Advertisement Clutter, Consumer's Woe

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What I had assumed would be an easy task involving about ten minutes turned out to be a horrendously confounding experience.

It all started when my mother handed me the seemingly uncomplicated responsibility of picking up a few items from our neighborhood super market. I mentally prepared a road map to maneuver my way to the store via the shortest route possible, which presented minimal interaction with cumbersome traffic. I'd then dash in through the door, fly towards the shelves, grab the necessary stuff and whiz back home via the same route. The first bit was easy, that is going to the market. But once I trotted inside and glanced at the shelves, my plan crumbled.

Helplessly, I stared at the hopelessly long array of soaps which stared right back with all the glittery cucumber-extract-and-papaya-juice-concoction-for-the-best-experience-ever-etc-etc puffery glowing on their expensive packaging.



I picked a blue coloured variant of a well-known brand whose ambassador cut the ropes of a bathtub tied to a hot air balloon. The balloon had taken off – bath tub, lady and bubbles floating over jagged mountain peaks distracting an innocent pilot, and almost leading to his untimely demise (darn, they only keep shooting down birds at the airport!).

No sooner had I picked it, my eyes fell on the yellow package of another brand. I remembered the brand from a billboard showing the brand ambassador taking a bath in the middle of a sunflower plantation.

Soaps showing a spray of water lined the next lot. And I easily recalled a girl dancing (read head banging plus arm swinging) under a waterfall promising unprecedented freshness.

They were all the same product, weren't they? Each served the same purpose – cleaning! But each positioned differently to arouse that feeling inside consumers of actually needing the brand whereas in reality she could derive the same basic benefit out of any other brands (or even non-brands)! Under such confounding circumstances what does a consumer do? She frets.

Anyhow, after the long spell of indecision, I picked the floating lady soap and breezed towards the grocery aisle for the next item on the list, ata. This shouldn't be too difficult. C'est facile! No sooner had complacency set in, than indecision erupted again! Should I buy the one whose name had stirred suspicion in the minds of an over possessive husband of a Hindi-serial-look-alike lady or should I go for the one named after Robin Hood's primary weapon?

What to pick? When I was almost on the verge of tossing a coin, I suddenly remembered the upper portion of a flour packet peeking out of my mother's kitchen cabinet. And in bold letters it claimed being a product of the latter brand. I picked it with no further hesitation.

Who'd have thought that a sudden recollection would motivate the haggard consumer to make the purchase decision, despite all those media airing worth millions of taka? Consumer behaviour is a complex subject rooting from (but not limited to) issues like the consumers' psychography, demography etc. It's an important subject taught rigorously at business schools, mulled over by marketing gurus, and tapped into by marketers worldwide. There's no telling what would trigger the favourable response for the companies – consumer purchase! Despite the mad race to outrun competitors and cluttering every visible surface on both sides of highways, shop signs, public vehicles, roof tops and even rain sheets of rickshaws, there's no telling what the shrewd consumer would do, or so would say the frustrated team promoting a particular brand!

However, a helplessly confused consumer would essentially settle for the brand which she is familiar with – something she'd seen her mother use before; maybe something she'd come to be aware of via word of mouth; maybe a promo done by her favourite silver screen star which thereby authenticates all puffery; or even by watching a talent program sponsored by a particular brand! Marketers call it equity building exercise – all done in order to stand out amongst the rapid proliferation of competitors, in an environment dotted by fragmented media and markets, pressures to optimise investment with limited fund, a recession struck economy and reduced consumer confidence and spending, – and they never cease vying hard for that piece of pie – the titillating wallet (or purse) of the consumer.

But how much of it is really helping? It must be helping, somewhat! Because guess which brand I settled for while picking the final item on the list, noodles...

All items collected, I headed for the counter, relieved and glad the ordeal was finally over. It hadn't taken exactly ten minutes. Thirty to be precise; insignificant waste considering I felt no cognitive dissonance.

In case you're still wondering I'd settled for the fastest-cooking noodles wrapped in sunny yellow!