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PROMINENCE OF INFORMATION BASES& MEDIA ASSESSMENTS IN THE POST CONFLICT MARKETING ENVIORNMENT

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ABSTRACT

Post conflict marketing environment is exclusive, and furnish opportunities for marketers to sell their product and services to the potential customers who are returned to their habitual life. The customers in the post conflict environment search for information sources, to rebuild, and redevelop their buying patterns. The importance place on information source and their predispositions towards media in general guide the selection of product. Present study was undertaken to identify the importance given by the consumers, to different media in the post conflict marketing environment. Convenience sampling technique was used to collect the data from 1750 customers in the northern and eastern provinces of Sri Lanka. Findings showed that Word of mouth and local newspapers ranked as the most important information sources, and the local loudspeaker announcement ranked as an irritating information source. Consumers from both provinces identified TV commercials as important sources of information. Therefore it is need for creating better advertisement strategy to attract consumers in the post conflict marketing environment. Evidently word of mouth is an important determinant of purchase decision among northern and eastern province customers. Marketers therefore need to stimulate interpersonal communication among family and friends. They also have to concentrated more on local newspaper advertisement and its design

KEYWORDS: *Information Sources, Media Evaluation, Post-Conflict Marketing Environment.*

INTRODUCTION

War is a devastating experience, leaving its mark on society, physical structures, legal systems, and almost every aspect of a country's social, political, market and economic fabric. For reconstruction to be effective, it requires a careful and concerted approach that draws on domestic resources, international donor assistance, and private sector resources, and marketing strategies. Countries emerging from conflict typically face multiple challenges in rebuilding homes, schools, factories, banks, communications networks, and other key infrastructure. The currency is weak, human resources diminished, and key institutions seriously impaired, all factors leading to profound, extensive poverty. Therefore at the post conflict marketing environment challenge is to develop an integrated approach that will help countries mend their

post-conflict wounds and move towards a path of long-term sustainable development in marketing and trade.

The conflict between the armed forces of the Government of Sri Lanka and the LTTE began in 1983. It is characterized in part by its relative isolation from the rest of the country. Most of the fighting and war-related destruction has occurred in the 8 contested districts of the North and East, while other parts of the country have remained largely free of such direct destruction. Even districts within the North and East have not experienced conflict in the same way. There is a large degree of variance of conflict experiences and conflict affectedness. In the high conflict areas, the conflict has taken on the character of a civil war, in that non-combatants, or civilians, are drawn in and suffer as a result. The conflict takes place within a highly contested tract of land that is still inhabited in parts.

Background of the study

Since the late 1990s, military operations and the general climate of violence and insecurity had an adverse impact on the regional economy of the North and East. Inter-ethnic trading networks and patterns were disrupted, and the checkpoints and pass system have restricted the mobility of people and goods, as well as market access. The lack of proper transport and storage facilities, and the imposition of double taxing and loading and unloading charges at the check points were all discouraging factors for good marketing environment, the people were restricted for willing to engage in trade despite the prevailing conflict conditions (Concepcion, 2003) **[1].** This restriction, and the increased taxation, is a significant impediment to economic activity during conflict. During war constraints are aggravated narrowing the marketing activities (Gerson and Allan.2001) **[2].** The reasons for this are that war exhibits an increase in overall risk, relative changes in risks of different activities. In the post-war period free of risk and inducement for industry development enable and encourage marketing to match their solutions to consumers in the conflict affected areas.

In the conflict environment marketers sold their products through a series of several intermediary traders, primarily along their social lines within their village or region. Because they feel more secure having commercial relationships within their own communities, farmers and traders were not communicating directly regarding market demands and producer supplies(Angleong, & Kotler, 2000) **[3].** This fragmented delivery of products to the market had a negative impact on both quality and profit margins. The longer it takes an agricultural product to arrive at its end market and the more points of contact it must cross the greater the likelihood that the product quality will have deteriorated, in terms of bruising (Chand, Satish and Ruth Coffman, 2008) **[4].**

In the post-war era, local firms are facing stiff competition from foreign brands. In order to compete successfully they need to develop new marketing strategies on the post-war perspective (Bray, John, 2005) **[5].** At the same time they also need to focus on all the marketing activities from the consumer's perspectives (Gerstle, Tracy and Timothy Nourse, 2007) **[6].** At the time of war consumers were more conscious on the product accessibility, and didn't consider the other aspects in the brands, but in the post-conflict marketing environment they expect good value for the money which they expenses on the product (SLE Centre for Advanced Training in Rural Development, 2001) **[7].**

Marketing is a business philosophy, which emphasizes that satisfying customer needs and wants is the key to an organization's profits and growth (Ferrell, & Hartline, 2002) **[8].** It gained acceptance in the industry in developing countries, because marketing management and its evolution was based on the experience of post war shortages, and the strategies need to be created more effectively in the changing situation, because the marketing strategies are made for the changes in the environment. One of the vase causes for the change in the marketing is political environment. conflicts in the environment changes the political stability and discourage the trade and marketing activities, and consumers consider their life as a first concern therefore available goods and services were consumed for their mortal, their bargaining power was low . At the conflict situation marketing strategies were not needed to capture the customers, but post war environment is different. Marketers develop their market towards the post conflict area to gain market shares, local marketers face new challenges from new entrances and compete with the substitutes, and consumer bargaining power also high, consumers are free of fear and their prepare to choose and consider every aspects of products and services and compare them with each and every products and services.

Post conflict marketing environment is exclusive, and furnish opportunities for marketers to sell their product and services to the potential customers who are returned to their habitual life. The customers in the post conflict environment search for information sources, to rebuild, and redevelop their buying patterns (Mills, Rob and Qimiaofan, 2007) **[9].** Because of the experienced gained in the conflict environment, consumers have become more knowledgeable, less naive, and less easily influenced, in addition they have more choices in the market. Marketers who attempt to penetrate their market in to post conflict marketing environment should select the appropriate mix of promotion (Hooley, Piercy, and Nicoulaud, 2008) **[10].**

One of the challenges facing marketing managers is how best communication messages in the post conflict marketing environment. this not only requires carefully matching the messages preferences of target market to the audiences and or readership profiles of available media, but also necessitates a determination of the importance consumers place on media and their predispositions (favorable or unfavorable)towards advertising in general has an impact on the effectiveness of any given advertisement. After the end of the civil war people have returned to their normal life and searching for new in every aspects, at the same time enterprises are moving into the post conflict marketing environments for having opportunity of adding potential customers. To match their solution with the consumers' needs and wants organizations wants to communicate via better sources, simultaneously consumers seeking for information, which helps their purchase decision. The sources which prefer the consumers, should be designed by the marketers otherwise, the attempt to meet the customer needs may fail.

Based on this background the study build toinvestigate what level of importance is given by the consumers in the post conflict environment? A study addressing these issues is relevant and significant. Results can be of interest to marketers aiming at the post conflict market.

Objectives of the study

- To recognize the importance given by the consumers to the media in the post conflict environment
- To identify the media evaluation by the customers in the post conflict environment

- To compare the importance and media evaluation given by the consumers in the two regions of post conflict marketing environment

Literature review

Purchase decisions that require high consumer involvement results in the individual placing more emphasis on the information search and evaluation of alternatives stage of the decision making process, as is evidenced where various communication sources are consulted on decision making (Armstrong and Lumsden, 2000; Bonnema and Vander-Waldt, 2008; Yamamoto, 2006) **[11,12,13].** A marketer must therefore have communications readily available to consumers informing them of products and services, if they are to be competitive in this environment (Webster, 1988) **[14].** These communication sources can be organized into two categories: traditional media and word of mouth. (Hennig -Tharau et al., 2004; Trusov, Bucklin and Pauwels, 2009). **[15,16]** It is proposed that each of the communication sources will have a different influence on the information search and evaluation phase of the consumer decision making process by potential customers. This is due to the consumers' perception of these sources in terms of criteria such as trustworthiness, expertise, relevance and risk and how they are evaluated in contributing to their decision making process.

Various communication sources are consulted in consumer decision making (Armstrong and Lumsden, 2000; Bonnema and Vander-Waldt, 2008; Yamamoto, 2006) **[11,12,13],** each of which has a varying influence on the decision making process. A vast amount of research on the communication sources influencing decision making (Maringe, 2006; Moogan and Barron, 2003; Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis, 2005). **[17,18,19]** Traditional media is the first communication source to be reviewed and this includes the various communication devices the marketer employs to reach and influence potential customers (Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis, 2005) **[19].** Several studies conducted in the context have identified that information generated by the university was the most relied upon source in making their decision (Veloutsou, Paton and Lewis, 2004) **[20].** Contrary to these studies the research of Maringe (2006) **[17].** Word of mouth is the most important communication source to be reviewed and refers to a conversation with a focus on the sharing of information regarding individuals' experiences with various products and services (Steffes and Burgee, 2009) **[21].** The most common sources of word of mouth include family members and friends (Gauri, Bhatnagar and Rao, 2008) **[22].** As a communication source, word of mouth is said to be influential to the decision making process of students with reference to university selection, though it was not ranked as the most influential source.

Electronic word of mouth communication is the final communication source to be considered. Although this communication source lacks the face-to-face contact compared to traditional word of mouth (Andreassen and Streukens, 2009) **[23],** the ability to seek advice from these networks at any time, from any place makes this source attractive to consumers (Cheung, et al., 2009) **[24].** These online communities are said to have a positive influence on the consumer decision making process (De Valck, Van Bruggen and Wierenga, 2009) **[25],** and are seen as more credible and of higher relevance to the reader compared to information generated by a marketer (Bickart and Schindler, 2001) **[26].** Other studies have identified that consumers are more conscious of recommendations made on the Internet due to credibility issues (Wathen and Burkell, 2002) **[27].**

Research Methodology

The population of the research is the people who engage in purchase activities in the post conflict marketing environment. The researcher used convenient sampling to select the sample. A sample consisted of 1750people, who engage in active purchase in the post conflict environment of Sri Lanka. The reason behind choosing non-probability sampling is that, the researcher would have gone for probability sampling for the customers, then a sample frame would have been needed to collect and from the list of consumers, who are actively participating in purchasing activities. Due to lack of the sampling frame work, researcher chooses convenience sampling technique to selects the sample for the study.

Four point scale ranging from1=unimportant to 4=important were used in eliciting the levels of important respondents placed on various personals, commercial, public and experiential sources of information in their purchase decisions. To elicit information regarding how respondents evaluated advertisement in various media, they were asked if a series of characteristics (informative, helpful as buying guide, irritating, exaggerated, believable, boring, misleading, has negative impact on children) applied to advertisement in different types of media.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The gender distribution of the survey respondents is 54.4 % males and 45.5 % female. The results also indicated that the samples have age predominantly between 21 and 25, which is 65%. More than 80% of the respondents are single. Majority of the respondents have college or higher education level: 13% are master degree holders, 54% of the respondents are at the degree/or professional qualification level and 36% of respondents are diploma/advanced diploma holders.

To determine the relative importance accorded to various information sources by the respondents, mean importance scores for each source was calculated and ranks were then assigned from the highest mean (most important) to the lowest mean (least important).As can be seen from table 1 consumers rate their own knowledge resulting from word of mouth and past experience as the most important source of information. This TV commercial is followed by word of mouth. Family members and friends respectively rank as third and fourth most important sources. Of the mass media sources investigated besides local newspapers TV commercials received high ratings. Results show that consumers do not consider salesman as a key information source. Results also point out that outdoor advertising is rated among the important sources with the rating just above sales person. As reported in the table 1 local loudspeaker announcements, internet advertisement, mobile advertisement are the least important sources for the consumers living in the post conflict marketing environment.

As can be seen in the table1 consumers in the Northern Province rated their own knowledge resulting from local newspapers as a single most important source of information. This experiential source is followed by word of mouth. Past experience and TV commercials respectively ranked as third and fourth most importance information source. Of the mass media sources investigated beside the local newspapers other print media received high ratings. Results show that Northern Province consumers consider sales person as lest information source. Results also pointed out that outdoor advertising is rated among the unimportant with the ratings just higher the sales people. As reported in the table both internet and mobile advertisements are the least important sources for the Northern Province consumers. Eastern consumers as well as

ranked past experience and word of mouth as the most and internet and mobile advertisement as the least important information sources according to them past experiences and the local newspaper advertisements are the second and third most important information sources. These are above TV commercials and ads appearing in print media. A trend that can be readily inferred from the rankings is that similarities between the two groups (northern and eastern customers)outweighed differences. This is confirmed by the positive and significant by the rank order correlation ($r_{s=.845;}P<0.05$)

TABLE 1: IMPORTANCE OF INFORMATION SOURCES

	North	East
Family members	10	9
Friends	11	8
Sales persons	15	13
Past experience	3	2
Word of mouth	1	1
Publicity	9	12
Trade Shows/exhibitions	13	14
TV commercials	4	4
Radio Commercials	8	10
Local newspaper advertisements	2	3
Magazine advertisement	7	6
Brochures and leaflets	5	7
Billboards and banner advertisement	6	5
Point of sales display	14	7
loudspeaker announcement	14	15
Internet banner advertisement	16	16
Mobile advertisement	17	17
r_s= 0.083 P<0.05		

Table: 2 presents the rankings of six advertising media across eight characteristics that can typify the nature of advertisements in a medium. These ranks were based on the number of mentions received by the media across each characteristic as can be seen from these results, respondents found ads in local newspapers as the most informative. In the reverse order advertisement in these media were also deemed most helpful as buying guides. Local loudspeaker announcement and radio advertisements were found the most irritating and boring.TV commercials were viewed as the most ex-aggregated, most misleading and having negative impact on children. It appears that newspaper advertisement was deemed the most believable.

When the results in table 2 are examined from the perspective of consumers form Northern Province, it can be seen that, Northern Province customers also found advertisement in newspapers as the most informative. These media were also deemed the most helpful as buying guide. They ranked internet and mobile advertisements as the most irritating, exaggerated and misleading. TV commercials were viewed as having most negative impact on children. It appears that newspaper advertisements and word of mouth ads were believed as most believable.

To discern the extent of agreement in the relative ordering of media between the two groups, Schucany and Frawley test was applied to the data, the test statistics can range between -1 and 1 where the coefficient of 1 signifies perfect similarity. The results in table 2 show the overall the two groups are not similar (W=0.003)

The findings of the study also carry a number of managerial implications for marketers aiming at the two markets. Actual product usages as reflected by past experiences seems to be the most important determinant of purchase decision among Northern and Eastern consumers, therefore the marketers who penetrate into post conflict marketing environment need to design either a selling strategy that stimulate purchase experience or one that simulates it. For example marketers could stimulate trial by offering free samples price discounts and bonus packs. Experiences could be simulated for the consumers by proving product service demonstrations so as to given them a feelings of the benefits of the product/services similar to feelings that they would have experienced after actual product purchase.

Consumers from both provinces identified TV commercials as important sources of information. Therefore it is need for creating better advertisement strategy to attract consumers in the post conflict marketing environment. Evidently word of mouth is an important determinant of purchase decision among Northern and Eastern province customers. Marketers therefore need to stimulate interpersonal communication among family and friends.

Two differences between Northern and Eastern province customers are of interest. First Northern Province consumers place higher importance on trade show and exhibition as a factor of influencing their purchase decision than the Eastern province customers. Second Northern Province consumers place higher importance on point-of –purchase displays than Eastern consumers

Advertisement in local newspapers are perceived to be the most informative and helpful source for consumers living in the both provinces. These media also perceived as most believable suggesting the print advertising is sufficiently sophisticated and advanced enough in both places to give them the informational content they seek. Consumers in both provinces all perceive such media as helpful as buying guide. These findings suggest that high credibility is associated with local newspaper advertisement among consumers in the post conflict marketing environment. It should be added that although appeals to consumers in the post conflict marketing environment would be seem to be approximately placed on television as suggested by the important placed on the TV commercials, there is a general perception that TV commercials are exaggerated , misleading and have a negative, impact on children. Therefore, marketers should take notice of finding and slogan which attract the consumers, who have negative perception on TV commercials.

The study noticed that consumers form both provinces ranked internet advertisement as the least important information source. Furthermore, they perceived internet advertising as the least informative and non-believable and the least helpful as buying guide. Thus a challenge lies ahead in generating interest and educating consumers about internet advertising in both provinces. It is instructive to note that, unlike a television, word of mouth, and local print media most internet advertisement is in form that requires sufficient interest and motivation on the part of the consumers to interact with the advertisement and access appropriate information rather than be passive recipients of the messages (Menon and Soman, 2002) **[28].** For internet advertising to be

successful internet advertisement must incorporate mechanism to motivate consumers to interact with medium and research detailed product information. Banks are now trying to inform their services via mobile advertisement in the post conflict marketing environment (HSBC, 20011) [29].The study showed that consumers in the post conflict marketing environment ranked the mobile advertisement as a least information source. But Mobile advertising can support markers in various ways because it allows reciprocal communication process between marketers and customers. As more wireless bandwidth become available, content rich advertising involving audio, pictures and video clips can be produced for individual users with specific needs, and inclinations (Varshney, 2003) **[30].** Technologies such as the multimedia messaging services (MMS) help to overcome this limitation. Phones with higher resolutions and multicolor displays can include visual elements for innovative mobile advertisement (Dickinger, Haghirian, Scharl & Murphy, 2004) **[31].** Therefore marketers who employ mobile advertisement need to redevelop their strategy for educating consumers on information source and evaluation for enhancing the effectiveness of advertisement because the consumers in the post conflict environment ranked mobile advertisement as irritating media.

Limitation and further research

Respondents in the survey were drawn from the north and east provinces of Sri Lanka. The data were collected from the respondents in the city of the two provinces, and convenience sampling technique was also used to select the respondents therefore the respondents represented upscale segment of the population. Therefore, extension of the research to other cities and villages in the other post conflict markets to other consumer group or the respondents from the non-conflict affected areas are needed for cross- validation. Second in this study, consumer's involvement and or exposure to different media were not considered. This may delimit generalization. Their inclusion in the further studies as moderator, mediator variables can shed further light into the current study. Longitudinal studies would be illuminating in monitoring shift in the relative importance of advertising as an information source and public sentiment towards various media by comparing pre and post conflict marketing environment. Research identifying the nature and direction of such shifts and delineating their underlying reasons would have significant ramification for adverting agencies and their clients. Previous research suggests that the impact of advertising in influencing purchasing decision and consumer attitude and opinions on advertising vary across product categories (Witkowski and Kellner, 1998) **[32].** Thus further research examining similar issues across different types of products would be enlightening.

TABLE 2: MEDIA OPINIONS MEDIA OPINION [a]

media	informative	Helpful as buying guide	Irritating	exaggerated	believable	Boring	Misleading	Has negative impact on children
TV	2(2)	2(2)	5(4)	1(2)	3(1)	4(3)	1(2)	1(1)
radio	3(3)	3(3)	2(1)	2(1)	2(2)	2(1)	2(1)	3(2)
Newspapers	1(1)	1(1)	6(6)	3 (4)	1 (3)	6(5)	4(3)	4(3)
Loud speaker	4(4)	4(4)	1(2)	4(3)	6 (4)	1(2)	3(4)	2(4)

ads								
Internet	**5(6)**	**5(6)**	**4(3)**	**5(5)**	**5 (5)**	**4(4)**	**5(6)**	**5(5)**
Mobile ads	**6(5)**	**6(5)**	**3(4)**	**6(6)**	**4(6)**	**3(6)**	**6(5)**	**6(6)**
a *the first number in each column indicated the rankings of a particular medium in terms of the characteristics represented by that column for the Northern sample . The numbers in parentheses represents the ranks for the Eastern sample. W=0.003								

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