



RESEARCH ARTICLE

INFLUENCE OF PEER PRESSURE ON BRAND SWITCHING AMONG INDIAN COLLEGE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

Reference groups play a determinative role in shaping general consumer behaviour. Peers exercise a strong impact on purchase decisions of the youth by providing invaluable information and feedback regarding different products and brands. The study aimed to identify the drivers of and barriers to brand switching among college students in India, and check for the influence of peer pressure on brand switching in the context of four product categories – mobile network, ice cream, deodorant and movie theatre. The authors conducted a survey of 70 college students to find out the prevalence of brand switching and investigate the drivers behind it, especially those related to peer group behaviour. There was a positive relationship between peers using a brand or favouring a brand and the consumer switching to that brand. The survey responses also revealed that sharing of brand opinions was correlated with brand switching, thereby reinforcing the strength of peer pressure.

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INTRODUCTION

Peer pressure refers to the pressure wielded by a group of people of same age group, sharing similar interests and/ or belonging to same socio-cultural category on a person to alter his/her behaviour, attitudes and values to be in conformity with the group norms (Lessig and Park, 1978; Schiffman and Kanuk, 2007). Peers belong to the normative reference group who serve as a cornerstone for people's judgements through direct interaction. Peer group has a substantial influence on both pre and post purchase behaviour among the youth. They change their choices, consciously or subconsciously, when surrounded by others with conflicting opinions. They act or think in a particular way to be accepted and approved, and also to avoid being isolated (Batra *et al.*, 1994; Lashbrook, 2000). Brand switching occurs when a person opts for a product of a different brand than that he/she usually buys. It is generally seen in the product categories that offer similar quality products under different brand names. The three main focal points which have been widely studied regarding factors which influence brand switching are - situational context, marketing mix variables and the type of customer. Customers' perception of and attitudes towards any brand vary based on situational factors. Factors such as shifts in lifestyle, present stage of life and mental state of a customer can affect his/ her decision in going for a new brand for the purpose of novelty or variety. Marketers often use lucrative blend of marketing mix elements, namely product, price, promotion, distribution and services, to induce brand switching in their favour. Rowley (2005) proposed that customers can be grouped into following four

categories on the basis of their loyalty to a brand- captive (who have no satisfying alternatives), convenience seekers (loyalty to any brand is affected by their lifestyle), contended (satisfied but no increase in consumption over time) and committed (active both in attitude and behaviour). Mostly the first two types of customers are quick to jump to newer brands and are targeted by the marketers.

There are fundamentally three models of brand switching. Zero step model is seen when customer's preference towards buying a product is unaffected by past experience. The second model involves Markovian stochastic process in which the evaluation of last purchase by the customer affects his/her present purchase. Finally, there is the three choice model prepared by McCarthy where, the customer has future and substitute choice of brands too, along with present one. Those alternatives are selected in case present brand does not provide adequate satisfaction. Peer pressure not only shapes purchase behaviour of young people but also makes them evaluate their choices. The purpose of this study is to investigate the extent to which peer pressure affects brand switching among young customers. Specifically it focuses on analysing how peer pressure affects purchase decision in switching between the brands of mobile service provider, ice-cream, deodorant and movie theatres.

Literature Review

Reference group, i.e. people who act as a reference point for a consumer and with whom the consumer shares common values, plays a major role in influencing the final purchase decision of the consumer (Bourne, 1957). It's the reference group that decides what is suitable and what is not (Shim,

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1996; Bristol and Mangleburg, 2005). Burnkrant and Cousineau (1975), Bearden and Etzel (1982) and Brinberg and Plimpton (1986) developed a classification of product and brand decisions to identify the factors that decided how strongly a reference group could affect a consumer's purchase decision. They identified several individual and group characteristics as factors, and asserted the importance of opinion leaders who were approached for information or advice. Moschis (1985) studied the influence of family and peers on purchase decisions of adolescents. It was observed that adolescents learnt about rational buying from their parents and their influence differed according to product used, situation and stage of decision making process. Park and Lesig (1977) developed a 14-point scale to measure reference group influence by dividing it into categories of informational, utilitarian and value expressive. Previous literature has shown that peer pressure has a stronger effect on the judgement of adolescent or teenage customers in comparison to those of adults (Park and Lessig, 1977; Miller, 2002; Elliott and Leonard, 2004; Evans, 2004). Guber and Berry (1993) found that adolescents are more interested in symbolic goods than non-symbolic goods. It's also observed that peer pressure is more effective in cases where the child spends more time out of home, family communication is weak and socially oriented and/or family environment is not stable (Roedder, 1999; Feltham, 1998). It also depends on the stage of life of youngsters (Bravo, Fraz and Martinez, 2007). Childers and Rao (1992) studied how peer influence varies across different cultures and races. They found that the impact of peer pressure was higher among US university students, compared to those in Thailand, where family influence was higher. The behaviour of students in Thailand was similar for both luxuries and necessities. Kim and Kang (2001) studied the purchase behaviour of blacks, Hispanics and whites in the US cities of Los Angeles, New York and Chicago. They found that ethnicity had an effect on the extent of influence of media, reference groups and store attributes while making a purchase.

Peers also govern socialization of the youth and brand association (Pilgrim and Lawrence, 2001; Lachance, Beaudoin and Robitaille, 2003). Peer group provides them with a number of alternatives to choose from while making a purchase (Peel and Dansereau, 1998; Gunter and Furnham, 1998). When a customer is not sure about the purchasing a brand, probability of his brand switching due to peer pressure increases (Feltham, 1998). Young people remain in regular contact with their peers. Continuing with the brand and brand switching depends on testimony and approval of the peer group (Gounaris and Stathakopoulos, 2004). Several studies have focused on how the influence of peers varies across product categories on the basis of conspicuousness (Lessig and Park, 1978; Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Brinberg and Plimpton, 1986; Childers and Rao, 1992; Bachmann *et al.*, 1993). Conspicuousness of a product depends on two attributes. The first attribute is the degree to which the product is a luxury or a necessity, the former being more conspicuous. The second attribute is the degree to which the product has public or private usage – publicly consumed products being more conspicuous. Peer pressure is found to be higher for more conspicuous goods. (Bearden and Etzel, 1982; Childers and Rao, 1992). Some studies have focused on the salient influence of peer pressure on the purchase of branded products. Specifically, the relationship of peer pressure and

brand sensitivity for fashionable clothes and athletic shoes has been analyzed. (Subramanian and Subramanian, 1995; Lavanche *et al.*, 2003; Yoh, 2005).

Mazursky, LaBarbera and Aiello (1987) and Jones, Mothersbaugh and Beatty (2000) studied the reasons behind brand switching, and determined the impact of extrinsic factors and the desire for novelty. Jones, Mothersbaugh and Beatty (2000) studied about the switching barriers that prevented consumers from changing the service provider, out of which switching cost, interpersonal relations and competitor's attractiveness were found to have the most impact. Monroe (1971) and Martin and Bush (2000) showed that adolescents disregard peer choices when they locate cheaper products. Other researchers have analysed the factors affecting the switching decision like marketing mix variables, situational factors and factors related to customer lifestyle (Miller and Ginter, 1979; McAlister, 1982 and Morgan and Dev, 1994). Carpenter and Lehmann (1985) brought out the inter relationship between marketing mix, switching and competition. Shi, Cheung and Prendergast (2005) studied how different promotional tools affected switching and found price discount, 'Buy 1, get 1 free' schemes and in-store demo being the most effective measures. Lin, Wang and Hsieh (2003) divided customers into 3 categories (satisfied switchers, dissatisfied switchers and stayers) on the basis of their satisfaction with their prior product and attitude towards switching. Rajkumar, and Dr. Charlas (2012) theoretically studied brand switching behaviour of consumers in Fast Moving Consumer Goods sector. They found that by providing good quality products and fulfilling promotional promises, marketers can avoid brand switching due to dissatisfaction. They also recommended creating a good brand image so as to not only retain current consumers but also attract potential customers to buy their products. Arvind Sahay and Nivedita Sharma (2010) examined the influence of peers, family, brand relationship and price changes on switching intentions of young consumers. They discovered that younger age group customers have a more passionate relationship with brands while older people relate more rationally with the brands, making the former group an easy target for marketers to lure. Price consideration and family influence dominated peer influence on youth during purchase. Price seemed to be more relevant than brand relationship in switching decisions. Makgosa and Mohube (2007) investigated the type and extent of impact of peers on buying behaviour of young adults over different product categories. They studied both informational and normative influence in the purchase of public and private luxury products and public and private necessities. They found that there was more informational influence for public and private luxuries and public necessities. In case of private necessities, peer pressure did not have a significant effect.

Danny T Kao and Lei Zhang (n.d.) found that culture has a substantial effect on brand loyalty of adolescents. New Zealand adolescents made their own choices in brands and their behavioural brand loyalty was not affected by peer pressure, though it influenced their attitudinal loyalty. Marketers were suggested to use external marketing strategies to ensure repeat purchase. In case of their Chinese counterparts, though attitudinal loyalty was not affected much by peer pressure, it did bring about a change in their behavioural loyalty.

Marketers were suggested to use appropriate promotional measures combining both sporty looks and price effectiveness.

METHODS

Deciding on scope

For analysing the influence of peers on brand switching during purchase, 4 different categories of products and services were chosen, namely mobile service provider, ice-cream, deodorant and movie theatre. This was done to ensure that both products and services, with different usage patterns (deodorant and SIM being used on daily basis, ice cream at a lower frequency and seasonality, and movie theatre with the lowest frequency) were examined to see if consumer behaviour varied across them. Another aspect that was taken into consideration was pricing of the selected products to have a reasonable range for study.

Questionnaire Design

Due care was taken in developing a suitable questionnaire that would serve the purpose of the study by focussing equally on various facets of brand switching on one hand and ascertaining the effect of peer pressure on switching. Respondents were asked if they had tried out new brands in the given product categories during the past 6 months. The time period was kept at 6 months, to ensure they could easily recall the last switching decision taken by them, as well as their experience with their previous brand. The duration was neither too short to include switching instances in each case, nor too long to hamper recall. Direct questioning about the influence of peers on purchase decisions was avoided. This precautionary measure was taken to avoid any bias in responses and to get a 'truer' assessment of the effect of peer pressure. If asked directly, respondents might have misstated the extent of impact of peers on their decision making, and could have portrayed their purchase decisions to be independent of the opinions of their friends. So, indirect questions were included in the questionnaire, like those about how many of their friends used the same brand as them, what were the opinions of their friends regarding their brand, etc. Price is an important factor affecting purchase decisions in a market like India and therefore the survey questionnaire looked at it from multiple angles. One of the questions asked respondents about the reasons for their change of brand, and tried to ascertain whether price was a key criterion for switching. Then, another question tried to compare price of current brand of switchers with that of previous brand, to check if they could have considered price, in addition to other factors, while going for the change. Another question tried to gauge whether the switchers would stick to their decision of brand change in case of future price changes of their current brand or previous brand. This question aimed to evaluate the strength of price as a driver of switching, or whether it could overrule other drivers. Apart from price, other factors which can induce brand switching were also looked into. Three more options were given in the question inquiring about the possible reasons for people having changed their brand. Nowadays, youth are not ready to compromise on quality of the products they use, and that's why it was included as a factor. To survive the cut throat competition in the market, firms selling similar products tend to rely on attractive deals/

offers to draw in new customers and hence offers/ deals was included as an alternative. Finally, with the wide range of brands available in the market today, the desire for change or the desire to try something new was included as a factor. Two questions about the prior brand of switchers were also asked. The first one sought to find out the duration of usage of previous brand to see how quickly people shifted between brands and check for evidence of brand loyalty resulting from prolonged use. The second one dealt with the level of satisfaction of switchers with their previous brand, to see whether switching occurred despite people being satisfied with their prior brand.

A question relating to satisfaction of switchers with their current brand was also included in the questionnaire. This would help determine whether the people were content with the change of brand or if they were regretting their decision. In case of them regretting the brand change, the question asked whether they wanted to go back to their previous brand or try something new altogether. Finally, questions on sharing of views about brands with friends and activity of people on social media were included in the questionnaire. The use of social networking sites makes sharing brand related information and experiences easier and, if frequented on regular basis, it can have substantial impact on choices of people while making purchases. Sharing opinions, directly and/or indirectly, does have a compounded effect on the mindset of people, thus enhancing or diminishing a brand's image over time.

Sample

The authors collected data for the study by conducting a survey among the graduate students of V.Y.T PG College in Durg and Bhilai Mahila Mahavidyalaya in Bhilai (Chhattisgarh, India). In all, about 80 students of the college voluntarily participated in the survey. 70 questionnaires were answered in full and in the proper way, and their responses were analyzed. College students were chosen for the study of brand switching, as this group proved to be most advantageous from many standpoints. They have increasingly become brand conscious with the growing power of mass media, the need to keep up with demands of modern lifestyle and desire to enhance their self image through use of high quality products. They are also more susceptible to peer pressure as they interact with peers on a daily basis and spend a good deal of time with them, in and out of college. With their new found financial independence through part time jobs or pocket money from parents, they are being able to exercise their choices while purchasing things, unlike their school days when they left most of such decisions on elders.

Data Analysis

Microsoft Excel was used to analyse the data collected from the survey. Pivot tables were used to summarise and classify the data obtained from each question, in such a way that not only the overall response patterns could be seen, but gender wise filtering could also be used to find if there was any significant difference between the responses of the genders.

RESULTS

Prevalence of brand switching

The first question aimed to identify respondents who had switched brands, i.e. had tried out a new brand, for one or more of the 4 products in the six months prior to the survey. Based on the responses as shown in Table 1, we see that 56% of the respondents surveyed had either changed their SIM to a new brand or got an additional one of a different brand in that period. Among females, the percentage of switching was 50% and it was 63% among the males. 59% of respondents surveyed had switched their ice cream brand (66% of females and 50% of males). 56% of respondents had switched their deodorant brand (50% of females and 63% of males). 41% of respondents had switched their movie theatre brand in the prior six months (37% of females and 47% of males). Based on the numbers shown in Table 2, 93% of the respondents (65 out of 70) had switched their brand of one or more products. Of these 65 brand switchers, 49 respondents, i.e. three-fourths had changed their brand for multiple products. On average, every switcher has switched brands for 2.3 products out of 4.

Table 1. Brand switching by product

Product	Brand Switchers		
	Female	Male	All
Mobile SIM	19	20	39
Ice cream	25	16	41
Deodorant	19	20	39
Movie Theatre	14	15	29

Notes:

- Above questions were asked to all respondents (N = 70)
- Survey sample included 38 female respondents and 32 male

Table 2. Brand switching by number of products

Number of Products	Number respondents who had switched brands		
	Female	Male	All
None of the 4 products	3	2	5
1 out of 4 products	11	5	16
2 out of 4 products	8	12	20
3 out of 4 products	14	10	24
All 4 products	2	3	5

Notes:

- Above questions were asked to all respondents (N = 70)
- Survey sample included 38 female respondents and 32 male

Table 3. Responses to survey questions on friends' usage & experience of respondent's current brand

Survey Responses	Mobile SIM			Ice cream			Deodorant			Movie Theatre		
	F	M	All	F	M	All	F	M	All	F	M	All
I. Friends using their current brand												
None of them	4(-)	-(-)	4(-)	-(-)	2(1)	2 (1)	2(-)	5(2)	7(2)	4(1)	1(-)	5(1)
Some of them	20(10)	11(7)	31(17)	15(7)	12(2)	27(9)	12(4)	9(4)	21(8)	17(3)	16(3)	33(6)
Most of them	12(9)	21(13)	33(22)	21(18)	15(11)	36(29)	19(15)	17(14)	36(29)	12(10)	15(12)	27(22)
Don't know	2(-)	-(-)	2(-)	2(-)	3(2)	5(2)	5(-)	1(-)	6(-)	5(-)	-(-)	5(-)
II. Friends' experiences with their current brand												
Not good	3(1)	-(-)	3(1)	2(-)	-(-)	2(-)	2(1)	1(1)	3(2)	2(-)	-(-)	2(-)
Average	6(1)	6(3)	12(4)	5(1)	9(2)	14(3)	11(3)	4(2)	15(5)	11(2)	6(1)	17(3)
Good	17(12)	16(9)	33(21)	14(12)	12(6)	26(18)	12(8)	7(4)	19(12)	12(7)	11(5)	23(12)
Very good	9(5)	10(8)	19(13)	15(12)	8(6)	23(18)	10(7)	15(12)	25(19)	8(5)	12(8)	20(13)
Don't know	3(-)	-(-)	3(-)	2(-)	3(2)	5(2)	3(-)	5(1)	8(1)	5(-)	3(1)	8(1)

Notes:

- Above questions were asked to all respondents (N = 70)
- Survey sample included 38 female respondents and 32 male
- Numbers in brackets indicates number of respondents who had switched brands

Friends' usage and experience of brands influencing switching

The next question was about the extent to which respondents' friends were using their current brand, i.e. the new brand for those who had switched, and the current brand for non-switchers. For all 4 products, as can be seen from the numbers in Table 3 (Part I), a majority of those who had switched brands had a "most of their friends" using their new brand (56% of SIM brand switchers, 71% ice cream, about 75% of both deodorant brand switchers and movie theatre brand switchers). Of the non-switchers, a smaller proportion had "most of their friends" using their brand (36%, 24%, 23% and 12% of SIM, ice cream, deodorant and theatre brand switchers respectively). A larger proportion had "some of their friends" using their brand (45%, 62%, 42% and 67% of SIM, ice cream, deodorant and theatre brand switchers respectively). The third question checked what respondents' friends' experiences had been with their current brand. Of those who had switched brands, four-fifths or more said their friends had had 'very good' or 'good' experience with their new brand (87%, 88%, 80% and 86% of SIM, ice cream, deodorant and theatre brand switchers respectively, calculated based on numbers in Table 3, Part II). Of the non-switchers, a smaller proportion of respondents had received positive opinion from their friends on their brands (58%, 45%, 42% and 44% of SIM, ice cream, deodorant and theatre brand switchers respectively). For both of the above questions, the responses by gender were too small to make any gender-specific inferences.

Reasons for switch and experience with prior brand

The fourth question asked respondents who had switched brands to select their reason(s) for switching. Based on the numbers in Table 4 (Part I), we can see that the largest proportion of respondents cited quality as one of their reasons for brand switch (44%, 51%, 56% and 48% of SIM, ice cream, deodorant and theatre brand switchers respectively). So, close to half of respondents who had switched brands because they considered the new brand to be better in quality than their prior one. After quality, the second most common switching reason

was “looking for a change” for 3 out of the 4 products (34%, 26% and 48% of ice cream, deodorant and theatre brand switchers respectively). Price was the second most commonly cited switching reason for SIM (38% of switchers had it as one of their reasons). The fifth question asked respondents about how long they’d used their prior brand before switching to the new one. A large majority had switched brands after having used the prior one for six months or more (83%, 58%, 62%, 59% of SIM, ice cream, deodorant and theatre brand switchers respectively, based on numbers in Table 4, Part II).

Among the SIM and movie theatre brand switchers, 44% and 31% respectively had switched brands after having used the prior one for more than a year. The sixth question tried to gauge the level of satisfaction that brand switchers had had with their prior brands. A relatively low proportion of switchers had been dissatisfied with their prior brands before switching (13%, 20%, 26% and 10% of SIM, ice cream, deodorant and theatre brand switchers respectively, based on numbers in Table 4, Part III). About three-fifths of the switchers had been moderately satisfied with their prior brand

Table 4. Responses to survey questions on brand switching reasons & prior brand usage

Survey Responses	Mobile SIM			Ice cream			Deodorant			Movie Theatre		
	Female	Male	All	Female	Male	All	Female	Male	All	Female	Male	All
I. Reasons for brand switch												
Better Price	7	8	15	5	3	8	6	4	10	4	2	6
Better Quality	8	9	17	15	6	21	10	12	22	6	8	14
Attractive Offer/ Deal	6	7	13	5	3	8	4	5	9	1	2	3
For a change	3	3	6	6	8	14	5	5	10	6	8	14
Others	-	2	2	-	1	1	-	1	1	-	-	-
II. Duration of usage of prior brand												
Less than 6 months	3	4	7	11	6	17	7	8	15	5	7	12
6 to 12 months	6	9	15	13	10	23	12	9	21	5	3	8
More than 12 months	10	7	17	1	-	1	-	3	3	4	5	9
III. Satisfaction with prior brand												
Highly Satisfied	4	5	9	3	5	8	2	4	6	6	4	10
Moderately Satisfied	14	11	25	15	10	25	13	10	23	5	11	16
Not Satisfied	1	4	5	7	1	8	4	6	10	3	-	3

Notes:

- i. Above questions were asked to only those respondents who had switched brands
- ii. Multiple answers were allowed for the question on reasons for brand switch

Table 5. Responses to survey questions on experience with the new brand post switching

Survey Responses	Mobile SIM			Ice cream			Deodorant			Movie Theatre		
	Female	Male	All	Female	Male	All	Female	Male	All	Female	Male	All
I. Current brand better than previous one												
Yes	12	13	25	9	11	20	9	10	19	6	9	15
No, may return to older one	4	5	9	8	4	12	7	5	12	6	4	10
No, planning to try another new brand	3	2	5	8	1	9	3	5	8	2	2	4
II. Current’s brand pricing relative to prior brand												
More expensive	7	6	13	7	5	12	2	10	12	7	8	15
Similarly Priced	8	8	16	15	11	26	13	8	21	2	7	9
Less expensive	4	6	10	3	-	3	4	2	6	5	-	5
III. Return to prior brand in case of its price decreasing												
Yes	11	5	16	6	3	9	3	5	8	4	3	7
No	6	8	14	15	6	21	10	6	16	6	7	13
Maybe	2	7	9	4	7	11	6	9	15	4	5	9

Note:

- i. Above questions were asked to only those respondents who had switched brands

Table 6. Responses to questions on social behavior

Survey Responses	Mobile SIM			Ice cream			Deodorant			Movie Theatre		
	F	M	All	F	M	All	F	M	All	F	M	All
I. Share opinions on brands with friends												
Yes	33(19)	27(19)	60(38)	28(22)	17(8)	45(30)	21(14)	21(16)	42(30)	26(14)	20(12)	46(26)
No	5(-)	5(1)	10(1)	10(3)	15(8)	25(11)	17(5)	11(4)	28(9)	12(-)	12(3)	24(3)
II. Usage of Social Networks												
Facebook	30(15)	29(18)	59(33)	30(19)	29(15)	59(34)	30(17)	29(19)	59(36)	30(11)	29(13)	59(24)
Orkut	3(1)	6(5)	9(6)	3(2)	6(2)	9(4)	3(1)	6(6)	9(7)	3(3)	6(4)	9(7)
Twitter	5(2)	11(9)	16(11)	5(3)	11(6)	16(9)	5(3)	11(10)	16(13)	5(3)	11(7)	16(10)
Others	7(6)	10(7)	17(13)	7(6)	10(6)	17(12)	7(2)	10(9)	17(11)	7(4)	10(7)	17(11)
III. Number of friends on social networks												
Less than 50	14(8)	4(1)	18(9)	14(11)	4(3)	18(14)	14(6)	4(1)	18(7)	14(4)	4(3)	18(7)
50 to 150	14(9)	19(13)	33(22)	14(8)	19(10)	33(18)	14(8)	19(14)	33(22)	14(6)	19(6)	33(12)
150 to 300	5(-)	6(5)	11(5)	5(3)	6(3)	11(6)	5(3)	6(4)	11(7)	5(3)	6(4)	11(7)
More than 300	1(1)	1(-)	2(1)	1(-)	1(-)	2(-)	1(-)	1(1)	2(1)	1(-)	1(1)	2(1)

Notes:

- i. Above questions were asked to all respondents (N = 70)
- ii. Numbers in brackets is the number of respondents who had switched brands

for each product, while 15% to 35% of the switchers had been highly satisfied with their prior brand across products. For all of the above three questions, the responses by gender were too small to make any gender-specific inferences.

Experience with the new brand

The next question asked brand switching respondents about their experience with their new brand – whether they deemed it better than the prior one, and if not, whether they would return to their older brand, or switch to another new one. As can be inferred from numbers in Table 5 (Part I), a clear majority of SIM and movie theatre brand switchers found their new brand better (64% and 52% of SIM and theatre brand switchers respectively), while slightly less than half of ice cream and deodorant brand switchers preferred their new brand over the older one (49% in both cases). Of the switchers who didn't like their new brand, a majority preferred to go back to their older brand (64%, 57%, 60% and 71% of SIM, ice cream, deodorant and movie theatre brand switchers respectively). The eighth question asked brand switching respondents how their new brand was priced compared to their older one. A majority of switchers had moved to a less expensive or similarly priced brand for three of the products (67%, 70% and 69% of SIM, ice cream, and deodorant brand switchers respectively, calculated based on numbers in Table 5, Part II). Among movie theatre brand switchers too, close to half the switchers (48%) had moved to a less expensive or similarly priced brand. The ninth question asked brand switchers whether they would go back to their prior brand if its prices were decreased or if their new brand's prices were increased. A significant proportion of switchers said they wouldn't go back to their prior brand (36%, 51%, 41% and 45% of SIM, ice cream, deodorant and movie theatre brand switchers respectively, based on numbers in Table 5, Part III). The proportion of switchers who wanted to go back to the prior brand was smaller for 3 out of the 4 products (except mobile SIM). Also, for 3 out of 4 products (except deodorant), this proportion was slightly more than the proportion of switchers who had specified price as one of their switching reasons in an earlier question. For all of the above three questions, the responses by gender were too small to make any gender-specific inferences.

Brand switching and social behavior

The tenth question asked all respondents whether they shared their opinions on brands with their friends. Based on the numbers in Table 6 (Part I), we see that the proportion of brand switchers among respondents who shared their brand opinions was higher than the overall proportion of brand switchers by 12.5%, 14%, 27% and 39% in case of mobile SIM, ice cream, deodorant and movie theatres respectively. Of the respondents who didn't share brand opinions, switching proportion was lower than the overall switching proportion by 82%, 25%, 43% and 68% in case of mobile SIM, ice cream, deodorant and movie theatres respectively. The eleventh question asked respondents about their frequency of logging into social networks. Over three-fourths of respondents had never logged into Twitter, Orkut or any other non-Facebook social network (as can be seen in Table 6 Part II). Of those who logged in frequently to Facebook, the proportion of switchers (55%, 60%, 60% and 43% in case of mobile SIM, ice cream,

deodorant and movie theatres respectively) was very close to the proportion of switchers for the overall sample. The last question asked respondents about the number of friends they had on social networks. As can be seen from the numbers in Table 6 (Part III), there seems to be no relationship between the number of friends on social networks and brand switching behaviour. For all of the above three questions, the responses by gender were too small to make any gender-specific inferences.

DISCUSSION

Switching was seen across all four products, and majority of respondents had switched their brands in case of SIM, ice cream and deodorant each in the six months prior to the survey. A lower brand switching in theatres might be due to the fact that either not many choices were easily accessible to the respondents, or that the low usage frequency of this product category limited brand switching. Switching proportion was higher for males in every product except in case of ice cream, wherein female switching proportion exceeded that of their male counterparts. However, the number of switchers by each gender was too small in this study to look at underlying factors which could be driving these differences in switching behaviour. The responses by brand switchers to the second question in the questionnaire show that majority of friends using a brand was correlated with switching to that brand. The responses of non-switchers indicate that consumers are likely to stick to a brand and not switch as long as they have some friends using their brand. But once most of their friends move to a particular new brand, they will likely switch. This is strong evidence on peer pressure affecting brand switching decisions. Analysis of the responses to the third question shows that if a large majority of one's friends have had positive experiences with a particular new brand, one is highly likely to switch to that brand. It also reveals that one may stick with one's current brand, even if some of one's friends have had negative experiences with that brand, shifting to a new brand only when most friends have provided positive feedback about the new brand. This indicates peer pressure affecting switching decisions. The responses to the fourth question reveal that the top reason for switching is quality, an indication of which for a new brand is possible through friends' opinions on the brand. The second most common reason, a desire for change, also indicates that there wasn't necessarily a specific parameter on which respondents were judging the new brand, which leaves their decisions susceptible to influence of friends. So, both the common reasons support the presence of peer pressure in brand switching. The responses to the next question indicate that prolonged use of a brand is not a big barrier to switching. Another way to state this would be that even after 6 (or in some cases, 12) months of using a brand, consumers didn't develop strong brand loyalty. The larger proportion of people switching SIM and movie theatre brands after a year of usage are likely due to the inconvenience in switching and low usage frequency respectively. Analysis of responses to the sixth question indicates that dissatisfaction with the prior brand isn't a strong driver of switching, and satisfaction with it isn't a strong barrier to switching.

A majority of brand switchers were satisfied with their new brand, as seen by responses to the seventh question. Out of

those who regretted their shifting of brands, a greater proportion of respondents were planning to go back to their previous brand, and a small percentage wanted to switch again to new brand. This showed that one negative switching experience could hamper the possibility of further switching. Responses to the eighth question show that while switchers may not switch brands to necessarily get better pricing, they will likely avoid relatively higher priced brands. Analysis of responses to the ninth question and comparison with responses to the fourth question on switching reasons indicates that some respondents didn't want to call out pricing as one of their switching reasons, even though they were price sensitive. It also indicates that a large proportion of switchers are immune to future adverse changes in brand pricing. The responses to the tenth question show a clear correlation between opinion sharing on brands and brand switching, thereby providing evidence of an environment in which peer pressure can influence brand switching. Analysis of the responses to the eleventh question reveals that frequent use of Facebook isn't correlated with brand switching. But we'd inferred from the earlier question that brand opinion sharing is correlated with brand switching. Therefore, it seems Facebook is not the platform for sharing of opinions on brands for these four products. Probably, opinion sharing about brands is restricted to word of mouth or face-to-face communication. The responses to the last question provided no evidence of relationship between the number of one's friends on social network and one's brand switching behaviour.

Conclusion

Across the four products studied (mobile SIM, ice cream, deodorant and movie theatre), there is clear evidence of peer pressure underlying brand switching decisions, as seen by:

1. Brand switching being correlated with most friends using a new brand
2. Brand switching respondents having received positive reviews about the new brand from a large proportion of their friends
3. Higher likelihood of switching among respondents who shared brand opinions with friends
4. Quality of the new brand and desire for change being key drivers of brand switching (thereby increasing the importance of reviews from friends)
5. Duration of usage of prior brand not being a switching barrier
6. Satisfaction with prior brand not being a switching barrier

Other conclusions on brand switching that could be made from the survey are:

1. Price is an important criterion for brand switching decisions.
2. A negative experience with the new brand can hamper probability of further brand switching.
3. Social networking behaviour didn't seem correlated with brand opinion sharing, indicating it isn't a key medium for peer pressure, when it came to these product or service brands.

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