

# **A Study on the Dimensions of Customer Expectations and their Relationship with Cognitive Dissonance**

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## **ABSTRACT**

*Cognitive Dissonance is a post-purchase phenomenon where the consumers are in fix with their recent decision. It is a situation that exists when consumers who have made recent purchases feel doubts about the wisdom of their decisions. Customer expectations can be explained as the ideas and feelings of a customer about the product or service and depends on what he or she needs from the product. The relation between customers' expectations and its relative importance in generating Cognitive Dissonance to such customers have been studied by the authors and reported in this paper. The study is conducted among the students' belonging to the age group of 19-25 years in a University from the state of Kerala, who bought a durable product very close to the time of study (in seven days). The dimensions of customers' expectations has been classified as expectation on quality, expectation on after sales service, expectation on customer consideration, expectation on offers/promotions, and expectation of price. The study revealed that when expectation of price, expectation of offers/promotions and expectation on after sales service are high or very strong, then the chance for cognitive dissonance are also very high, and other two expectations such as expectation on quality and expectation on customer consideration have not been found as important in generating cognitive dissonance.*

**Key words: Cognitive Dissonance, Customer expectations.**

## **Introduction**

Cognitive dissonance or post purchase remorse is one of the fascinating areas of consumer behavior that can directly influence consumer satisfaction and loyalty. It is a state of feeling to the customer after major product purchase. It is a situation that exists when consumers have doubt about their recent purchase decisions. In the consumer decision making process, the cognitive dissonance can be positioned between

customers' product purchase and their satisfaction / dissatisfaction. Customers' may have different expectation about the product/service and each can influence their cognitive dissonance (Montgomery & Barnes 1993). An exclusive study with respect to customers' expectation and cognitive dissonance is of high importance to the marketers as they are looking for a satisfied customer base for their survival.

## **Cognitive Dissonance (CDs)**

Every human being hold much cognition about the world and themselves, when they clash, a discrepancy would be evoked that leads to a state of tension called Cognitive Dissonance (Festinger 1957). It is the situation when the consumers who have made the recent purchases have doubts about the wisdom of their decision. In these situations, people might have conflicting attitudes, beliefs or behaviours that produce a feeling of discomfort, which may leads to customer dissatisfaction (Montgomery & Barnes 1993).

## **Customer expectations**

Customer expectation means the ideas and feelings of a customer about the product or service depends on what he or she needs from the product and expects it to do. The customer expectation has been depends on his previous experience, advertising, word of mouth, etc. The customers' expectation about the product or service is the core of their satisfaction. Before buying a product or service, every customer might have some kind of expectations about the performance, price, quality, after sales service, etc. with respect to that product. Once the product or service is capable of meeting or satisfying the customers' expectation, it can be termed as customer satisfaction, or customer delight (Olson & Dover 1979).

## **Significance of the Study**

Previous studies show that various customer expectations before purchase lead to CDs (Oliver 1980, Buskirk & Rothe 1970, Anderson 1973). But none of the available studies are substantiated the different dimensions of customer expectations that play a significant role in developing cognitive dissonance.

A clear understanding of customer expectations can help any marketer to satisfy their needs in an effective manner than his competitors, and thereby he can create and maintain a strong base of satisfied and loyal customers. From the literature it is clear that the customers feeling a state of cognitive dissonance when their expectations are not met by the marketers while delivering service/product. So recognizing the customer expectations in advance are of multiple advantages to marketers. This research paper is an effort to identify various dimensions of customer expectations that impact on cognitive dissonance and thereby customer satisfaction.

## **Objectives of the Study**

To identify the role of various dimensions of customer expectations in the development of cognitive dissonance.

## **Background of the Study**

Review of available literature in the area of consumer behavior highlights the significance of cognitive dissonance in customer satisfaction. Some studies had suggested that customers' expectations are also important in determining the level of cognitive dissonance and some of such studies are discussed below to highlight the need for conducting for the research to understand the influence of various dimensions of customers' expectation on cognitive dissonance.

Anderson (1973) suggested that any discrepancy or gap between consumers expectations and product/service performance will be reduced or assimilated by the consumers through adjusting his/her perception of the product/service to be more consistent (less dissonant) with his expectations.

Consumer expectations are limitless. They can expect up to what they feel. The marketing

policies with respect to quality, promotion strategy, pricing, etc. are formulated by considering the customer expectations. The corporate promotional mixes may form unrealistic expectations for product or service which result in consumer dissatisfaction upon purchase and use of the product if it hasn't reach the customer expectations. Studies show that if there are great differences between customer expectation and actual product performances, it may cause a less favorable evaluation of a product that leads to customer disparity (Anderson 1973, Buskirk & Rothe 1970).

When a product fail to meet customer expectations, conflict between buyer and seller would arise. Both the party trying to avoid or minimize their dissension. Advertising and other promotional work of the organizations can build consumers' expectation even more than product's actual capabilities. Cognitive dissonance or post purchase conflict would be happened by the different perceptions of buyers and sellers with respect to the product failure. The customers may expect a feature of the product as very important but the sellers may expect some other features would be more important to customers from the same product. It leads to disconfirmation of expectations that causes post purchase regret (Jacoby & Jaccard 1981, Westbrook 1980, Folkes 1984).

It has been stated that the difference between the pre-decision estimated value of chosen alternative and its post-decision value, determined after some of its consequences have been experienced can be termed as post decision surprise (Harrison 1984). The rational decision making have a significant level of expected post decision disappointment. That is the expected value of chosen alternative increases with the number of alternatives. The most obvious way

to manage the post decision disappointment was to deflate or reduce the expectations.

In an another study, Oliver (1980) reported that the expectation of a customer with respect to a product has been influenced by the product itself including customers prior experience, symbolic elements, brand connotations; the context including the content of communications from salespeople and social references; individual features including persuasibility and perceptual distortion. The degree to which the product or service exceed, meet, or fall one's expectation leads to positive, zero or negative disconfirmation which ultimately focuses to the customers' satisfaction or dissatisfaction. It has stated that customer satisfaction is a function of expectation and expectancy disconfirmation.

According to Woodruff et al (1983), prior to every purchase and use of a brand, consumers would form expectations of its performance in a particular use situation. The expectations are predictions of the nature and level of performance the user would like to receive. After experiencing the product, the customers normally compares perceived actual performance with expected performance. If perceived performance exceeds the expectations, a positive mismatch will occur and vice versa. Whenever the negative mismatch occurred, a customer would be regretted or feels dissonance with the product and ultimately leads to customer dissatisfaction.

The expectations about the performance of the product influence the actual performance of that product. Due to some extraneous reasons, individuals would have to expect a better performance of a product or service. They consider the expectations as their comparison standard with the performance of the product. The actual performance of the product during its usage may not be up to their prior expectations.

It may leads to a post buying conflict with the customer about the product purchased (LaTour & Peat 1979, Woodruff et al 1983).

It is obvious from the study reported above that customer' prior expectations about the product lead to dissonance, if the product doesn't meet the standard. The customers would have various dimensions of expectations with respect to the product or service. But the available studies fail to diagnose different dimensions of their expectations. Through a critical review of available literature in the field of customer expectations and cognitive dissonance, some common dimensions of expectations with respect to the customers' product purchase had been identified. The researchers consulted experts from marketing and other fields to validate various dimensions of customer expectations identified during the review of literature. After this face validation process, five dimensions of customer expectations have been chosen for the present study and they are expectation on quality, expectation on after sales service, expectation on customer consideration, expectation of offers/promotion and high expectation on price.

### **Hypothesis**

H1: High customer expectation on quality of the product positively affects CDs

H2: High customer expectations on after sales service to the product positively influences CDs

H3: High customer expectations on good customer consideration during the purchase positively affect CDs

H4: High customer expectations of offers/promotions with respect to the product positively affect CDs

H5: Customers' expectation of high price to the product positively affects CDs

### **Research Methodology**

**Population/Sampling frame:** Students who belong to the age from 19 to 25 in a University from the state of Kerala, who bought a durable product close to the time of study (in 7 days) have been considered as the population.

**Sampling size and method:** A sample of 120 students have been chosen through convenient sampling method.

**Tools for data collection:** Questionnaire consists of two sections has been used for data collection. The first section includes five questions to identify whether the customers felt cognitive dissonance after their purchase. The second section consists of five questions for knowing the customers response towards various dimensions of customers expectations.

The reliability of the questionnaire has been checked by using Cronbach's Alpha. The overall coefficient of Cronbach's Alpha for the entire questionnaire was 0.819. The reliability of manifest variables used for identifying the CDs states a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.914. The entire reliability coefficient is highly significant as it is higher than the standard Cronbach's Alpha coefficient. According to the standard, Cronbach's alpha coefficient is 0.7(Gaur & Gaur 2010). So it can be concluded that the questionnaire used for collecting the data possess a good reliability.

The Inter item Correlation Matrix between the manifest variables of CDs states the correlation between the manifest variables and all the manifest variables have a significant positive correlation with 1% level of significance.

In order to check the relation between CDs and dimensions of expectations, the manifest variables used for identifying the CDs has to be loaded in to one variable named Cognitive Dissonance. If the manifest variables constitute a single component, it would be easy to consider that such component as its latent variable, that is, CDs. The latent variable (the extracted component) was capable of explaining the variance of five manifest variables significantly. Here the component is capable of explaining 91.8% variance in inferiority feeling with the product, 85.2% variance in availability of better option, 85.7% variance in feeling of regret after buying this product, 88% variance in suggesting the product to friends because of satisfaction and 81.7% of variance in the repurchasing of product in the future. Altogether, the one component has capable of explaining a good percentage of variance in the five manifest variables used in the study for identifying the presence of CDs. So the single component can be named as 'Cognitive Dissonance' for the further analysis.

The combined variance explained by single component, named as Cognitive Dissonance was 74.949%. In other words, a single component (CDs) is capable of explaining 74.949% of the total variance explained by all the manifest variables.

**Technique of Data analysis:** Principal Component Analysis, Correlation.

**Research process:** Respondents were instructed to consider the most expensive item just purchased, while answering the questionnaire as the purchase of an expensive items can give a better indication of dissonance (Oshikawa 1970). The product types were not considered as the research was to identify the different customer expectations and their influence in generating Cognitive Dissonance. Five manifest variables were used for

identifying the existence of Cognitive Dissonance. Manifest variable means a variable that can be directly measured or observed. It is the opposite of a latent variable that cannot be directly observed (Blunch 2008). Following are the manifest variable used to identify the latent variable called Cognitive dissonance:

1.Regret with the product purchased: Once a customer directly agrees that he felt regret about the product he purchased recently, it would resembles that he has CDs with the purchase (Festinger 1957).

2.Feeling of Inferiority: If a customer feels inferiority with the product he purchased, there would be a chance of CDs (Cognitive dissonance, n.d).

3.Availability of better options: After purchase, the customers may have an opinion that there should have been better option than this one. It also leads to CDs (Egan et al 2007).

4.Repurchase of the same product: If a customer decided not to purchase the same product in future, it may be an outcome of CDs (Cummings & Venkatesan1976).

5.Suggesting the product to friends: Cognitive dissonance feeling customers would not suggest the product to his friends and relatives (Hunt 1991).

Authors have identified five dimensions of customer expectations based on their consultations, and interactions with experts in the field of marketing, consumer research and also in academic sector, and these five dimensions of customer expectations were used in the study to analyse the relationship between customer expectations and cognitive dissonance. The five dimensions of customer expectations were face validated and used in the study are explained below:

1. Expectation on quality: It is the perceptual superiority/performance of a product by customers before buying/using the same. The expectation on quality may be understood differently by different customer on the basis of their socio-economic conditions.

2. Expectation on after sales service: The customers' expectation about the periodic maintenance or repair of the product by its manufacturer or supplier after the purchase.

3. Expectation on customer consideration: It means the customer expectation about the personnel's assistance with respect to generating awareness and informing new features about the product during their purchase.

4. Expectation of offers/promotions: This is the expectation by the customers that any additional features or services would be given during the product purchase.

5. High expectation on price: It is the customers' expectation about the price of the product.

A Principal Components Analysis has been used for squeezing the variables which are used to identify the existence of Cognitive Dissonance and named 'Cognitive Dissonance' as a latent variable. The reliability of all the variables in the questionnaire has been checked in general and the reliability of the items used as the manifest variables of cognitive dissonance has been checked separately too. Finally the relation between the cognitive dissonance and different expectations of customers has been identified by using bivariate correlation.

## Analysis

The first alternative hypothesis states that customers' high expectation of the quality of the product positively affects CDs. The null hypothesis would be that the customers' high expectations of the quality of the product have no significant relation with CDs. The Correlation matrix states that correlation is insignificant. So we don't have any evidence to reject the null hypothesis. That means as per the study, cognitive dissonance and expectation of quality of the product has no relation (Table 1).

The second alternative hypothesis stated as customers' high expectations on after sales service to the product positively influences CDs. The null hypothesis was the customers' high expectations on after sales services to the product have no significant relation with CDs. As per the correlation matrix, the Pearson Correlation is significant at 1% with 1 tailed. It means as per the matrix, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. So there is a positive moderate correlation between CDs and high expectation on after sales service to the product (Table 2)

The third hypothesis has been stated as customers' high expectation on good customer consideration during the purchase positively affects CDs. The null hypothesis would be customers' high expectation on good customer consideration during the purchase have no significant relation with CDs. The correlation matrix shows there is no evidence to reject the null hypothesis. So with respect to the study, there is no significant evidence to say that expectation of consumer consideration have any role in generating CDs (Table 3).

Table 1: Correlations between CDs and Expectation on quality of the product

		Cognitive Dissonance	Expectation quality of the product
Cognitive Dissonance	Pearson Correlation	1	-.117
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.102
	N	120	120
Expectation quality of the product	Pearson Correlation	-.117	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.102	
	N	120	120

Table 2: Correlations between CDs and expectation of after sales service for this product

		Cognitive Dissonance	Expectation of after sales service for this product
Cognitive Dissonance	Pearson Correlation	1	.256**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.002
	N	120	120
Expectation of after sales service for this product	Pearson Correlation	.256**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.002	
	N	120	120

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

The fourth alternative hypothesis of the study has been stated as customers' high expectations of offers/promotions with respect to the product positively affect CDs. The null hypothesis was customers' high expectations of offers/promotions with respect to the product have no significant relation with CDs. As per the correlation matrix, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient is significant at 1% level. So we can reject the null hypothesis and it can be concluded that high expectations of offers/promotions with respect to the product have a positive relation with CDs (Table 4).

The final hypothesis has been stated as customers' expectation of high price to the

product positively affects CDs. The null hypothesis was customers' expectation of high price to the product have no significant relation with CDs. The correlation matrix states that at 1% level of significant, we can reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternative hypothesis. That is expectation of high price to the product positively affects CDs (Table 5).

Table 3: Correlations between CDs and expectation of consumer consideration

		Cognitive Dissonance	Expectation of consumer consideration
Cognitive Dissonance	Pearson Correlation	1	.096
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.149
	N	120	120
Expectation of consumer consideration	Pearson Correlation	.096	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.149	
	N	120	120

Table 4: Correlations between CDs and high expectations of offers/promotions with respect to the product

		Cognitive Dissonance	Expectation of offers and promotions
Cognitive Dissonance	Pearson Correlation	1	.327**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
Expectation of offers and promotions	Pearson Correlation	.327**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

Table 5: Correlations between CDs and high expectation on price to the product

		Cognitive Dissonance	High expectation on price before buying the product
Cognitive Dissonance	Pearson Correlation	1	.335**
	Sig. (1-tailed)		.000
	N	120	120
Expectation of price before buying the product	Pearson Correlation	.335**	1
	Sig. (1-tailed)	.000	
	N	120	120

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (1-tailed).

## **Results and Discussions**

### **Results**

Customers' expectation about the quality of the product is not related with cognitive dissonance.

There is a moderate positive correlation between customers' high expectation of after sales service for the product and CDs. That is if the customer having high expectation of after sales service with respect to the product purchased, there would be high CDs with such purchase.

The study shows that high expectation on consumer consideration have nothing to do in generating CDs. Since the researchers were unable to reject the null hypothesis, it can be interpreted as high expectations of consumer consideration have no relation in generating CDs.

There is a positive correlation between customers' high expectation of offers/promotions and CDs. That means high expectation of offers/promotion leads to high CDs with respect to the purchase. .

The study shows that there is a positive correlation between high expectation on price to the product and CDs. It means if the customers having high expectation on price to the product before purchase leads to high CDs. In this study, the goods are special goods which the customers buying occasionally or rarely. So they are not always aware of the price and they might have an expectation. The selling people make them aware that the price they charged is fair and in practice. So the marketers can safeguard such customers from being dissonant.

Altogether, the study shows that three kind of customer expectation before the purchase namely expectation on after sales service for the product, expectation of offers and promotions,

and expectation on price to the product having a moderate positive correlation in generating CDs and rest of the expectations, namely expectation on quality of the product and expectation on consumer considerations have no role in generating CDs with the customers.

### **Discussion**

Even though cognitive dissonance is a short term phenomenon in the consumers' behavior after their product purchase, it can make a long term impact by determining customers' satisfaction/dissatisfaction. Past studies shows that high expectations may leads to cognitive dissonance if such products or services fails to live up the expectations (Folkes 1984). Authors used five dimensions of consumer expectations to study their role in the development of cognitive dissonance. The finding of the study that the dimension of customers' expectation about quality of the product has not related with cognitive dissonance is not supported by the existing literature. Many available studies could relate the product performance (a measure of quality) with the cognitive dissonance. For example, Folkes (1984) had reported the influence of customer expectation about the product performance over cognitive dissonance.

Another finding of the study, the dimension of consumer expectation on consumer consideration has no relation in the development of cognitive dissonance is also contradictory to the findings of some of the previous studies. It is obvious from past research that consumers' would have some kind of belief about recognition, consideration and presence of service during the purchase that leads to their expectation. If this dimension of expectation is unconfirmed, then it can lead to psychological discomfort and thereby cognitive dissonance (Anderson 1973).

The dimension of customer expectation on after sales service has a significant role for the development of cognitive dissonance. This finding has been vouched with past research and supported the literature (Bell 1967). This dimension has a long term impact and customers can measure the actual performance of after sales service during the usage or experience of the product. But sometime, the customers can perceive the expected after sales service during or prior to their purchase process. The rest of the dimensions such as expectation of offers/promotion and expectation on high price to the product have significant influence in the development of cognitive dissonance and these findings are supported by the existing literature (Folkes 1984, Anderson 1973).

The present study is carried out among the university students belonging to the age group of 19 to 25 years and the peculiarities of this age group might have influenced the results of the study. Most of the studies with respect cognitive dissonance have been conducted among general population of the consumers and studies with respect to a specific age group or a group classified based on any of the demographic factors are not noticed in the literature. Authors believe that this may be the reason for some of the findings of the present study with respect to some of the dimensions of customer expectations are not matching with results of previous studies. Findings of the present study will be highly significant for marketers who targets customers belonging to the aforementioned age group and wish to avoid cognitive dissonance to the maximum possible extend among their targeted customers.

### **Conclusion**

The present study was carried out to reveal the relationship between various dimensions of customer expectations and cognitive dissonance.

Altogether five dimensions were identified and formed five hypotheses by relating to cognitive dissonance. Out of the five hypotheses stated for the study, researchers were able to prove three hypotheses. That means there is no evidence to accept the other two hypotheses through the study. It states that high expectation on after sales service, high expectation on price of the proposed product and high expectation on offers/promotions are leads to generating CDs in the customers. If the customer has experiencing CDs to their product purchase, the possibility of such customers' drop out is very high. An awareness of the influences of customers' expectation towards cognitive dissonance is highly important to the marketers in order to develop a loyal customer base.

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**Results of various statistical analysis for checking instrument reliability and validity:**

Overall Reliability Statistics

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.819	10

Reliability Statistics of manifest variables of CDs

Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.914	5

Item-Total Statistics of various manifest variables used for identifying the presence of CDs

	Scale Mean if Item Deleted	Scale Variance if Item Deleted	Corrected Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
inferiority feeling with the product	7.2500	8.794	.858	.880
availability of better option	7.1167	9.045	.768	.898
feeling of regret after buying this product	7.4250	9.255	.767	.898
repurchasing of this product in future	6.8667	8.806	.722	.909
suggesting the product to friends because of satisfaction	7.3083	8.568	.805	.890

The Inter item Correlations Matrix between manifest variables of CDs

	Inferiority feeling with the product	Availability of better option	Feeling of regret after buying this product	Repurchasing of this product in future	Suggesting the product to friends because of satisfaction
Inferiority feeling with the product	1	.754**	.784**	.670**	.749**
Pearson Correlation		.000	.000	.000	.000
Sig. (2-tailed)					
N	120	120	120	120	120
Availability of better option	.754**	1	.600**	.697**	.641**
Pearson Correlation			.000	.000	.000
Sig. (2-tailed)					
N	120	120	120	120	120
Feeling of regret after buying this product	.784**	.600**	1	.544**	.770**
Pearson Correlation				.000	.000
Sig. (2-tailed)					
N	120	120	120	120	120

Repurchasing of this product in future	Pearson Correlation	.670**	.697**	.544**	1	.647**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000		.000
	N	120	120	120	120	120
Suggesting the product to friends because of satisfaction	Pearson Correlation	.749**	.641**	.770**	.647**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	.000	
	N	120	120	120	120	120

Component Matrix (manifest variables are moved in to one factor named CDs)

	Component
	1
inferiority feeling with the product	.918
availability of better option	.852
feeling of regret after buying this product	.857
repurchasing of this product in future	.817
suggesting the product to friends because of satisfaction	.882

a. 1 components extracted.

Total Variance Explained by the manifest variables towards the CDs

Component	Initial Eigenvalues			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	3.747	74.949	74.949	3.747	74.949	74.949
2	.533	10.670	85.619			
3	.329	6.583	92.202			
4	.224	4.481	96.683			
5	.166	3.317	100.000			

Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.