

Impact of Gender, Age and Income on Consumers' Purchasing Responsiveness to Free-Product Samples

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Abstract

This study is aimed at exploring the impact of gender, age, and household income on consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples that are given to them at retail grocery stores in Riyadh. The findings demonstrated that consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples accounted for 67% on the five-point measuring scale. With regard to demographics, younger and female consumers were more responsive to free-product samples, whereas different income groups had no significant differences in this respect. Accordingly, the study recommended marketing managers to: pay more attention to free-product samples as an important promotional incentive; to exert efforts in doing further applied market research to identify locations to which female and young shoppers are attracted, and to target them with free-product samples.

Keywords: free-product samples, purchasing responsiveness, sales promotion, Demographics.

1. Introduction

Today, Consumers are bombarded with many kinds of promotional offers. Retailers of consumer goods usually: use promotional incentives to attract consumers; encourage them to go to their stores rather than competitors'; choose to buy their brands; purchase larger quantities of products on promotion (Ndubisi, 2005) and accelerate the number of consumer's shopping trips to the store (Chen and Monroe, 1998). For some food products, sales promotion methods are more important than advertising in ensuring profitability of the product (Vlachvei et al., 2009). However, Most of academic researchers have directed their studies to the impact of sales promotion methods on consumers' purchase decisions (Papatla and Krishnamurthi, 1996; Colombo et al., 2003; Swaminathan and Bawa, 2005; Kiran and Kishore, 2012). The most common in-store promotion types include different forms of price

reductions, displays, advertised brands, and free-product samples (Anic and Radas, 2006). However, few researchers have studied the effect of in-store free-product samples on their consumers' purchasing behaviors (Lammers, 1992; Heiman et al., 2001; Jones, 2001; Bawa and Shoemaker, 2004; Ben Amor, 2007; Heilman et al., 2011).

In this context, an exploratory research on 10 different grocery retailers and 30 of their consumers in Saudi Arabia's capital; Riyadh, indicated that free-product samples -as a promotional method- is not commonly used compared to gifts and price discounts. This may be attributed to the lack of research on consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples from consumers' perspective; hence, marketers do not know the role of free-product samples in consumers' purchase decisions. To close this gap, the researchers have conducted this research to measure the Saudi consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples in retail grocery stores and whether gender, age and household income demographics cause differences in this regard. The research findings are expected to give marketers in Saudi Arabia more insights on the role of free-product-samples as a promotional method as well as the influence of demographics on consumers' responsiveness to free-product sample promotions as a base of targeting so that stores can increase sales and counteract competition.

2. Literature Review and Hypotheses

2.1. Consumers' Purchasing Responsiveness to Free-Product Samples

Free-product samples that are gifted in stores to retail consumers give them the opportunity to try the product before making a real purchase (McGuinness et al., 1995). They are used as part of a strategy to encourage retail consumers to buy products and increase sales of consumer goods (Sun, 2011). Consumers' responsiveness is meant to be the deal proneness or consumers' tendency to reacting to promotions when they are in transaction processes (Lichtenstein & et al. 1995). Among different types of promotions, free-product samples have been widely used as an effective promotional tool in generating product trial and making real purchase (Rossiter and Percy, 1987; Belch and Belch, 1990; Bawa and Shoemaker, 2004; Heilman et al., 2011). A study on in-store sampling has shown that 92% of consumers preferred free-product samples over cents-off coupons while purchasing (Fitzgerald, 1996). Along the same line, Lindstedt (1999) found that 70% of shoppers will try in-store free-product samples if approached, and 37% will buy the product once they are sampled. In this regard, a study revealed that on the day of promotion, in-store free product samples can increase sales of the sampled product by as much as 300% (Mei and Moses, 2005) or even 500% in another study (Lindstedt 1999). However, results of Linstendt (1999) and Jones (2001) indicated that free-product samples have shown to boost sales by 37%-50% on the day of promotion (Heilman et al., 2004). Nonetheless, past and recent academic research in marketing considered sampling as one of the most under-researched areas of promotions (Lammers, 1992; Peattie, 1998; Heiman et al., 2001; Bawa and Shoemaker, 2004; Ben Amor, 2007; Heilman et al., 2011).

In general, many marketers acknowledge sampling programs as creating short-term boosts in consumers' responsiveness; hence improve sales of new products and expect a continuous growth in expenditures on sampling programs (Fowler, 2001). Surveys provided further information on the importance of trial samples for purchase. In one survey, 72% of the consumers showed that they purchased at least some of the brands for which they had received samples. The respondents agreed that sampling was a good risk-free opportunity to try new products, while 89% reported they would "feel better" about purchasing a product that they had been sampled, and 69% stated that product samples and demonstrations influenced their behavior more than television or radio advertisements (Estell, 2002). Along the same line, a National Incentive Survey conducted in Britain by Marketing Magazine stated that 72.8% of respondents considered free-product samples as the most likely promotional offer that makes them buy the products (Hupfer and Grey, 2005). As well, free samples

reduce the brand uncertainty inherent in trying unfamiliar products and may be more important for low-involvement products (Ghosh, et al., 1995). Additionally, marketers should keep in mind that consumers understand they offer samples because of their high confidence that testing experience will lead to later purchase (Wellner, 1998).

Past studies showed different results of the relationship between free samples and consumer responsiveness. For instance, marketing managers recognize the significance of product trial and thus give free samples to consumers in order to draw their attention to the product and expose them to a behavioral experience with product rather than just hearing about it (Kardes, 1999; Pramataris et al., 2000; Fill, 2002; Shimp, 2003). These studies have shown that free samples -as a promotional tool- are important on consumers' buying behavior. In addition, Banks (2003) stated that by adding value through free samples trial, brands attain stronger possibilities in affecting consumer behavior and choice. On contrary to those previous findings, Gilbert and Jackaria (2002) found that free-product samples hold no significance in consumer's buying responsiveness. Chandon, et al. (2000) showed that sales promotions might be appealing to consumers with high proneness for reasons beyond financial savings. These consumers may switch brands to benefit from special deals and offers that would support their smart shopper's self-perception, switching to products on promotion. However, many researchers saw that the success of free-product samples in promoting subsequent purchase behavior can be explained by principles of instrumental or operant conditioning theory, which argues that reinforced behaviors tend to be repeated than other behaviors (Chandon, 1995). When a trial sample is received favorably, the consumer's positive reinforcement can create a favorable response towards the product and develop intentions to purchase or make real purchase (Rothschild and Gaidis, 1981; Nord and Peter, 1980; Peter and Nord, 1982; McGuinness et al., 1992; McGuinness et al., 1995; Motes and Woodside, 2001; Sun, 2011). Based on the raised discussions, the following hypothesis is constructed:

H1: Consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples is significantly higher than Mean 3.

2.2. Demographics Effect

Do demographics play a role in consumers' response to sales promotion as a whole and to free-product samples in particular? Past and recent behavioral research on sales promotions focused on the demographics of deal-prone consumers (Bawa and Shoemaker, 1987; Narasimhan, 1984; Dotson, 2001; Vipul, 2010). Most of scales of analytical and econometric nature that studied sales promotions assumed that financial gains are the only benefit that motivates consumers' responsiveness to sales promotions. Accordingly, some studies have studied the effect of household income on consumers' purchasing responsiveness (Blattberg and Neslin, 1990; Park and Gomez, 2004). Nonetheless, some empirical results suggested that financial savings cannot fully explain why consumers respond to sales promotions. With regard to demographics, Vipul (2010) found impacts of gender, age, household income, education and household size on consumers' responsiveness to sales promotion. Sharma and Antil (2013) have studied the effect of age, gender, household income and family size on consumers' reaction to sales promotion. Another previous study by Dotson (2001) found that not married, younger and non-white consumers are taking advantage of some types of sales promotion (including free samples). Hence, it is noted that gender, age and household income play important roles in consumers' responsiveness as follows in more detail:

2.2.1. Gender

Although gender studies in consumer purchasing behavior are limited as a whole, some studies found gender differences in consumer's decision-making processes (Mokhlis and Salleh, 2009). However, conflicting results were found with respect to the relative significance of masculinity and femininity in explaining findings. For instance, Coughlin and O'Connor (1985) revealed that masculinity was a significant predictor of consumer purchase intentions, while Fischer and Arnold (1990) found

femininity to be more significant than masculinity in shopping for holidays. Other previous studies provided convincing evidence that male and female consumers' decision-making style is different (Mokhlis and Salleh, 2009). For promotion responsiveness, some studies have found that women are more promotion prone than men (Mazumdar and Papatla, 1995; Harmon and Hill, 2003). Focusing on free-product samples, Dotson (2001) and Ndubisi (2005) demonstrated that consumers' responsiveness to free-product samples does not differ between male and female consumers. In view of those conflicting results of gender differences, and the inadequate research on the role of gender in customers' behavioral response to promotional tools as a whole and free-product samples in particular, the following hypothesis is constructed to study the gender's effect on consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples:

H 2: Consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples differs based on gender.

2.2.2. Age

Previous studies demonstrated that age has a great influence on consumers' response to promotions (Kausler and Kleim, 1978; Dotson, 2001; Vipul, 2010; Sharma and Antil, 2013). The study by Dotson (2001) pointed out a number of significant differences in reported usage of sales promotion incentives regarding age. It found out that the youngest group, less than 25 years old, reported a higher likelihood of taking advantage of free-product samples than 35-54 years old groups. Generally, Young consumers perceive promotion as activities which bring distinguished benefits in the form of the likelihood to purchase products at reduced prices or to obtain free samples of goods or freebies (Adamczyk, 2008). In spite of these findings, conflicting results have been found in other studies regarding age. For instance, Moschis et al. (1995) found that older consumers appear to be more sensitive and prone to deals in general and more responsive to sales promotion items such as coupons and free samples in particular. Another study reported that older consumers respond favorably to promotion methods including free-product samples and coupons (Moschis, 1994). Accordingly, the effect of age hypothesis is constructed as follows:

H 3: Consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples differs based on age.

2.2.3. Household Income

Part of the neo-classical microeconomic theory is that consumers always react to maximize their utilities when buying commodities (Hunt and Lautzenheiser, 2011). Therefore, past studies have concentrated on financial saving as a primary consumer benefit of deals (Blattberg and Neslin, 1990). Hence consumers will respond to sales promotion only when financial incentive of doing so exceeds the opportunity cost of its redemption (Kwon and Kwon, 2007). Accordingly, using free-product samples is a positive chance of benefit where the cost will almost diminish. Hence, it is logic that the attraction of this technique will be stronger in lower-income households who have limited shopping budgets (Urbany et al, 1996; Kwon and Kwon, 2007; Vipul, 2010). In this context, Mishra et al. (2012) revealed significant differences in perceived utilitarian and hedonic benefits of sales promotion based on consumer's monthly household income. On the other hand, some studies found a surprising outcome indicating that those with higher household incomes appear to use promotional deals more often (Blattberg et al., 1978; Bawa and Shoemaker, 1987; Kwon and Kwon, 2007). Reversely, other studies found that deal proneness level is equal in all categories of income groups (Blattberg and Neslin, 1990; Dotson, 2001; Montaldo, 2006; Sharma and Antil, 2013). Accordingly, the income effect hypothesis is constructed as follows:

H4: Consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples differs based on household income.

3. Methodology

3.1. Sample and Data Collection

The study population is retail grocery stores consumers in Riyadh city, Saudi Arabia. A convenience sample of customers has been studied because of the difficulty to obtain a probability sample. Depending on e-survey, a total of 477 filled surveys were received, of which 43 were invalid and excluded from the analysis. Therefore, a total of 434 valid questionnaires were eventually entered into the analysis as shown in Table 1, representing a response rate of 91%. Table 1. shows frequencies and percentages of study sample characteristics, categorized by demographics: gender, age, and household income. Male customers represent 46.3% of the study sample, whereas female customers represent 53.7%. Customers whose ages are from 17 to 25 years old represent 39.2% of the study sample, whose ages are from 26 to 35 represent 40.1%, meaning that customers whose ages from 17 to 35 years old represent 79.3% of the sample. Regarding household income, the consumers whose incomes are less than SR 4000 represent 36.4%, and whose incomes are more than SR 12000 represent 25.8%. The two income groups together represent 62.2%. The other income levels represent (33.8%).

Table 1: Characteristics of study sample

Demographics		frequencies	%
Gender	Male	201	46.3
	Female	233	53.7
	Total	434	100
Age	Less than 17	22	5.1
	17-25	170	39.2
	26-35	174	40.1
	36-45	49	11.3
	46+	19	4.3
	Total	434	100
Household income	Less than SR 4000	158	36.4
	4000-6000	46	10.6
	600-8000	39	9
	8000-10000	39	9
	10000-12000	40	9.2
	More than 12000	112	25.8
	Total	434	100

3.2. Measures

The consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples was measured by a scale of (10 items) based mainly on items used by Anic and Radas (2006) and the concepts regarding sales promotion proneness disclosed by Kwon and Kwon (2007). These items were paraphrased to be fit for free-product samples and more clear for the study respondents. Accordingly, the survey contained 10 Likert-type items that measure the direct relationship between free-product samples and consumers' purchasing responsiveness as one variable, each item was measured by a five-point scale ranging from "1= strongly disagree" to "5= strongly agree".

3.3. Data Analysis

Data analysis was performed using SPSS 16. First, Factor analysis was used to test the collecting data instrument validity, identifying variable's related items. Second, Internal consistency method (Cronbach's Alpha coefficient) was used to test the scale reliability. Third, one-sample t-test has been used to test H1, Independent Samples t-Test to test H2 and One-Way ANOVA was used to test H3 and

H4. That's in addition to some descriptive statistical methods such as: percentages, Means, Standard Deviations (S.D.) and Coefficients of variance (C.V).

4. Findings

4.1. Validity and Reliability Testing

Using principal extraction and Varimax rotation methods, validity testing findings for the ten items of the data collection instrument demonstrated high loading coefficients as shown in Table 2. The loading coefficient for each item exceeded a factor loading accepted benchmark of 0.50 (Churchill, 1979). Hence, all the items of the instrument have been included in statistical reliability, descriptive and analytical statistics of the study hypotheses testing. Reliability testing of the study measuring instrument as shown in table 2 demonstrates acceptable levels of reliability. Alpha Cronbach's Coefficients have exceeded the minimum accepted benchmark value of 0.60 (Malhotra, 2007).

4.2. Descriptive Analysis of Study Variable

Table 2 shows Means, Standard Deviations and Coefficients of Variance (C.V.) for all items in the measuring instrument. The overall Mean of the consumers' purchase responsiveness to free-product samples is 3.38, which is higher than 3, representing 67% of the maximum value (5) on the scale that measures that variable.

Table 2: Factor loading and descriptive analysis

Measurement Items	Factor loading	Cronbach alpha	Mean	S.D	C.V.
The consumers' purchase responsiveness to free product samples		0.92	3.38	0.99	0.29
I often look for free samples before buying the product	0.753		3.09	1.36	0.44
I prefer to try the product before buying it	0.762		3.82	1.25	0.33
I usually look for free samples of new products	0.793		2.95	1.35	0.46
I give more attention to shops that give free samples before my purchasing decision	0.779		2.51	1.35	0.54
I prefer the product that I try in free samples before purchasing	0.780		3.69	1.24	0.33
Free sample is important to me before making a purchase decision	0.646		4.16	1.06	0.25
I prefer buying from the shops that give free-product samples	0.840		3.42	1.33	0.39
I always visit the shops that give free-product samples	0.811		3.01	1.32	0.44
When I visit a shop, I always ask about the free-product samples	0.700		3.95	1.20	0.30
I usually buy the product that satisfied me after trying a free sample of it	0.801		3.19	1.43	0.44

4.3. Testing of Hypotheses

4.3.1. Testing of H1

Table 3 demonstrates a support of the proposed construct in H1. It indicates that the Mean of the measured consumers' responsiveness to free-product samples (3.38) is above Mean 3 (67% of the maximum value on the scale which is 5). The P value of the One-sample t-test is 0.005 of significance level, illustrating the consumers' agreement that free-product samples are behind their purchasing responsiveness. Thus H1 is upheld.

Table 3: H1 testing (one Sample t-test)

Variables	Mean	SD	df	t-value	P-value
The consumers' responsiveness to free-product samples	3.38	0.99	433	2.849	0.005**

** Marginally significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

4.3.2. Testing of H2

Table 4 states a statistical difference in the consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples as $t\text{-value} = 2.149$ ($p = 0.012$). The Mean of female consumers (3.48) is higher than the Mean of male consumers (3.27), indicating that females are more responsive to free-product samples than males. Thus, H2 is upheld.

Table 4: H2 testing (Independent Samples t-Test)

Gender	Mean	SD	df	t-value	p-value
Male	3.27	1.06	432	2.149	0.012**
Female	3.48	0.92			

Dependent variable: the consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples

** Marginally significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

4.3.3. Testing of H3

Table 5 states statistical differences in the consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples due to age, as $F(433) = 3.087$ ($p = 0.016$). This suggests that age is likely to have an impact on the relationship between free-product samples and consumers' purchasing responsiveness. All age groups appeared to differ in terms of their responsiveness to free-product samples. Thus, H3 is upheld. More analysis, in table 6, indicates that young consumers are more responsive to free-product samples.

Table 5: H3 testing (One-way ANOVA)

Age	Mean	SD	df	F-value	p-value
17-	3.67	0.77	433	3.087	0.016**
17-25	3.56	0.97			
26-35	3.31	0.99			
36-45	3.05	0.89			
46+	2.95	1.25			

Dependent variable: the consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples

** Marginally significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

Table 6: Pair's comparisons of consumers' responsiveness to free-product samples Mean scores of age groups, using LSD Post Hoc comparison

Age levels	Age levels	Mean differences	p-value
17-	17-25	0.50	0.117
	26-35	0.78	0.015**
	36-45	0.92	0.011**
	46+	1.18	0.008**
17-25	17-	- 0.50	0.117
	36-35	0.28	0.070
	36-45	0.42	0.069
	46+	0.67	0.050**
36-35	17-	0.78	0.015**
	25-35	-0.28	0.070
	36-45	0.14	0.537
	46+	0.39	0.248
36-45	17-	-0.92	0.011**
	17-25	-0.42	0.069
	26-36	-0.14	0.537
	46+	0.25	0.507
46+	17-	-1.18	0.008**
	17-25	-0.674	0.050**
	26-36	-0.396	0.248
	36-45	0.254	0.508

** Marginally significant at the $p \leq 0.05$ level.

4.3.4. Testing of H4

Table 7 states non-statistical differences in the consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples due to household income, as $F\text{-value} = 1.413$ ($p > 0.05$). This suggests that household income is not likely to have an impact on the relationship. All income groups appeared to be somehow similar in terms of their purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples. Thus, H4 is not upheld.

Table 7: H4 testing (One-way ANOVA)

Household income	Mean	SD	df	F-value	p-value
Less than 4000	3.55	0.95	433	1.413	0.218
4000-6000	3.39	0.93			
6000-8000	3.47	1.01			
8000-10000	3.33	1.04			
10000-12000	3.41	0.83			
12000+	3.11	1.05			

Dependent variable: the consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples

5. Discussion and Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that the consumer's responsiveness to free-product samples is higher than Mean 3, indicating a high effect of free-product samples on consumers' purchasing responsiveness, validating most of previous studies (e.g. Motes and Woodside, 2001; Banks, 2003; Sun, 2011). Moreover, the results showed that gender plays an important role in consumers' purchasing responsiveness to free-product samples. Females were found to be more responsive than males, validating studies by Mazumdar and Papatla (1995) and Harmon and Hill (2003). This result may be linked with the inclination of females to be involved in purchase as an enjoyable experience in Saudi culture in general. Besides, women in Saudi Arabia are entirely responsible for the household grocery shopping; such role made them more responsive to free-product samples in stores. The findings also indicate that responsiveness to free-product samples is different based on age, where younger consumers were found to be more responsive to free-product samples, validating studies by Dotson (2001) and Adamczyk (2008). Such finding maybe attributed to the fact that younger consumers are more inclined to try and enter novel experiences than older consumers do. The final finding of this research showed no difference in responsiveness to free-product samples based on household income, validating some studies by Montaldos (2006) and Sharma and Antil (2013). This result can be attributed to the high income average in Saudi Arabia as a whole so that differences in consumer's purchasing responsiveness to free-product sample are beyond financial benefits.

6. Recommendations and Future Research

Based on the findings of this research the study recommends that marketing managers should pay more attention and invest more in free-product samples in the Saudi market in general. Furthermore, it is advised that extensive efforts are exerted in further applied market research to identify locations to which female and young shoppers are attracted. Marketing managers should target female and young consumers, providing them with free samples especially in new or unfamiliar products. Moreover, further research in the field of free-product samples' effect inside and outside the study region is advised. There is still an urgent need to investigate the impact of promotional tools on consumer behavior. Therefore, in spite of the light shed on free-product samples in this research, further research may choose to study and examine other types of sales promotions and the correlation effects of different demographic or psychographic groups on specific brands or product categories.

7. Limitations and Future Research

Although this study has delivered a base for understanding free-product samples as a promotional tool in Saudi Arabia, there are a number of limitations to this study. First, free-product samples as a promotional tool is not a current trend in the market, therefore, some respondents found it difficult to understand and differentiate between free-product samples and gifts. Furthermore, the spectrum of research related to promotional tools has showed poor interest in free-product samples. This created a limitation of extensive research on this tool in particular. Moreover, collecting data has depended on a convenience sample and taken a prolonged period and extra effort due to the low numbers of people who are interested in marketing research. This is because consumers in Saudi Arabia have low faith in the power of scientific research to change corporate mentalities in such developing culture.

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