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CONSUMER RESISTANCE TO INNOVATION: MARKETING PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

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Abstract

Despite company efforts to adopt consumer-oriented innovation development processes focused on delivering added value to the consumer, most commercial companies are faced with high rates of innovation failures. This paper seeks to explain why customers resist innovations, when otherwise these are considered necessary and desirable in order to have competitive edge over their competitors and survive in the market.

The reason to study and understand consumer resistance to innovations lies in the fact that most business organizations are faced with a very high rate of new product failures at early introduction stage of product life cycle and only very small fraction of these innovative ideas are successful in tapping the market effectively.

We have seen in the past the customers were reluctant in adopting internet banking because of the risks and security concerns associated with it and initially resisted to accept this innovation. One of the major causes for market failure is the resistance they encounter form the consumers to new innovations and new product developments.

Yet, very little research has been done on this subject as mostly the studies are focused on successful innovations and their rate of diffusion into the marketplace.

Keywords: Consumer Resistance, Innovation, Diffusion

Introduction

Resistance to innovation is a new concept being appeared and which is rather difficult to define. A loose definition for consumer resistance to innovation would be the negative reaction towards innovation because of its potential changes made to a satisfactory status quo or because it is in conflict with their belief structure (Ram & Sheth, 1989).

Thus, we can say that resistance to innovation is how consumer react to new or improved products introduced into the market, whatever they may be.

Consumer Resistance Defined:

- The fact of people disliking or being unwilling to buy a particular product or service (Cambridge Business English Dictionary).

-The unwillingness of consumers to adopt a particular product, service, or change (Collins English Dictionary).

-The lack of interest by consumers in buying a new product.

Despite company efforts to adopt consumer-oriented innovation development processes focused on delivering added value to the consumer, most commercial companies are faced with high rates of innovation failures. This is puzzling, as innovation adoption research has stressed that relative advantage is a dominant driver of consumer adoption.

Nevertheless, many innovations still meet resistance (Garcia & Atkin, 2002; Molesworth & Suortti, 2002). The reasons for this resistance vary and have not as yet received a significant amount of study, but examples illustrate the diversity of innovations which meet resistance.

For example, consumers expressed moral objections against genetically modified food, and actively campaigned against the introduction of these innovations (Bredahl, 2001; Fortin & Renton, 2003).

Consumer resistance also appears in the case of simpler innovations. For example, many wine drinkers steadfastly refused to accept the screw cap as an acceptable replacement for the traditional cork on wine bottles (Garcia & Atkin, 2002).

The objective of this paper is to develop insight into the topic consumer resistance to innovation-marketing problems and solutions.

The paper mainly focuses on explaining the reasons why consumers resist to innovation, the possible potential barriers to innovation, marketing strategies should be adopted to deal with these barriers to innovation and appropriate day to day life examples of innovation failures due to consumer resistance to innovation.

Finally, limitations and directions for future research are detailed.

Literature Review

While several authors have supported the notion of consumer resistance (Gatignon & Robertson, 1989; Ram, 1987; Sheth, 1981) and implicitly or explicitly acknowledged the importance of 'negative' or 'anti' consumption (e.g. Bredahl, 2001; Garrett, 1987; Herrmann, 1993; Kozinets & Handelman, 1998; Saba, Rosati, & Vassallo, 2000), there is little attention devoted to the thorough conceptualization of the concept of

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individual consumer resistance (Lapointe & Rivard, 2005; Penaloza & Price, 1993).

Innovation resistance is a response based on a conscious choice (Szmigin & Foxall, 1998), defined by Ram and Seth (1989) as ‘‘the resistance offered by consumers to an innovation, either because it poses potential changes from a satisfactory status quo or because it conflicts with their belief structure.” Nevertheless, this broad definition of innovation resistance is not particularly illuminating, being as it essentially defines innovation resistance as ‘resistance to innovation’. One key issue of concern is that resistance includes not trying the innovation (Nabih et al., 1997; Ram & Sheth, 1989; Szmigin & Foxall, 1998).

This is problematic because Rogers (2003) points out that initial objections toward an innovation can sometimes be overcome by offering consumers the opportunity to try the innovation for a certain period of time. Moreover, existing literature (e.g. Ram & Sheth, 1989; Szmigin & Foxall, 1998) suggests that innovation resistance can be further delineated from the basic ‘not-trying’ of the innovation into three distinct types of consumer behavior: rejection, postponement, and opposition.

Rejection: Rejection is not driven by a simple lack of awareness or ignorance about the innovation on the consumer’s part.
Rather, this form of resistance implies an active evaluation on the part of the consumer, which results in a strong disinclination to adopt the innovation (Rogers, 2003).
Lee and Clark (1996–1997) recognize that this reluctance is often induced by a suspicion of new and unproven innovations. In addition, Hirschheim and Newman (1988) contend that rejection is intertwined with an innate conservatism, i.e. a reluctance to change the status quo.

An example of a food innovation that was rejected by the American market is McDonalds’ ‘Arch Deluxe’ burger, which had the slogan the ‘‘Burger with the Grownup Taste”. While McDonalds positioned this new burger as a more sophisticated food product for adults, consumers did not really consider McDonalds as a provider of sophistication, but of convenience (Haig, 2003).

Postponement: Although consumers find an innovation acceptable in principle, they may decide not to adopt it at that point in time, for example until the circumstances are more suitable. In this case the decision is not final, and thus this definition is similar to Greenleaf and Lehmann’s (1995) ‘‘delay”, as a form of consumer resistance. For example, many consumers are waiting for voice over internet protocol (VoIP) technology to become more mainstream before considering adopting this technology. Currently, software and hardware for VoIP is readily available (e.g., Skype) and is in fact very easy to use.
However, it is not regarded as a standard yet, and most consumers are still suspicious of what they regard as ‘‘unproven technology” (D’Errico, 2005).

Opposition: Consumers may be convinced that the innovation is unsuitable and decide to launch an attack – for example negative word-of-mouth – against its launch. Davidson and Walley (1985) describe this as innovation sabotage, where consumers actively engage in strategies to prevent the innovation’s success. Such forms of opposition, also referred to as ‘‘active rebellion”, are most likely to affect market mechanisms (Fournier, 1998).

The factors that drive consumer resistance can be split into two main types (e.g., Gatignon & Robertson, 1989; Herbig & Day, 1992; Martinko, Henry, & Zmud, 1996; Ram & Sheth, 1989).

First, innovations which require a change in consumers’ established behavioural patterns, norms, habits and traditions are likely to be resisted. Second, innovations which in some way cause a psychological conflict or problem for consumers are likely to be resisted.
Similarly, Tornatzky and Klein (1982) conclude that compatibility, defined as the degree to which an innovation is perceived as consistent with existing values, habits and past experiences of the potential adopter, is one of the few factors of Rogers’ theory that consistently relates to adoption.

Considering traditions and norms, any behaviour that is contrary to group norms, or societal and family values, creates a barrier (Herbig & Day, 1992).

Also, several researchers (Foxall, 1993; Foxall, 1994; Ram, 1987; Sheth, 1981) argue that when consumers are satisfied with their current situation, they have no desire or reason to change. Sheth (1981) points out that resistance is sometimes a consequence of habits. These habits are formed when a customer uses a product frequently over a long period of time.

Thus, it is not surprising that innovations which conflict with the usage patterns of competing and well-established products (e.g., a piece of software not compatible with Microsoft Windows), or that contradict well-established workflows, practices, or habits, will face resistance (Hurter & Rubenstein, 1978; Oreg, 2003). In this situation, other routine behaviours must change before the innovation achieves acceptance.

In terms of psychological variables, theory suggests that the perceived product image of an innovation should have an influence on resistance. In particular, when studying innovation resistance, image serves as an extrinsic cue that consumers use as a signal to base their decisions on. This is line with Bearden and Shimp (1982), who argue that extrinsic product cues are important for consumers to assess new products.
As the actual product characteristics and functioning of an innovation may be hard to observe, the image is likely to be derived from stereotypes, rumour or other indirect, non-experiential, sources (Ram & Sheth, 1989).
Additionally, a certain identity might be obtained from the innovation’s origins, for example the product class or industry which it belongs to, or the country of origin. Recent research has also suggested that negative media coverage can induce negative image perceptions of innovations (Fortin & Renton, 2003) that lead to resistance (Ram & Sheth, 1989).
Resistance towards innovations is also influenced by consumers’ awareness of the perceived risk of adopting an innovation (Shoemaker & Shoaf, 1975). Consumers often experience many uncertainties about the adoption of innovations, especially with regard to performance (Garcia & Atkin, 2002), and consequently assume the likely outcome of innovation usage to

be negative (Martinko et al., 1996). It is consumers' evaluation of the likelihood of these negative outcomes which constitutes their perceived risk. Literature has defined several forms of risks, of which physical, economic, functional, and social risk have been mentioned in relation to consumer resistance (Bredahl, 2001; Ram & Sheth, 1989; Saba et al., 2000).

In turn this illuminates a number of quandaries in our present understanding of the underlying forms of consumer resistance to innovations.

Why Innovation Resistance?

We humans are a funny bunch around new ideas. Yes, we're excited to hear about them. But far less keen to act on them.

Certainly, there are many possible reasons for consumers showing resistance to innovation:

First, an innovation may have an impact on the consumer day-to-day existence and disrupt their daily established routines. The very start of the e-commerce in India met with the high degree of consumer resistance because of the changes it created in the shopping behaviour. Consumers could not interact with the store personnel and could not get the real feel of the product which in present in market shopping. Even today majority of middle aged Indian consumers are resisting the online shopping mode. Also, certain consumers are happy with their present condition or habit (Status quo) and thus shows resistance to new innovations.

Second, the Semmelweis Reflex is a metaphor for the reflex-like tendency to reject new innovation, evidence or knowledge simply because it contradicts established norms, beliefs or paradigms. It simply means innovation may conflict with the consumers prior belief structure or well established norms and principles. Like, it is believed by the my countries across the globe that products produced by China are of inferior quality and are against their established beliefs, norms and standards. Also, many innovative products (medicines) produced in India are being rejected by Americans because it conflicts with their prior norms and standards.

Third, the Mere-exposure Effect is a psychological phenomenon where people tend to develop a preference for things merely because they are familiar with them. It can be something as simple as preference for a face you're familiar with, or 'warming' up to an idea only after being exposed to it a number of times. It simply means people develop preferences to things they are familiar off and offer resistance to things they are non-familiar to. Like many people don't buy expensive products quickly or on single go and buy them only after getting familiar or adept to it only.

Fourth, Loss Aversion refers to people's tendency to strongly prefer avoiding losses over acquiring gains. Studies have suggested that losses are twice as powerful, psychologically, as gains – people would hate to lose $100 much more than they would feel great about winning $100. Thus, people show resistance to new innovation in fear of loss they may have to bear while they purchase the newly innovative product. Many consumers show resistance to newly launched tech gadgets and products because of failure and loss associated with it.

Fifth, the Knowledge Bias refers to the tendency of people to choose the option they know best, rather than the best option. This includes well-known principles like the curse of knowledge, when having in-depth knowledge of a subject prevents people from thinking about it from a less-informed perspective. Like people buying Samsung mobile phone when there are better options available with Micromax, Lava, Motorola in the same price range.

Sixth, Anchoring is the tendency to rely too heavily on a past reference or one piece of information when making judgments. Thinking of how people judge a "good" price for a product based on the first price they see – any subsequent price they see is judged high or low based on the first price. Many people while purchasing new products refer to their past experiences or rely on past piece of information, like people buying groceries to a store having appropriate and consistent price of items and resist a store which changes its price of items too frequently.

Seventh, Hyperbolic Discounting is the preference for rewards that arrive sooner rather than later. And the longer the delayed reward, the lesser the value is. Example: thinking of long-term payback through energy efficiency versus immediate reward via lower equipment price.

Adoption of Innovation

The innovation adoption curve of Rogers is a model that classifies adopters of innovations into five categories namely innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. Each of these groups have different level of tolerance to the innovation and the variation in level affects the timing of adoption.

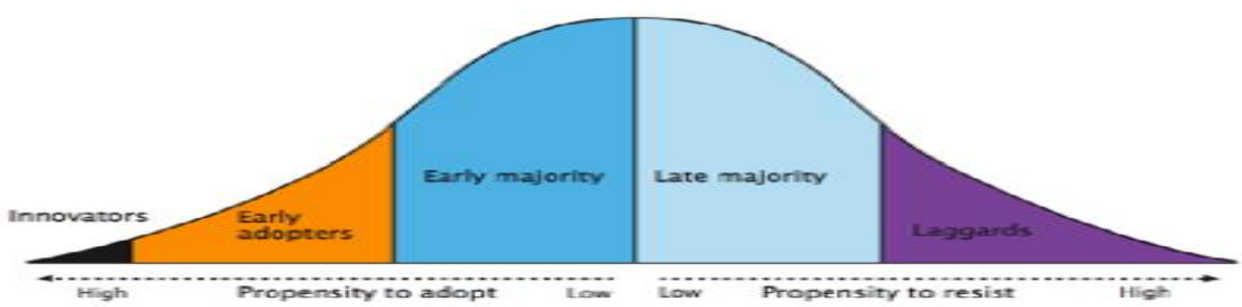


Figure 1: Rogers Innovation Adoption Curve

Innovators: Brave people, pulling the change, they exhibit no resistance to innovation and are the first to adopt.

Early Adopters: Respectable people, try out new ideas, but in a careful way.

Early Majority: Thoughtful people, careful but accepting change more quickly than the average.

Late Majority: Sceptic people, will use new ideas or products only when the majority is using it.

Laggards: Traditional people, caring for the old ways, are critical towards new ideas and will only accept it if the new idea has become mainstream or tradition.

Factors affecting adoption of innovation by majority of consumers:

I. **Awareness:** The adoption or rejection of an innovation begins when consumer becomes aware of the innovation (Rogers & Shoemaker, 1971). Lack of awareness is the most important factor in the adoption of an innovation. The average consumers are not adopting internet banking services due to unawareness of the availability of the service and benefits it offers.

II. **Ease of Use:** The adoption of new innovation very much depends upon the ease of use of the particular product or service. The success of new innovation depends upon the ease by which it can be used or how easy the person gets adept to it. There are various instances where innovations were resisted by the consumers due to its complexity. For example qwerty mobile phones were resisted by the consumers because of their complexity in use and hence there sales went down in comparison to normal mobile phones.

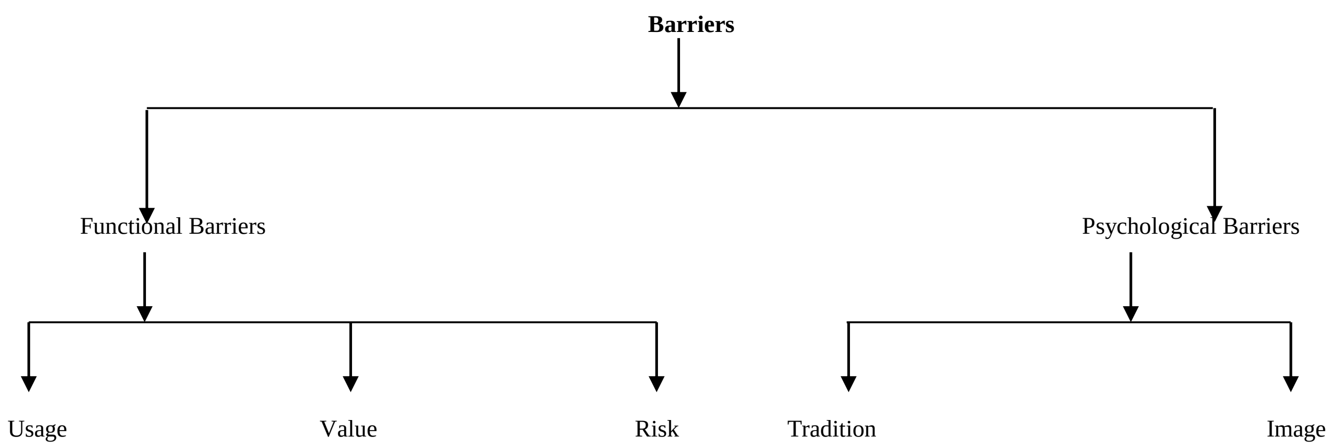
III. **Complexity:** is the degree of ability to understand or use a new product. The more complex is the product for the consumers, the more complicated would be the process of getting appreciation and becoming attractive to them. Complexity becomes especially important when attempting to establish market acceptance for high tech goods. To be more particular, there exist “technical fears” that can become a barrier for consumer acceptance of a new product. These fears include: the fear of technical complexity of the product; the fear of becoming out-of-date quickly; the fear of public reaction; the fear of doing physical damage to the product.

IV. **Relative advantage:** is the ability of a new product to better meet consumer needs in comparison with other products existing currently in the market. For instance, the cell-phone as a means of wireless communication provides easily accessible communication and has obvious relative advantage over the landline telephone.

V. **Compatibility:** is one of the most important factors of a new product acceptance. The degree of conformity of a new product with the needs and values of potential consumers, their practical experience and with the products already existing in the market is called compatibility. For example, nowadays the most popular operating system in the world is Microsoft Windows, although there exist other systems, such as Mac OS, Linux.

VI. **Possibility to try the product:** is the degree to which a new product can be tested in limited amount of time. The higher the possibility to try the product, the easier it is for consumer to evaluate and accept it. For example, the producers of cosmetics are giving the chance to try their new products (such as creams, balms, lotions) by giving people free samples of it.

Barriers of Consumer Resistance to Innovation



Functional Barriers:

a) Usage Barrier: Innovations which are not compatible with the existing habits of consumers. Unless the usage of the product is made easier, it will continue to face resistance. Example: electric cars, Mac OS, Linux operating system.

b) Value Barrier: It refers to the value of the innovation, Price versus performance measure of the innovation as compared to the existing substitutes. Thus an innovation should offer a strong performance-to-price value compared with product substitutes there is no reason with the consumers to change. Example: CORFAM by DU POINT, CDs versus pen-drives (pen-drives are easy to use, can store lot of data compared to CDs).

c) Risk Barrier: It refers to the potential risk associated with the innovation. Consumers are likely to postpone an innovation until they are aware of it. Example: If product innovation is of 1st generation with high cost associated with it there is uncertainty for consumer to wait longer for the stable product or buy, like in case of I-Pads.

There are four main types of risks inherent in an innovation namely physical risk, economic risk, functional risk and social risk.

I. Physical Risk: harm to person or property that is associated in the innovation, example: new drugs, electrical iron or equipment etc.
II. Economic Risk: The higher the cost of innovation, higher is the financial risk associated with it. Examples: Costly gadgets, mobile phones, machines, etc.
III. Functional Risk: It refers to the uncertainty in the proper functioning of the innovation and the consumers are afraid or uncertain about the proper functional performance of the new innovative products. Examples: Newly launched cars, bikes, equipment etc.
IV. Social Risk: It refers the potential societal resistance or objection to an innovation. Consumers resist an innovation because they feel they are against the societal norms and are not acceptable in the society or social scenarios. Example: Whether to eat beef products or not.

Psychological Barriers:

a) Tradition Barrier: It refers to the deviation in tradition of the consumers with the introduction of new innovation, the cultural change which occurs for the consumer due to innovation. The greater the cultural or tradition change, the greater is the resistance towards the new innovation. Example: not all people find it socially acceptable to drink and smoke it is against their traditions, similarly in food habits, many people abstain from eating onion and garlic it's against their culture.
b) Image Barrier: Every innovation has its certain identity, a class, a set of qualities associated with it or a unique personality. An innovation has it origin, country where it is developed or the innovative product being manufactured.

Thus, if the identity or class or qualities, personality does not match the qualities or class of the consumers or with the image of the consumer that innovation faces a resistance. Every consumer perceives to have certain expectations from an innovation or perceived qualities or image about the innovation and if that image does not goes with the innovation the consumer declare it unfavorable and show resistance towards it. Example: Indian Start-ups are changing the face of the country, decentralized organizations are not always more efficient than centralized organizations and China products are always of cheap quality.

Marketing Strategies for Overcoming Barriers of Consumer Resistance to Innovation

Type of resistance (Barriers)	Marketing Strategy Components			
	Product Component	Communication Component	Price Component	Sale Component
Functional Barriers a) Usage Barrier Barriers in the use of innovation.	Modification & improvement in the new product so that it provides easy use and adequate level of service.			Policy of market development and adaptation of product to consumer needs and wants at all points of sale.
b) Economic / Value barrier.	Improving the presentation of the product (modification & development), distinctive features, adding value to the product, product quality. Improving product positioning.	Effective communication signifying the effective price of the product in relation to its competitors.	Employing effective pricing strategies such as market penetration pricing and cut down product manufacturing costs.	
c) Risk Barrier	Following well known policies of trademarks, obtaining certificates of quality, ISO certificate, etc. Providing guarantee of products.	Using informational and self explanatory advertisements. Focus on clear and informative messages via all channels.		

Psychological Barriers a) Tradition barrier		Informing consumers about the use of the product, creating awareness about the usage in right manner.		Using sales and industrial agents effectively.
b) Image barrier	Efficient use of trademark policies and quality certificates.	Emphasis in communication on the importance of the quality parameters, certificates and trademarks.		

Table 1: Marketing strategies for resolving barriers of consumer resistance to innovation.

Marketing Solutions to Consumer Resistance to Innovation

1. The higher competitiveness of the supplier, the higher the level of innovation diffusion into the market. Enterprises that aim at becoming highly competitive in the market should be using more and more aggressive pricing strategies and attract more and more resources to the release the new products.
2. The better the reputation of the firm the faster is the initial diffusion of the product. Good reputation increases trust to the product, because it lowers the risk during the decision-making process by the consumers during purchase.
3. Products are faster diffused in the market when standardized technology is used. Consumers usually consider purchase of innovation more risky if they are not sure of whether the technology used in the product will become standard or not. If this risk is reduced or eliminated, more consumers will be eager to purchase the product. Hence, standardized products should be manufactured.
4. Targeting the consumers which are fast at adopting the new innovation such as innovators and the early adopters of the Rogers innovation adoption curve.
5. Trying to achieve sustainable competitive position in the market, an enterprise should aim at satisfying consumers' needs and develop new products in accordance with consumers' demands.
6. The enterprises beside using traditional marketing tools should also master new marketing technologies for overcoming resistance to innovations and use various means of spreading the information about the innovations, such as: perkonomics (loyalty programs), viral advertisements, social media marketing, brand ambassadors and integrated marketing communication efficiently.
7. Use of effective pricing strategies such market penetration pricing, High low pricing, every time low pricing , etc to tap the market and increase the acceptance rate of new innovations by the consumers.
8. The firms should use its resources wisely and focus on quality of products and must fulfil all quality standards and obtain ISO certificates.
9. The firms should focus on distinctiveness while manufacturing products and thus helps in reducing the resistance to innovation by the consumers.
10. The firm should prevent all type of functional (usage, value, risk) barriers and psychological (tradition and image) barriers while developing new innovations.

Some Examples of Failed Businesses due to Consumer Resistances to Innovation and Wrong Marketing Strategies Adopted by the Firms:

DoneByNone – This Gurgaon based e-commerce venture operated as a women's only fashion brand. The venture started out as HandsPick.com and later changed its name to DoneByNone. It was started by Amarinder Dhaliwal and Vijesh Sharma who were earlier with Bennette, Coleman & Co. Ltd in February 2011. The company managed to raise funds from early stage investor, Seed fund. After customer satisfaction related issues were pointed out in late 2014, the company shut down its operations in early 2015.

Dazo – India's first app-based meal delivery service shut down operations in October 2015 after raising seed funds from a flurry of investors ranging from Rajan Anandan (MD, Google India), Amit Agrawal (Country Manager, Amazon India), Sumit Jain (Co-founder, Commonfloor),Aprameya Radhakrishna (co-founder, TaxiForSure) and others. The Start-up failed due to poor food quality and efficiency and was resisted by the consumers.

Indiaplaza.com – One of the first e-commerce companies in India (pioneer of its times), starting out in 1999 as Fabmart.com. It was renamed Fabmall.com and later Indiaplaza.com, after Fabmall acquired US based Indiaplaza in 2007. An investee company of Kalaari Capital and founded by Mr K. Vaitheeswaran, Indiaplaza raised $8 mn in funding from 2004 to 2011. The company stopped its operations in mid-2013. The company failed because of usage barrier, it was ahead of its times, also because of little focus on consumers, lagging in adoption rate and non adaptability towards the changing market dynamics.

Even before whatsapp -A kind of a social networking site On Mobiles- Dodgeball was a mobile location based social networking started in year 2000 by Dennis Crowley's was doomed as everything happened via text message, which was not very user friendly.

Zeppery -Founded in 2015 by Utkarsh Srivastava and Lalit Vijay, funded by Suyash Sharma ($77k) it was food pre-ordering app that allowed users to pre-order food at restaurants and other outlet. Company struggled to retain customers and had to close its operation in just six month. That was fast.

According to founders the concept of food pre-ordering was too early for Indian market.
(*Source: Google internet.)

Conclusions

Innovation are the main source of competitive advantage and will continue to remain the major factor for any firm's success, but innovating successfully and without facing any consumer resistance is a troublesome task and needs lot of firm's efforts and specially role played by a marketer in successful implications of these innovations. This paper tries to establish successful conceptual framework in understanding the resistance to innovation by consumers and the possible market problems and their effective solutions.
The consumers are resisting to new innovations and the possible reasons for this includes status quo, semmelweis reflex, mere-exposure effect, loss aversion, knowledge bias, anchoring and hyperbolic discounting. While there is timing of innovation introduction for its successful adoption and depends upon many factors such as awareness, ease of use of innovation, relative advantage, complexity, compatibility, etc.
The innovation barriers are broadly classified into two broad categories namely functional and psychological barriers. The functional barriers include the usage, value, risk barriers and the psychological barriers include tradition and image barriers and these must be resolved strategically and effectively by employing efficient marketing strategies involving following components namely product, price, communication and sale components.

The marketers must employ suitable strategies to resolve and solve the problems of innovation resistance and may involve strategies like understanding consumer needs, effective pricing strategies, communication strategies, using standardized technology- certificates and quality benchmarks, etc.
We have also seen the failure of many businesses because of resistance of consumers towards new innovation such as failure of firms like Donebynone, Dazo, Indiaplaza.com, Dodgeball and Zeppery.
The key point lies in the fact that it is not only the role of the firm or the marketer to resolve these innovation barriers effectively but to understand the possible reasons of resistance to innovation by the consumers well in advance and accordingly design marketing strategies and manufacture or introduce new innovations into the marketplace for the successful adoption of these innovations by the consumers.

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