score of 19.85. Though the score stand just only marginally above the point of neutrality on a scale of -200 to 200, performance of marketing in India nonetheless does not appear to be that bleak. Much lower or even negative mean sentiment scores observed in past studies in respect of countries like USA, Australia, Hong Kong and China point to a much favourable opinion prevailing in India about the performance of marketing.

On a disaggregative level, the situation is not found all that satisfactory. The study finds significant variations present in consumer sentiments towards marketing across the marketing mix elements. While consumer opinion is found to be most favourable about retailing and only marginally favourable with product quality and advertising, it is found to be unfavourable in respect of pricing. No doubt consumer feelings about retailing, product quality and advertising are positive, considerably low mean sentiment scores in respect of these elements point to ample scope for improvement at these fronts. Pricing is one element that deserves utmost attention. Despite growing income and prosperity, consumers in India in general continue to be extremely price sensitive. Marketers, especially the multinational corporations, need to be extra careful in devising their pricing policies and strategies. They should try pricing their products in a way that is both affordable and acceptable to the Indian consumers.

The study also finds differences existing in consumer perceptions about the importance of different marketing mix elements. Product quality and price in the perceptions of the consumers are the two most important considerations, followed distantly by advertising and retailing elements, and in that order. An obvious implication of this finding to the marketers is the importance they need to attach to different marketing mix elements at the time of formulation of their marketing strategies. As per the sentiments prevailing among consumers, product quality and pricing considerations deserve greater attention than

retailing or advertising in the overall marketing programmes of the companies.

The study finds consumers to be differing in their sentiments toward marketing across their demographic characteristics. While gender has not emerged as a significant antecedent, consumer sentiments toward marketing are found significantly related to age, educational and occupational characteristics of the surveyed consumers. Image of marketing is found spectacularly far more impressive among the consumers who are in the '25-44' age group, have postgraduate and professional qualifications or are either professionals or in business. But it is found to be much less favourable or even negative amongst the relatively younger (less than 25 years) as well as older consumers (45 and above), less educated and unemployed persons such as students and housewives. Since a major chunk of the country's population demographically comprised persons who are in the present study found to be having poor or unfavourable image about marketing, marketers in future need to work hard in understanding the socio-economic background and mind-set of such consumers and evolve policies capable of catering to the consumption pattern and life aspirations of these groups of consumers.

Consumer satisfaction is found to be differing across marketing mix elements. Similar to the results obtained in respect of consumer sentiments towards different marketing mix elements, consumer satisfaction is found to be the highest in respect of retailing and advertising aspects of marketing. In respect of product quality, consumers have expressed a state of indifference. But with pricing, they appear quite discontented. The findings once again point to the need for giving utmost importance to pricing and product quality issues. As suggested earlier, manufactures need to fix prices in a way that is affordable and acceptable to the consumers. Marketers also need to intensively invest efforts and time in improving quality of their products in future.

According to the surveyed consumers, customer orientation is not the guiding

philosophy of business firms in India. Most business firms rather operate on the philosophy of 'let the buyer beware' and view consumers as not being right in their demands. Firms mostly shirk their responsibility in meeting customer needs and are too often busy accomplishing their profit goals than serving the consumer interests. Little wonder that the consumers are strongly in favour of greater government regulations and interventions to ensure a fair deal to them in future. Consumers have also exuded optimism in consumerism. They do feel that consumerism will further gain momentum and consumer exploitation issues would receive much more attention in future.

In the wake of Indian marketplace becoming fiercely competitive and consumers becoming more and more discerning and aware of their interests and rights, it is becoming imperative for the business firms to reorient their business philosophy from that of operating on the premise of 'let the buyer be beware' to that of developing customer intimacy and providing customer satisfaction. Many a firm have already borne the brunt of being ousted from the market because of neglecting customers in their policies and practices, and many more will see such an ouster in near future if they fail to timely gear themselves up to the task of taking utmost care of their customers and delivering maximum possible satisfaction to them.

The study finds consumer sentiments towards marketing as well as their beliefs about business/marketing philosophy to be significantly related to customer satisfaction with marketing. Perceived need for government interventions and regulations is also found to be highly and significantly dependent on consumer sentiments towards marketing and consumer beliefs about business philosophy. In view of the significant importance of consumer attitudes towards marketing and their satisfaction with marketing to their perceived need for government interventions and regulations, it will be a desirable move if the information about consumer attitudes toward marketing and beliefs about business philosophy is periodically collected so that marketers and policy makers know how well

is marketing doing in the perceptions of consumers and what are the areas which need corporate level and government level interventions.

Study Limitations and Directions for Future Research

Like any other study, this study has a few limitations. Firstly, the analysis in the study is based on the data collected from a survey of respondents living in Delhi and NCR region. Findings of the study, therefore, cannot be generalised to the population of the country as a whole. Consumer attitudes, moreover, are expected to vary across industries. It will be in the fitness of things that studies in future are carried out with samples drawn from different parts of the countries and across industry and product groups.

The present study has made only a modest attempt to assess the reliability and validity of the consumer sentiment towards marketing scale in the Indian context. Use of structural equation modelling can be of great help in more robustly examining its psychometric properties and also taking care of direct as well as mediating and moderating effects of other constructs on the consequences of consumer sentiments towards marketing

Reliability of the four-item consumer satisfaction scale is found to be less than satisfactory. Till the time a more reliable and valid scale is developed, it will be desirable in future studies to perform regression analysis separately on each one of its constituent items (relating to individual marketing mix elements) rather than on the overall mean satisfaction scores derived through summation of scores of the four scale items.

A lot of changes have taken place in the marketing system the world over since the time Gaski and Etzel's (1986) scale was developed (Jain and Goel, 1998). Newer marketing institutions and modes such as modern retail outlets and e-commerce have emerged on the scene. Service sector has also gained importance. Efforts are,

therefore, called for to modify the consumer sentiment scale by including into it additional items and dimensions as are capable of more exhaustively tapping the domain of contemporary marketing world.

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Appendix I

Gaski and Etzel's (1986) Consumer Sentiments towards Marketing Scale: Items Retained after Scale Purification and Validation

Scale/ scale items
Product quality
3. Most products I buy wear out too quickly. (R)
4. Products are not made as well as they used to be. (R)
5. Too many of the products I buy are defective in some way. (R)
7. The quality of products I buy has consistently improved over years.
Price
1. Most products I buy are overpriced. (R)
2. Firms can charge lower price and still be profitable. (R)
3. Keeping in view prevailing wage rates and income levels, most consumer products are priced fairly.
4. Competition between companies keeps prices reasonable.
5. Companies are unjustified in charging the prices they charge. (R)
6. Most prices are fair.
7. In general, I am satisfied with the prices I pay.
Advertising
1. Most advertising provides consumers with essential information.
4. If most advertising was eliminated, consumers would be better off. (R)
5. I enjoy most advertisements.
7. Generally, advertised products are more dependable than unadvertised ones.
Retailing/Distribution
1. Most retail stores serve their customers well.
2. Because of the way retailers treat me, most of my shopping is unpleasant. (R)
3. I find most retail salespeople to be very helpful.
4. Most retail stores provide an adequate selection of merchandise.
6. When I need assistance in a store, I am usually not able to get it. (R)