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## Elements of Task Definition Shopping Situations: A Study in Context of Products High on Haptic Salience

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### Abstract

Marketing literature has identified task definitions as one of the important situational influences. Task definition features of a situation include an intent or requirement to select, shop for, or obtain information about a general or specific purchase. Researchers have tried to define planned and emergency shopping situations on basis of amount spent on trip and by customer-generated measures on the purpose of the shopping trip. In the studies using behavioral data, either an individual cut-off or an aggregate cut-off has been used. All these definitions of planned and emergency shopping situations are driven from practitioners' perspective and suffer from operationalization issues. This brings to fore a need to enhance the understanding about the concept of task definition. In this study, we make an attempt to understand and define the concept of task definition from customers' perspective. Based on the thematic analysis of data collected through qualitative interviews, we identify the elements of task definitions which customers consider salient in distinguishing between different task definitions. We conclude, based on the additional analysis of comparison of these elements across different product categories, that it is also important to consider the finer point in elements across two product categories for same type of shopping trip.

**Key Words:** task definition, haptic touch, regular purchase, emergency purchase, fill-in trip, major trip

## Elements of Task Definition Shopping Situations: A Study in Context of Products High on Haptic Salience

### 1. Introduction and objective of paper

Task definition features of a situation include an intent or requirement to select, shop for, or obtain information about a general or specific purchase (Belk, 1975). These include different buyer and user roles as anticipated by the individual. For example, a person shopping for a small appliance as a wedding gift for a friend is in a different situation than he would be in shopping for a similar appliance for personal use (Belk, 1975). Therefore, the choice of product and store may be frequently governed by situational circumstances which form the basis for the specific reasons that customers have for buying a product or service. These situational conditions and the shopping strategies that they generate, are often referred as 'task definitions' (Kenhove, Wulf, & Waterschoot, 1999).

Though considerable work has been done in the area of task definitions, there is seems to be a need to enhance the understanding the concept of task definition. The first few studies on task definition focused on customer's purchase behavior for planned and unplanned buying decisions (Kollat & Willett, 1967; Stern, 1962). Kallot and Willett (1967) showed that a customer's proneness to unplanned purchasing varies depending upon the nature of the shopping trip, i.e., whether the trip is a major trip or a fill-in trip. Researchers have tried to define major and fill-in trips on basis of amount spent on trip (Frisbie, 1980; Kahn & Schmittlein, 1992) and by customer-generated measures on the purpose of the shopping trip (Kollat & Willett, 1967, Walters & Jamil, 2003). In the studies using behavioral data, either an individual cut-off (Kahn & Schmittlein, 1989; 1992) or an aggregate cut-off (Frisbie, 1980) has been used.

All these definitions of major and fill-in trip are driven from practitioners' perspective and suffer from operationalization issues. For example, it is reasonable to hypothesize that, on average, a major trip is larger than a fill-in trip (Cobb & Hoyer, 1986; Kollat & Willett, 1967). However, due to their variable nature, fill-in trips

could be very expensive too which means that there can be issues in defining these types of trips based on a cut-off rule (Nordfalt, 2009). Kelly, Smith, and Hunt (2000) found that customers who had not planned to buy anything made unplanned purchases worth, on average, nearly twice the amount spent on unplanned purchases by customers who also made some planned purchases during the trip. Also, due to variable size of households, a single-person household's average major trip may be smaller than a five-person household's average fill-in trip (Nordfalt, 2009). This necessitates a need for research to explore task definitions. In this study, we make an attempt to understand and define the concept of task definition from the customer's perspective. More specifically, we examine two research questions

- What are the elements which are considered salient by customers to differentiate the different types of shopping trips?
- Are there differences in the elements of shopping trips across product categories?

Marketing literature has identified task definitions as one of the important situational influences (Belk, 1975; Kenhove et al., 1999). Previous research in role of task definition on consumer behavior has examined the influence of different task orientation on product related choices (Clarke & Belk, 1979; Miller & Ginter, 1979), on marketing mix variables (Kahn & Schmittlein, 1992; Walters & Jamil, 2003) and choice of store formats (Kenhove et al., 1999; Thelen & Woodside, 1997). Irrespective of differences in defining the different types of trips, researchers have emphasized on influence of task definitions on consumer behavior. The influence of task definition on the decision choices made by customers necessitates the need to develop a better understanding of this concept from research as well as customer point of view. For the same, understanding the elements which are salient among customers for task definitions will help the retailers in formulating appropriate marketing strategies and plans.

In order to answer the second question and define the context of the study, we have taken the context of products which are high on haptic salience. The context for the study evolves from the changing retailing scenario in India wherein customers are increasingly putting importance on the opportunity to touch and feel the product before making the

purchase. Retailers need to take note of this and formulate their strategies and tactics in delivering value to the customer (Sinha, 2003). In this study, for the same, we have taken the context of products where touch has a role to play in purchase decision.

This paper starts with a review of the previous work done in area of task definitions which provides a basis for further explorations. After a summary of literature in the area, we explain the research methodology including data collection and data analysis methods. Based on the analysis of data, we identify the elements of task definitions which customers consider salient in distinguishing between different task definitions. We also explore whether these elements differ across different product categories. Next, we provide the implications and conclude by providing area of future research.

## **2. Literature background**

Belk (1975) suggested that task-defining features of a customer purchase situation arise from goals relating to information gathering or product selection, and from the usage situations envisioned for products which are relevant to these goals. In other words, the task is defined by the customers' intentions at a particular time and place. In a consumer behavior context, a task definition comprises the set of goals a customer forms to resolve needs deriving from a specific situation (Marshall, 1993). Kenhove et al. (1999) explained that task definitions for purchase situations may also differ in aspects such as involvement, difficulty, specificity, and complexity. For example, the task may be highly involving either because it entails important immediate goals, or because the intended usage situation involves important goals.

The earlier studies on task definition focused on customer's purchase behavior for planned and unplanned buying decisions (Stern, 1962; Kollat & Willett, 1967). Stern classified the unplanned buying as synonymous with impulsive buying and suggested a "mix" of different categories of impulsive buying. Kallot and Willett (1967) showed that a customer's proneness to unplanned purchasing varies depending upon the nature of the shopping trip, i.e., whether the trip is a major trip or a fill-in trip. Kahn and Schmittlein (1992) termed major and fill-in trips as regular and quick

trips respectively. Major shopping trips require much time and effort to be expended by the customer because a large number of items are to be purchased to fulfill short and long-term needs (Frisbie, 1980; Kahn & Schmittlein, 1992). Fill-in shopping trips are designed to meet more pressing product needs with less time and effort being expended by the customer during the trip compared to a major shopping trip (Kahn & Schmittlein, 1992). Kollat and Willett (1967) stated that fill-in trips are typically made between major shopping trips to satisfy urgent needs for a few products.

Researchers have tried to define major and fill-in trips on basis of amount spent on trip (Frisbie, 1980; Kahn & Schmittlein, 1992) and by customer-generated measures on the purpose of the shopping trip (Kollat & Willett, 1967; Walters & Jamil, 2003). (**Table 1** shows a summary of literature on operationalization of task definition.) Bell and Lattin (1998) argued that underlying task definitions (e.g. major trip versus fill-in trip) played an important role in the response patterns exhibited by the customer. Kenhove et al. (1999) stated that task definitions are generally believed to have an important influence on an evaluative criterion's salience. Holbrook and Gardner (1998) suggested that task orientation encourages targeted search which is geared towards solving a problem.

**Table 1: Task definition operationalization from literature**

S. No.	Study	Task definition Operationalization
1	Kollat and Willett, 1967	The respondents were asked to reveal their purchase plans at the entry of store.
2	Clarke and Belk, 1979	Employed the gift/personal use dichotomy to manipulate task involvement levels. Subjects were informed that products were to be purchased for personal use (low) or else as gift for a good friend (high).
3	Miller and Ginter, 1979	Subjects completed the questionnaire in different eating out occasions, which was operationalized for different task dimensions.
4	Frisbie, 1980	Filler trip was defined by the expenditure designating a filler trip (\$5, 5 % of monthly food expenditure, 0.05 % of annual income). A major trip was defined as any trip which was not a filler trip.
5	Kahn and Schmittlein, 1992	The shopping trip was classified as major or fill-in trip depending upon the total amount spent on each trip which was relative to a household level cutoff point.
6	Kenhove, Wulf, and Waterschoot, 1999	During the interview, the subjects were provided with a list of task definitions and were asked to indicate which task definition was dominant with respect to the store they were currently visiting.
7	Walters and Jamil, 2003	Shoppers were asked in survey to indicate the type of shopping trip they just completed using a set of shopping trip descriptions.
8	Nordfalt, 2009	Shoppers were asked to respond to two item 10-point self-report measure for classification of major and fill-in trip during exit interviews.
9	Reutterer and Teller, 2009	Shoppers were already classified for fill-in and major shopping trip based on A C Nielsen data provided to researchers.

Research in role of task definition on customer behavior has examined the influence of different task orientation on product related choices (Clarke and Belk, 1979; Miller and Ginter, 1979), on marketing mix variables (Kahn and Schmittlein, 1992; Walters & Jamil, 2003) and choice of stores (Kenhove et al., 1999; Thelen and Woodside, 1997). Miller and Ginter (1979) discovered that different choice criteria were used according to four different usage situations. Clarke and Belk (1979) examined the manner in which product involvement and situational task importance

affect anticipated customer purchase effort. While examining the effect of marketing mix variables on shopping trip, Kahn and Schmittlein (1992) stated that relationship exists between shopping trip and promotions on offer at store. On choice of store, Thelen and Woodside (1997) discovered that the type of task definition influences primary store choice. Kenhove et al. (1999) investigated the impact of task definition on store attribute salience and store choice and found that different task definitions were related to store choices.

Summing up the work done in the area of task definitions, it can be stated that researchers have emphasized on influence of task definitions on different aspects of consumer behavior. The review of literature suggests that there are differences in defining different types of trips and though Reutterer and Teller (2009) have tried to provide characterization of major and fill-in trip based on few dimensions, there is a need to understand the concept with a fresh perspective. Taking into account this research gap, we make an attempt to understand and define the concept of task definition from the customer's perspective.

As mentioned earlier, the context for the study evolves from the changing retailing scenario in India. Though India has the highest number of retail outlets in the world, Indian retailing scenario has been dominated by small format stores, traditionally called *kirana* stores. The share of organized retail represents mere 9% share of Indian retailing market. (Report on Indian retail industry by Cygnus, 2010). However, Indian retail scenario is undergoing a vast change with a number of players getting into organized retailing. Leading Indian companies like Future Group, Aditya Birla Retail, and Reliance Retail are ambitiously driving their expansion plans in organized retail. While some foreign players like Metro and Carrefour have entered through Cash-And-Carry format, other foreign players like Wal-Mart and Tesco have also ventured into India in collaboration with Indian partners (Abhishek, 2014). Overall, the Indian retail market is growing at 30% annually, with the organized segment registering above average growth of 30% (Report on Indian retail industry by Cygnus, 2010).



The transformation of Indian retail scenario has led to existing and new players experimenting with new retail formats. While customers have the choice of traditional format (*kirana*) stores, they are also endorsing other formats like hypermarkets and supermarkets. Evolving store formats and shopping behavior is leading to changes in the way stores function (Sinha & Uniyal, 2005). The traditional format stores have a clear division of space wherein wooden furniture is used to divide the store space between customers and shop staff. The merchandise is stocked in the area which is in direct control of the shop staff. The customer asks for the products and is often provided the same. The shop staff serves as the shopper's intermediary to the world of things (Underhill, 1999). This arrangement prohibits and discourages the customer to actually touch and assess products. However, with the new format retail stores, customers can directly pick up the merchandise from the display put up by stores. Customers, now increasingly, can touch it to discover the merchandise on their own (Underhill, 1999). This opportunity to touch and feel the product before making the purchase has important implications for consumer behavior in India which retailers need to pay attention. Therefore, in this study, we have taken the context of products where touch has a role to play in purchase decision.

### **3. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Method of data collection**

Research methodologists strongly suggest the suitability of qualitative methods when the research is exploratory in nature and when the research questions are: 'what is', 'how' or 'why' (Yin, 1994). Qualitative interviews also explore specific topics, events, or happenings and through qualitative interviews, one can understand experiences and reconstruct events in which one did not participate (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). The term *qualitative* here means exploring the broader understanding possible in natural conversations and narratives. It was decided to conduct qualitative interviews to understand customer's perceptions of different shopping trips for identifying the elements of task definitions. By understanding the customer experiences of task definitions through conversations and narratives, we wanted to generate the main elements of task definitions which would guide us in understanding the concept of task-definition.

Qualitative interviews are modifications or extensions of ordinary conversations, however, one has to focus the discussion to obtain more depth and detail on a narrower range of topics than one would in ordinary conversations (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In an unstructured format, generally followed in line of conversations, the researcher suggests the subject for discussion but has few specific questions in mind. When the interviewer wants some specific information, they use a semi-structured format. In such cases, the interviewer introduces the topic, then guides the discussion by asking specific questions. Most of the qualitative interviews have both structured and unstructured parts but vary in the balance between them. In this research, we followed a semi-structured approach for interviews as we had defined the research arena. This choice of semi-structured format was also guided by the fact that our discussions were topical interviews which are more narrowly focused on a particular event or process, and are concerned with what happened, when and why. In preparing main questions for topical interviews, we worked out a series of queries that together cover specific events or stages of a process, in this case task definitions. These would help in bringing more clarity on the issue of task definition which will help in identifying the elements of task definition.

While planning these main questions, care was taken to include the three concerns raised by Rubin & Rubin (1995). The issue of coverage of overall subject, flow from one question to next and their matching with research design were addressed while planning the main questions. These questions were refined after conducting 2-3 interviews as it emerged that wording for some of the questions were not clear to the respondents. The sequencing of questions was also slightly modified after initial few interviews, to ensure that flow of questions was logical.

Each interview lasted over 25-30 minutes and covered questions about issues related with regular and emergency purchase situations along with specific purchase situations for apples and mobile phones, which were selected for this study. (Section 3.4 describes the process of selection of products.) All interviews were recorded. In one case the interviewee insisted that the interview should not be recorded. Her views

were respected and notes were taken down and they were typed in detail on the same day the interview was conducted. In all cases, transcripts of all interviews were prepared for identifying elements of different types of shopping trips.

### 3.2 Sample and sample size

Nine interviews, with five male and four female respondents of different age-groups, were conducted for this study. The age profile of respondents was also chosen as to capture views from different age-groups (**Table 2**). Care was taken to conduct these interviews when the respondents were in a free state of mind. In most of the cases, they were interviewed in their homes. In two cases where interviews were to be conducted in their offices, it was conducted after the office hours.

**Table 2: Age profile of Respondents for Qualitative Interviews**

Code	Age	Gender	Educational Qualification
M1	26	Male	Graduate
M2	19	Male	Undergraduate
F1	45	Female	Graduate
M3	49	Male	Graduate
M4	57	Male	Post-graduate
F2	30	Female	Graduate
F3	48	Female	Graduate
M5	30	Male	Graduate
F4	26	Female	Graduate

### 3.3 Method of analysis

The key analytic unit of the present method involved identifying themes and therefore we chose to analyse our interviews through thematic analysis. Thematic analysis of text involves systematic reading, interpreting and categorizing pieces of linguistic data and verbal interaction into theme-based patterns (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Kellehear, 1993). This method is a qualitative approach which seeks patterns within data (Kellehear, 1993; Miles & Huberman, 1994). However, here the emphasis is on theory that emerges as directly as possible from respondents themselves rather than researchers using conceptualizations of their own or those drawn from previous work (Henwood & Pidgeon, 1992). As thematic analysis involves systematic generation of theory from qualitative data, epistemologically, it is close to grounded

theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). However, whereas grounded theory is appropriate to an entirely bottom-up ethnographic design, this study begins with certain specific questions, which shape and guide the search for patterns and meaning in the data, and hence thematic analysis was chosen. Even in doing so, we followed an inductive approach so that themes identified were strongly linked to the data themselves (Patton, 2002).

The interview transcripts were first read to identify references to each of these two research questions, which were then each organized into different files. The text in each of the files was then re-read and different sub-themes within each file were noted and commented upon by both the authors. Finally, we compared these sub-themes among the respondents and identified how widespread each sub-theme was across the sample as a whole.

### **3.4 Selecting the products**

Competition from modern format retail stores has forced a number of traditional retailers to change the display arrangements at their stores and allowing customers direct access of products. Therefore, we wanted to choose products which were high on haptic salience i.e. products for which customers were seen devoting touch efforts.

In order to identify products high on haptic salience, multi-stage process was adopted. As the first step, a comprehensive list of all the products for which haptic touch is allowed in retail stores, was made based on observations made while visiting the store as a shopper. This led to generation of the first list of 125 products for which touch was allowed in stores. In the second step, the retail outlets were re-visited and customers were observed during shopping process for eliminating the items where customers were not seen devoting efforts in touching the products, even if haptic touch opportunity was present. It was decided to follow non-intrusive observation of customers as we did not want the customers to be conscious and thus change their normal shopping behavior. Rust (1993) said that there are times when non-intrusive

observational methods provide a more complete and accurate picture of the purchasing experience and can be used. Since the observation was not about something that was private or personal, there were no ethical issues in such observations. This led to generation of the second list of 46 products.

In the third step, a questionnaire was developed for capturing customer responses about haptic salience of short-listed products. For each product, respondents were asked to indicate whether they thought that the products were high, moderate, or low on haptic salience. The questionnaire was administered to group of respondents consisting equal number of men and women. Apples and mobile phones emerged as highest ranked products on high haptic salience through this survey.

While mobile phone can be classified as a customer durable product, apple is one of the frequently purchased grocery items in households. Also, while mobile phone is a high priced product and apple is relatively low-priced product, both the products show some commonalities as well. Different varieties of apples are available in market and similarly a large number of brands and models of mobile phones are present in shops. Accordingly, the price range for both the product categories is also wide. With multiple options available in both the product categories and their availability in a wide price range, customers tend to spend time in assessing the quality for both the products.

We also wanted to understand if different brand salience influenced task definition shopping situations and therefore we checked for role of brand salience for these two products. For the same, we conducted a pre-test in which respondents were asked to rate importance of brand in purchase of apple and mobile phone on one item measure which was designed for this study. The seven point scale was anchored at one end by “least important” and at another end by “most important”. They were also asked if they knew about the brands of apple and mobile phone and they were told to write the names of brands for these two products.

Data was collected from 42 respondents and they were given a small incentive as a token of appreciation for their involvement after they completed the questionnaire. The mean score for importance of brand during purchase (on scale of 1-7 with 1 = Least Important, 7 = Most Important) along with the percentage of respondents knowing about brands of apple and mobile phone is summarized in the **Table 3**.

**Table 3: Mean Score for importance of brand during purchase**

Products for shopping	Mean Score	Percentage having knowledge of brands in product category
Apples	3.10	36.84 percent
Mobile phone	6.73	100 percent

**Table 3** shows that mean score for apple and mobile were different. Also, while all the respondents were aware about the brand names of mobile handsets, only 36.84 percent of respondents knew about any brands of apples. This suggested variability in the brand salience of two products. Based on this insight, we decided to understand perception of task-definitions for these two product. We felt that the similarities and differences for these two products will help in understanding about concept of task-definitions and to capturing insights across durable and non-durable product categories.

## 4. Findings

As discussed earlier, the research was aimed at answering the questions namely (a) identify elements which are considered salient by customers to differentiate the different types of shopping trips, and (b) whether there are differences in elements of shopping trips across product categories. We conducted the analysis for answering these two questions from which various themes were identified.

### 4.1 Elements considered salient by customers for different shopping trips

These elements were identified based on the parts of interview with respondents before any mention was made of two different product categories namely apples and mobile phones. The respondents discussed about planned and shopping based on their

general understanding of the topic and themes were identified based on general aspects only.

#### **4.1.1 Themes for planned shopping trips**

##### Focus in shopping trip

Though task definition pertain to goals of the customer, it did not come out very strongly in the responses. Only one respondent, M2 highlighted its importance.

M2: *“I will go to shop with a specific purpose as per my requirement and would look for products which will fulfill that purpose. ... would first try to find the product which I was looking for. I will only shop for my purpose and would fulfill that purpose.”*

Whenever respondents were asked to explain planned purchase, most of them explained about it in terms of the product categories which they would cover during planned shopping.

##### Type of products covered in planned shopping

The two main type of products covered in planned shopping pertained to household products or products which required huge expenses. Some of the quotes which described household products covered in planned purchase included:

M1: *“...planned shopping is more for household items.”*

M3: *“...planned purchase is something in which I buy things for household requirements which are used in day-to-day usage like rice, wheat etc.”*

M4: *“There are some things in house for which you plan and purchase for entire year. These include edible oil, wheat, rice etc. whose consumption we plan according to number of family members.”*

F1: *“We prepare a list of items which are required at home. Then we prioritize the items which are required at home.”*

F2: *“...Then you make a list of grocery items... We only plan for routine stuff which is required in household. These include grocery items and toiletries.”*

Some of the quotes which described expensive products covered in planned purchase included:

M3: “...There are things like car or TV which you buy after planning. We are not from an income class where we change things in 2-3 years. So these things are also purchased after careful planning.”

M5: “...planned purchase essentially means a higher value item which cannot be randomly bought because either it is very-very specifically customized to my requirements or it is very high cost item...if I want to buy a watch or if I want to buy a laptop then it would definitely, in my purview, come under the planned purchase.”

Apart from the product categories, coverage of a number of shops also emerged as one important element of describing planned shopping.

#### Number of shops visited

The respondents stated that they would like to cover 3-4 shops before they purchased items during planned shopping trips.

M2: “In case of planned purchase i.e. if I had 2-3 days before the start of play then I would have gone to Law Garden market, National Handloom, and different malls. I would had looked at different options and then decided to purchase.”

M5: “...I am very particular about my shoes. So getting a shoe is a very critical aspect. It is something which I plan in great detail. I go to atleast three shops – Adidas, Reebok and Nike...It is only after 3-4 days when I have visited a number of shops and made up my mind, I go for final purchase of shoes.”

F1: “For these items, we look at different shops,...then we buy them.”

F4: “If I want to buy a formal shirt, I might go to Wills Lifestyle, Pantaloons etc. It may be 5-6 shops that I will visit, and I will then check out the fit, style, size and then I might purchase the shirt.”

#### Involvement of others for decision making in planned shopping

Another aspect which was highlighted from interview, was the role of others in planned shopping which was not pointed out in any of the previous studies.



M1: *“Parents and friends were always involved in the decision making.”*

M2: *“Parents have a role as they provide me money to buy everything...”*

M3: *“My wife prepares a list and both of us go together... I am with her when she decides about the items in list.”*

M5: *“...I do take inputs from my wife and at times from my parents also.”*

F3: *“However for big things, I consult my children also. For jewellery etc., I consult my husband. For items like purse I ask my children because they know where these things are available at reasonable prices. I consult them. Sometimes, I ask them to accompany me also.”*

F4: *“I talk to my mother everyday on phone. I tell her that what I am planning to buy and we discuss over phone.”*

Sometimes the involvement of others also included salespersons.

M1: *“...I have felt that the role of salesperson is very important if we are going alone to the shop. I wanted to buy a shirt and the salesperson in the store was not very cooperative and forthcoming with suggestions. He was also not very good in pointing out things which I may consider. So, I did not buy from that shop. When I went to another shop and the salesperson who was present there was helping everyone. He showed me shirts of my size which helped me in making a purchase decision.”*

### Role of Price

The role of price, as seen from the below-mentioned quotes, was in various hues. Price was seen as important by many respondents as seen from the following comments:

M2: *“...I will also look at price.”*

M5: *“...I get a feel and gather quotations i.e. compare prices.”*

While price was seen as important by many respondents, it was often linked with budget.

M1: *“For clothes, I see what is my budget and as per my budget what is the requirement of clothes for me.”*

M4: *“We plan for quantity so that budget does not get disturbed.”*

F2: *“The quantity is fixed keeping in view the budget and the items in the list.”*

For some, though price was important, quality become more crucial.

F3: *“Price is important because one has to take care of budget, but quality is important. I can be a little flexible with budget.”*

F4: *“In planned shopping, I won’t buy formal wear from any outlet. I will always go for a branded one...Price is not everything. It is important, but if I am getting something very good in higher price, I will purchase it.”*

#### Particular time for planned shopping trip

Though it did not come across as a prominent common theme, some of the respondents pointed that they undertook planned shopping on specific days.

M3: *“...we have free time only on Sundays or holidays. So mostly we go on Sundays.”*

F2: *“Planned purchase is something which is made at the end of month.”*

F3: *“Since I am in a job, I find time only on weekends or in evenings.”*

#### **4.1.2 Themes for emergency shopping trips**

##### Focus in shopping trip

Like in case of planned shopping, goals of the customer in emergency shopping did not come out very strongly in the responses. Only one respondent, M2 highlighted its importance.

M2: *“...in case of emergency purchase, I will go to market with the thoughts about my requirements.”*

##### Type of products covered in emergency shopping

Many of the products purchased during emergency shopping situation involved buying products as gifts or for guests.

M1: *“It has happened a number of times in case of gifts...most of emergency purchases are for gifts”*

F4: *“Emergency purchases would happen when I have sudden plans of going home and I want to purchase gifts for family members.”*

F1: *“If somebody comes at home and we have to offer something to him to eat and it that item is not available at home then it becomes emergency purchase.”*

F2: *“If a guest comes in home and something is finished, then it is an emergency situation.”*

In some cases, other products were also mentioned as categories in emergency shopping.

M3: *“...there are things which break down. If it is something which is required for daily usage, then it has to be repaired on the same day.”*

M5: *“I think personal product is something for which I have to do emergency purchases.”*

#### Involvement of others for decision making in emergency shopping

Unlike the case of planned shopping where parents, relatives and friends were seen as having role in decision making, here they were not seen as important.

M1: *“...consultation with your friends and relatives is very minimal... At that point of time, it was important for me to complete my requirement, rather than asking others”*

M3: *“If I require something in emergency then I know the importance of that situation. I do not need to consult anyone... If sugar or tea has finished and none of us paid attention to it and some guests arrive, then what to do. In these cases she need not ask me or I need not ask her.”*

F5: *“Discussion with others in case of emergency purchase is very rare. Most of the time, no.”*

#### Assortment size

The quantity to be purchased was generally small.

M1: *“I made the judgment that what is the minimum possible requirement which is vital at this point of time... quantity should be minimal to handle that circumstance”*

M5: *“...for consumables, I definitely go for small packages.”*

### Number of shops visited

While planned shopping required visiting a number of shops and looking for options, in case of emergency shopping, respondents mentioned visiting only one shop.

M2: “...in case of emergency purchase if the product is available at one shop then I will buy it without thinking about visiting a number of shops...There was an emergency situation as we needed black kurta and an orange shirt for the play which was supposed to start very soon. So we went to National Handloom and quickly bought them. We bought it within half an hour, after seeing the first option...”

M5: “...it may be just 1-2 in emergency purchase. Maybe only one.”

### Role of price

Almost all of them said that price has a no or very limited role in decision making during emergency shopping trips.

M1: “...it turns out to be expensive as we end up paying more.”

M2: “Suppose there is an emergency and I have to make a submission tomorrow. I will go to shop and ask the shopkeeper for that pencil. I will not even ask for the price and will pay whatever he will charge...in case of emergency situation, monetary aspect is overlooked”

M5: “in case of emergency purchase, which I cited some time back, I did not have much leeway in terms of price.”

F1: “...price would not be important.”

F2: “...I do not care about prices”

F3: “If something is required urgently, then price becomes secondary.”

Some of the respondents, as following quotes highlight, showed that they would be interested in low-priced options during emergency shopping.

M1: “If you do not have time, then buy a lesser-priced item...”

M4: “I would not like to spend too much money in this situation...I will consider the least-priced option.”

## 4.2 Customer perception of elements for different types of shopping trips across product categories

For answering second research question, elements were identified and compared based on respondents' view about planned purchase of apples and mobile phones. A similar exercise was undertaken for emergency purchase of apples and mobile phones. Based on the findings, we propose that there are differences in elements of shopping trips across product categories.

### 4.2.1 Thematic differences in planned shopping trips of apples and mobile phones

#### Criteria for purchase

As mentioned earlier, the pre-tests did not show respondents to be very concerned about brands of apples. None of the interviews also discussed about elements of brands though in case of planned purchase of mobile phones, almost all talked about brand of mobile phone as criteria for purchase decision.

M2: *"...I have a Sony-Ericsson phone. However this phone did not work out very well for me. Earlier, I had a Nokia phone which was okay. The Sony-Ericsson phone gives me some trouble during charging. Therefore, the next phone that I will be buying would be a Nokia phone. So, first I will decide about the brand."*

F2: *"...I was clear that I wanted to buy LG model."*

F4: *"...visit more outlets, maybe brand-specific outlets like Nokia outlets or Samsung outlets."*

However for purchase of apples, while respondents talked about quality in generic terms, without getting into specific dimensions of quality, many were more specific about aspects of mobile phones in planned purchase. Quotes by M1 and M2 are representative of this aspect.

M1: *"I will look for features in the phone which will remain relevant for next one year..."*

M2: *"...I will go after the looks of handset."*

### Role of price

While price was seen as important in case of planned purchase of apples, importance of price in case of mobile phones was often with a view to keep it restricted to lower level.

M4: *"I will not buy a phone which is very expensive."*

F1: *"...we will consider our budget thinking whether we have to buy a costly phone or a cheap phone. In my case, I will not prefer a costly phone."*

F3: *"I should not buy a phone which is very expensive..."*

As in case of earlier findings in section 4.1.1 for planned shopping situation, many said that they will check the rates of apples and compare the prices in market.

M5: *"I will make mental note of 2-3 varieties present in the shop and compare their prices."*

F2: *"For me price becomes an important consideration in case of planned purchases... I will look at newspaper offers."*

F3: *"I look for price of apple. I look for price in newspapers. I also ask the nearby shops for price of apples. I also check the price at shops from where I buy on regular basis."*

### Involvement of others in decision making

In case of apples, none of the respondents talked about role of others in purchase decision while it was a recurrent theme in case of mobile phones.

M4: *"...As far as asking somebody to come along with me for shopping, is concerned, I think, as it is an expensive item, it should be done."*

F3: *"...but in case of mobile phones, first I'll ask my son. I will even ask my husband about the different choices available in market... I will take advice from my brothers and sisters, who are there in Delhi."*

F4: *"I would like to consult my friends, maybe people who have been using mobile handsets that I have short-listed. I will ask them about their experiences and then finalize the model to purchase it."*

Role of salespersons was also highlighted in case of mobile phones.

M5: “...So I searched on internet and read lot of reviews. I also talked to few people, one of whom had bought a new CDMA phone. However, the reviews that I read and the opinion that he expressed were in opposite direction, so I got totally confused. So I went to the shop and got the salesperson’s perspective.”

### Profile of shop

The respondents highlighted different aspects of shops during planned shopping of apples and mobile phones. While the planned purchase of mobile phone was desired from a trusted shop where shopkeeper was known to the customer, trust did not emerge as very important. In the latter case, respondents highlighted various features of shop such as hygiene around the store and trust with weights as important. For example, M2 and F3 spoke about buying from trusted shop in case of mobile phones where they knew the shopkeeper.

M2: “...I will prefer to go to a shop where I know the shopkeeper.”

F3: “One of my students has a mobile shop in Ahmedabad. I trust him and I always buy from him.”

On the other hand, M3 said that type of shop does not matter. He, along with others like M2 highlighted role of features of shop in case of planned shopping of apples.

M3: “If I buy from a lorry, or a fruit shop or from a mall, there won’t be much difference...If one has to buy vegetables or fruits then there is not much difference among the different types of shops... sometimes there are issues with weight so I prefer to buy from shops which I trust with weights.”

M2: “...I will look for hygiene around the store. I will also consider the manner in which apples have been kept in shop...”

### Number of shops visited

Earlier findings suggested that planned shopping required a number of visits to shops. However, when compared across apples and mobile phones, multiple number of visits for purchase was not articulated by any of the respondents. In case of apples, though, many people talked about visits to multiple shops.

M3: *“Suppose you have time for planned purchase then I would like to explore 1-2 shops more. Given that I have time, I would like to visit 2-3 different shops and the select the apples.”*

M5: *“I would look for apples in atleast 2-3 shops.”*

F1: *“First I will see where can I get the best apples. I will look at different shops.”*

#### **4.2.1 Thematic differences in emergency shopping trips of apples and mobile phones**

##### Criteria for purchase

While describing the basis for selecting apples or mobile phone, the respondents in both cases spoke in the same manner wherein they emphasized that it should be of acceptable quality. There was no particular concern about best quality but they stated that it should not be very bad quality in which case they would avoid the purchase.

M2: *“...in case of emergency situation, I will buy whichever one I will find okay in visit to first shop.”*

M4: *“Its not that I will accept any quality. Quality has to be decent enough...”*

M3: *“In emergency, I will have to manage with whatever is available at the time...if the quality is not good then I will not purchase.”*

F1: *“The product should be decent. It is not like that we will buy anything from the market just because it is emergency purchase situation.”*

##### Role of price

While the respondents had suggested that price did not have a role in emergency purchase situation (Section 4.1.2), the interviews suggest differential impact in two product categories. For apples, it continued to remain unimportant as seen from some representative quotes.

M4: *“In this case, price will not important. Even if the vendor asks for a higher price then I do not mind, because anyway I have to buy it.”*

M5: *“...get it for whatever price charged by shopkeeper.”*

F1: *“I may not consider price as very important.”*



On the other hand, for mobile phones, all the respondents said that they will buy only low-priced variant of mobile phones in emergency purchase.

M1: *“In case of emergency situation, I will buy a cheap mobile just to tide over that situation.”*

M4: *“As far prices are concerned, I would there are two things: If I have to make an emergency purchase of mobile phone then it means that my phone has been lost or conked off or I have given it to someone. In such a scenario, I would like to get a more economical model.”*

F2: *“I will have a smaller budget in comparison to regular budget.”*

### Profile of shop

In case of emergency purchase of apples, nearest shop became important consideration while in case of emergency purchase of mobile phones, trusted shop – either known to respondent or a branded outlet - was highlighted as important consideration.

M3: *“...I will buy apples from wherever I can get it, preferably from the nearest shop.”*

M5: *“...I would go to the nearest shop, rather than the type of shop playing any role in decision making, atleast in case of apple.”*

F4: *“In case of apples, I would go to the nearest shop.”*

F2: *“...I am outside Ahmedabad...In case I have relatives in the city then I will ask them also if they know of any shop which they trust. I will buy only after asking them.”*

M3: *“I went to the standard showroom of Nokia so that I get quality product.”*

## **5. Discussion and conclusion**

The objective of this paper was to identify the elements considered salient by customers to differentiate the different types of shopping trips. The findings show that previous operationalizations of task definitions, summarized in **Table 1**, were limited in the way they explained task-definitions. Earlier explanations of task-definitions were based on one or two elements which were defined from managerial point of view. As our findings suggest, customers have different elements in consideration

when they think about shopping trips. **Table 4** summarizes the different elements, based on thematic analysis, which were in consideration of customer when they articulated about different shopping trips. The list of elements for two shopping trips suggests that previous operations of task definitions, which were based on only one or two elements, were not comprehensive. Thus, this research helps in highlighting the need to ensure that further operationalizations of task-definitions should not be kept restricted to just one or two elements.

**Table 4: Themes for planned and emergency shopping trips**

Shopping Trips	Themes
Planned	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus in shopping trips</li> <li>• Types of products covered</li> <li>• Number of shops visited</li> <li>• Involvement of others for decision making</li> <li>• Role of price</li> <li>• <i>Particular time for shopping</i></li> </ul>
Emergency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Focus in shopping trips</li> <li>• Types of products covered</li> <li>• Number of shops visited</li> <li>• Involvement of others for decision making</li> <li>• Role of price</li> <li>• <i>Assortment size</i></li> </ul>

The list of elements identified show *involvement of others in decision making* as one of the elements. Till now, any of the previous research on task definition, had not highlighted this aspect as an element of task definition. This aspect came out very strongly in case of planned purchase situations where all the respondents highlighted doing it. Besides this, customers identified role of *pre-designated time of shopping* as another element in planned shopping while *assortment size* emerged as one theme in emergency shopping trip. Most of the previous research had *assortment size* as important dimension for categorizing the trip as planned and emergency. Present research shows that *assortment size* was not at all in consideration of customers in case of planned shopping.

**Table 5: Differences between durable and non-durable products**

Shopping Trips	Themes	Apples	Mobile Phones
<b>Planned</b>	Criteria for purchase	No specific criteria mentioned	Importance of brand highlighted
	Role of price	Important – comparison to be done before purchase	Important – keep it restricted to lower level
	Profile of shop	Important features of shops like hygiene, right weights etc.	Trusted shop where owner is known to customer
	<i>Number of shops visited</i>	Multiple visits	Multiple visits not articulated
	<i>Involvement of others in decision making</i>	No	Yes
<b>Emergency</b>	Criteria for purchase	Acceptable quality	In absence of acceptable quality, no purchase to be made
	Role of price	Unimportant	Only low-priced variant
	Profile of shop	Nearest shop	Trusted shop – either known or branded outlet

For answering second research question, an attempt was made to understand if elements were emphasized differentially by customers for durable and non-durable product category. **Table 5** lists the elements which were identified by thematic analysis for the two product categories in both shopping situations. As the table shows, there are differences in the way elements are considered by customers for two product categories in case of planned and emergency shopping. For example, while trusted shop where owner is known to customer becomes important consideration in choosing the shop for planned purchase of mobile, the different features of shop like hygiene and proper weighting systems become important in choosing the shop for planned purchase of apples. This shows that while it is important to consider elements differently across shopping trips, it is also important to consider the finer point in elements across two product categories.

This study considered the products which are high on haptic touch. Further investigation is needed for understanding whether the extent of haptic touch would also change for planned and emergency purchases. This study is concerned about purchase in a physical store. How would task definition manifest itself in purchases from non-store retail formats would be very interesting as the time and effort, the two main bases for task definition currently, take a different meaning. Based on future research, the concept of shopping trip itself could become redundant. As future research direction, we propose that large scale field study may be undertaken to validate the dimensions of task definition across demographic segments, geographies, and service buying.

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