An Analysis of the Factors That Influence the Influencers' Recommendations with Regard to the Purchase of Automotive Lubricants for Two-Wheelers

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Previous researches have established that purchase and usage of automotive lubricants for two-wheelers is influenced by workshop mechanics (influencers). This research focuses on the factors that influence the recommendations of these influencers and extracts five factors. The paper concludes with suggestions to marketers to segment influencers of their consumers based on their psychographic profile and design customized marketing intervention initiatives to cost-effectively achieve the desired positive brand recommendation.

Introduction

The global population of two-wheelers, comprising motorcycles, scooters and mopeds is estimated at 500 million units. With increasing disposable income and the short distance quick mobility needs being unmet by non-customizable mass rapid transport systems, two-wheelers segment is witnessing rapid growth year on year. Asia, South America and Africa are expected to witness the maximum growth. This segment accounts for an estimated 3% of the global demand for lubricants, out of which three-fourths are accounted for Asian countries such as China, India and Indonesia. The Indian lubricants market, approximately 2MMT, is estimated to account for 6% of the world market. Out of the total Indian lubricants market, 7% is estimated to be the share of two-wheeler lubricants. There are over 30 major lubricant marketers in India vying for an enhanced share of this rapidly growing market.

Purchase of certain categories of products or services requires somewhat specialized knowledge about the category for making better informed decisions, the lack of which makes consumers susceptible to be influenced by influencers. Some categories of influencers, by way of their profession, have a personal interest in the buying behavior exhibited by the consumers. They actively exercise their influence through brand recommendations and, in most cases, ensure that their recommendations are adhered to.

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An automotive lubricant for the end-use in an individual's personal vehicle is a low involvement product category. Lubricants have proliferated in terms of types, specifications, packs, price points and brands. Differentiations on product attributes, technical specifications and brands are perceived by consumers to be low and are broadly grouped into two, viz., well-known brands having premium pricing and lesser known brands at lower price points. The product category has also been heavily advertised on outdoor media and to a limited extent in electronic and print media by Indian lubricant marketers. Lubricant MNCs have advertised heavily in international auto sports events, creating a rub-off effect on their marketing efforts in India. Most lubricant marketers in India have identified that automobile mechanics play a very strong influencer's role in the purchase of automotive lubricants. They design and deploy various incentive programs for mechanics to achieve a positive brand recommendation.

Literature Review

There is rich literature on the factors that influence consumer buying behavior. Consumers are influenced by influencers in society, such as opinion leaders, market mavens, innovative consumers, and social media and online influencers.

Innovativeness has been defined by Rogers (1995) as "the degree to which an individual or other unit of adoption is relatively earlier in adopting new ideas than other members of a system". Innovators are early adopters, not influenced by others and gather information on their own. The construct of consumer susceptibility to interpersonal influence has been developed by Bearden *et al.* (1989), who explained it as a tendency to learn about the products and services by observing or seeking information from others and willingness to confirm to their expectations regarding purchase decisions. D'Rozario (2001) added that susceptibility is dependent on cultural assimilation of interpersonal influence. McGuire (1968) developed the construct of influenceability and linked it to other individual traits. Park and Lessig (1977) developed a measure of susceptibility to interpersonal influence based on the dimensions of informational influence and utilitarian influence. Several studies have indicated inverse relationship between susceptibility and innovativeness (Manning *et al.*, 1995; Cho, 1997; and Lalwani, 2002). Clark and Goldsmith (2006) confirmed various dimensions of innovativeness, including significant correlation with role related consumerism, posited by Kahle (1995a and 1995b) as relatively affluent, self-confident and self-respecting that they view themselves as educated, knowledgeable, logical, sensible, and intelligent.

According to Pawar and Khandelwal (2012), "mechanic plays the role of gatekeeper in the purchase of automotive lubricants" and they further stated that "emphasis should be given by encouraging mechanics and providing incentives to promote the brand". Exhaustive information-sharing mechanism with mechanic opinion leaders through e-mails, seminars, exhibitions, fairs, promotional events, etc. are the means to influence them to promote a brand (Saha, 2013).

Objectives

The objective of the study is to determine the factors that influence the influencers with regard to the purchase of two-wheeler lubricants.

Methodology

The study is descriptive in nature and attempts to arrive at the factors that influence two-wheeler mechanics to recommend a particular brand, grade or type of lubricants to their customers.

Research Instrument: The survey instrument was developed by way of a well-structured questionnaire. The instrument consisted of 34 items, selected on the basis of pilot survey discussions with six mechanics, covering their interests, attitudes, commercial considerations, support by lubricant marketers and buying behavior of their customers. Out of the 34 items in the questionnaire, 19 items were selected for this research paper as factors influencing their recommendation, ranging from various modes of advertisement, below the line promotional activities, financial incentives, loyalty schemes, influence of other mechanics and influence of salespersons, using a five-point Likert scale with '1' indicating 'Strongly Disagree' and '5' indicating 'Strongly Agree'. These were followed by four items to assess the demographic characteristics. The data was edited, coded and analyzed using IBM SPSS Statistics 22.0 software.

Research Design and Data Collection: The questionnaires were personally administered by the researcher to 57 two-wheeler motor vehicle mechanics in the cities of Pune and Kolhapur in Maharashtra, in January 2014, out of which two were rejected, as they indicated lack of seriousness and 55 were found usable.

The mechanics were purposively chosen for this research amongst those who operate their own independent, non-franchised two-wheeler workshops, enjoy good reputation and have good footfall of customers seeking maintenance, servicing and oil change services for their two-wheelers. This category of workshops is gaining customers as they provide repair and maintenance services at acceptable standards, in lesser turnaround time and comparatively much lower prices than authorized or franchised service stations. The study is therefore based on primary data collected by the researcher. The sampling design can be stated as convenient sampling.

Mechanics of vehicle manufacturers' authorized/franchised service stations have been excluded from the study as they do not have the freedom to recommend lubricants of their choice to their customers but are constrained to follow their principal organization's recommendations, whereas the above independent mechanics are free to choose, recommend and use lubricants of their choice.

Results and Discussion

The detailed demographic profile of the respondents is given in Table 1.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of the Respondents			
Characteristics	**Profile**	**Frequency**	**Percent**
Gender	Male	55	100
	Female	0	0
Age	Less than 25 years	8	14.5
	25 years to less than 35 years	21	38.2
	35 years to less than 45 years	11	20.0
	45 years and above	15	27.3
Experience	Less than 1 year	1	1.8
	1 year to less than 5 years	9	16.4
	5 years to less than 10 years	6	10.9
	10 years and above	39	70.9
Educational Qualification	Non-diploma holder	18	32.7
	Diploma holder	37	67.3
Number of Two-Wheelers Serviced per Month	Less than 150	18	32.7
	150 to less than 300	19	34.5
	300 to less than 450	10	18.2
	450 and above	8	14.5

All the respondents were male. A majority of the respondents (58.2%) were aged between 25 and 45 years, and operated workshops where their monthly servicing business was up to 300 two-wheelers per month.

Exploratory factor analysis was performed on the 19 items of the measurement scale to reduce the 19 variables to a grouping of few latent variables which explains the observed variables. Principal Component Analysis was used as it is the most commonly used approach, which transforms variables into uncorrelated composite variables or principal components. Orthogonal rotation was selected as it yields factors in the final solution which have no correlation amongst them. The criteria used for factor extraction were that the Eigenvalues, which are the sum of variances of factor values, should be greater than one and the factor structure should be meaningful, useful and conceptually sound (Pett *et al.,* 2003). Descriptive statistics of the 19 items are given in Table 2.

The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy test result obtained was 0.590 (Table 3). As the value is more than 0.5, it indicates that the sample is reasonably adequate and the data supports application of factor analysis.

Communalities denote the variance in the original measured variables that is accounted for by the factor solution. The factor extraction values of the 19 variables are given in

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Variables				
Variable	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Skewness**	**Kurtosis**
Merchandising – Stores	1.56	0.501	–0.264	–2.005
Advertisement – Posters	1.67	0.511	–0.319	–0.932
Advertisement – Outdoor	1.65	0.615	0.367	–0.612
Advertisement – Newspapers	2.45	0.939	0.345	–0.766
Advertisement – Magazines	2.53	0.92	0.361	–0.123
Advertisement – FM Radio	1.51	0.505	–0.037	–2.075
Advertisement – TV	2.85	1.161	0.22	–1.09
Advertisement – Online	2.35	1.004	0.728	0.335
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Fuel Stations	2.33	1.09	0.552	–0.655
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Stores	2.31	0.92	0.517	–0.453
Sales Promotion Campaigns –Workshops	2.96	1.201	–0.061	–1.221
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Free Gifts	3.18	1.415	–0.09	–1.43
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Tour Packages	2.91	1.206	–0.017	–1.154
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Lucky Draws	2.76	1.217	0.09	–1.209
Training Programs	3.42	1.272	–0.342	–1.049
Signboards Paintings Uniforms	2.82	1.203	0.033	–1.213
Loyalty Schemes	2.65	1.174	0.29	–0.945
Influence of Expert Mechanics	2.91	1.295	–0.038	–1.312
Influence of Salespersons	3.07	1.2	–0.278	–0.908
Std. Error of Skewness	0.322			
Std. Error of Kurtosis	0.634			

Table 3: KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.590
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	520.361
	Df	171.000
	Sig.	000.000

Table 4, which shows that the value extracted for every variable, except one, is greater than 0.5.

Table 4: Communalities

Variable	Initial	Extraction
Merchandising – Stores	1.000	0.429
Advertisement – Posters	1.000	0.636
Advertisement – Outdoor	1.000	0.747
Advertisement – Newspapers	1.000	0.748
Advertisement – Magazines	1.000	0.629
Advertisement – FM Radio	1.000	0.711
Advertisement – TV	1.000	0.844
Advertisement – Online	1.000	0.600
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Fuel Stations	1.000	0.764
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Stores	1.000	0.707
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Workshops	1.000	0.610
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Free Gifts	1.000	0.827
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Tour Packages	1.000	0.797
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Lucky Draws	1.000	0.717
Training Programs	1.000	0.801
Signboards Paintings Uniforms	1.000	0.767
Loyalty Schemes	1.000	0.618
Influence of Expert Mechanics	1.000	0.612
Influence of Salespersons	1.000	0.673

Factor Analysis results are shown in Table 5, which shows five factors were extracted, accounting for 69.66% of the total variance explained.

The Scree Plot is given in Figure 1 which shows five components above Eigenvalue of 1 and a distinct elbow at component No. 6.

Factor loadings are correlation coefficients between the 19 observed variables and the 5 factors extracted. For finding out distinct factors, where each factor is heavily loaded on certain exclusive variables, orthogonal rotation was carried out. The factor loadings after performing the orthogonal rotation are given in Table 6, wherein the largest factor loadings for each of the 19 variables are highlighted in bold figures.

The variables were grouped under the five factors extracted, as per the largest factor loadings. Reliability of these five factors extracted was tested by Cronbach's alpha test, which was performed on the groups of variables under each factor. Cronbach's alpha

Table 5: Total Variance Explained

Component	Initial Eigenvalue			Extraction Sums of Squared Loadings			Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %	Total	% of Variance	Cumulative %
1	4.022	21.171	21.171	4.022	21.171	21.171	3.597	18.930	18.930
2	3.421	18.004	39.175	3.421	18.004	39.175	2.737	14.404	33.334
3	2.559	13.470	52.645	2.559	13.470	52.645	2.551	13.425	46.759
4	1.778	9.359	62.005	1.778	9.359	62.005	2.266	11.926	58.685
5	1.454	7.653	69.657	1.454	7.653	69.657	2.085	10.973	69.657
6	0.906	4.770	74.428						
7	0.798	4.200	78.628						
8	0.738	3.884	82.512						
9	0.643	3.386	85.898						
10	0.507	2.666	88.564						
11	0.416	2.192	90.756						
12	0.366	1.927	92.683						
13	0.315	1.657	94.340						
14	0.276	1.451	95.791						
15	0.251	1.324	97.115						
16	0.206	1.085	98.201						
17	0.151	0.794	98.995						
18	0.099	0.519	99.514						
19	0.092	0.486	100.00						

Note: Extraction Method: Principal Component Analysis.

Figure 1: Scree Plot

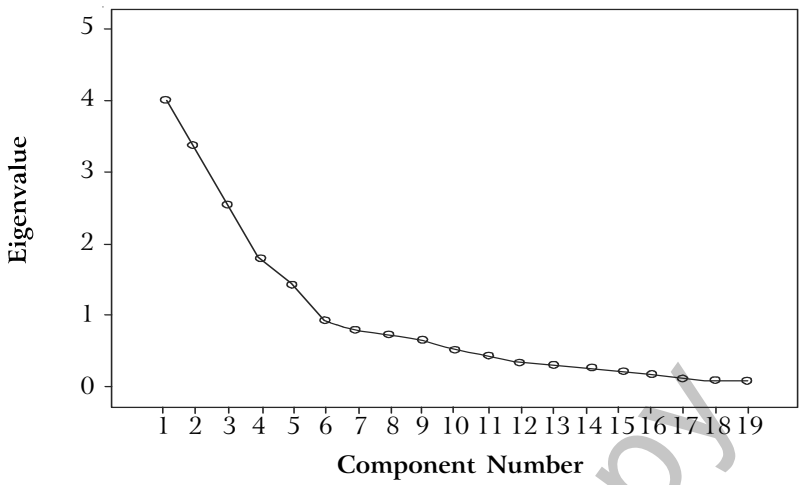

Table 6: Rotated Component Matrix

Variable	1	2	3	4	5
Merchandising – Stores	0.008	**0.651**	0.076	–0.012	–0.005
Advertisement – Posters	0.001	**0.783**	–0.068	0.001	0.134
Advertisement – Outdoor	0.079	**0.859**	–0.009	0.020	0.039
Advertisement – Newspapers	–0.020	0.045	0.083	**0.851**	–0.121
Advertisement – Magazines	–0.146	–0.130	0.429	**0.635**	0.058
Advertisement – FM Radio	0.108	**0.819**	–0.157	0.002	0.062
Advertisement – TV	0.067	0.064	0.114	**0.898**	0.128
Advertisement – Online	0.054	–0.164	**0.611**	0.372	0.239
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Fuel Stations	–0.014	0.264	0.009	0.025	**0.833**
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Stores	0.144	0.126	–0.088	0.052	**0.812**
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Workshops	0.175	–0.133	0.143	–0.028	**0.735**
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Free Gifts	**0.877**	–0.073	–0.043	0.160	0.158
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Tour Packages	**0.863**	–0.137	–0.130	0.078	0.097
Sales Promotion Campaigns – Lucky Draws	**0.818**	0.101	0.135	–0.113	–0.083
Training Programs	–0.159	–0.082	**0.867**	0.132	–0.002
Signboards Paintings Uniforms	**0.813**	0.267	0.151	0.043	0.098
Loyalty Schemes	**0.733**	0.111	–0.073	–0.202	0.151
Influence of Expert Mechanics	0.301	0.115	**0.652**	0.289	–0.014
Influence of Salespersons	–0.005	–0.008	**0.818**	–0.036	–0.047

value of 0.7 or greater is considered acceptable for the factor to be reliable (Hair *et al.,* 2006). The outcome of factor analysis showing the Factor Loadings and Cronbach's alpha value are given in Table 7.

Table 7: Outcome of Factor Analysis

Factor	Variable	Factor Loadings	Cronbach's Alpha
F1	Sales Promotion Campaigns – Free Gifts	0.877	
	Sales Promotion Campaigns – Tour Packages	0.863	
	Sales Promotion Campaigns – Lucky Draws	0.818	0.887
	Signboards Paintings Uniforms	0.813	
	Loyalty Schemes	0.733	
F2	Merchandising – Stores	0.651	
	Advertisement – Posters	0.783	0.802
	Advertisement – Outdoor	0.859	
	Advertisement – FM Radio	0.819	
F3	Advertisement – Online	0.611	
	Training Programs	0.867	0.772
	Influence of Expert Mechanics	0.652	
	Influence of Salespersons	0.818	
F4	Advertisement – Newspapers	0.851	
	Advertisement – Magazines	0.635	0.779
	Advertisement – TV	0.898	
F5	Sales Promotion Campaigns – Fuel Stations	0.833	
	Sales Promotion Campaigns – Stores	0.812	0.729
	Sales Promotion Campaigns – Workshops	0.735	

On examining the content of the items making up each of the above five factors or latent variables, they are labeled and provided with brief donations:

Factor 1 – Personal Financial Benefits: Influencers are influenced by prospects of significant personal financial gains arising out of purchase by consumers in accordance with their recommendation. They stand to gain from the lubricant marketing firm by way of (a) free gifts and coupons with points redeemable in cash or kind bundled with each pack of lubricant; (b) loyalty schemes redeemable in case or goods or package tours on achieving targeted sales volumes; (c) lucky draw coupons with each pack of lubricant, where the mechanic is attracted by the opportunity of winning a high value utility item; and (d) upgradation of ambience of the workshop by providing signage, paintings, uniforms, workshop equipment and tools.

Factor 2 – Mass Visibility Benefits: Influencers are influenced by prospects of avoidance of risk of post-purchase cognitive dissonance by consumers by recommending a brand which enjoys good outdoor visibility and perceived widespread usage. They seek comfort in their customers' willing acceptance of their recommendation as mass visibility of a low involvement product category brands creates brand familiarity and lowers customers' discomfort in acceptance. They give more importance to long-term customer retention aided by good customer relationship.

Factor 3 – Personal Esteem Benefits: Influencers are influenced by their heightened sense of fulfillment of their esteem needs, nurturing their superior cognitive skills, continual updation of domain knowledge and deep sense of satisfaction arising out of a genuine desire to offer the most informed and technically sound recommendation to their consumers.

Factor 4 – Mass Awareness Benefits: Influencers are influenced by catchy, attractive advertisements and tend to get swayed by believing in the storyline or outcome and get personally attached to the brand. The attachment with a particular brand however does not last long and is soon replaced by another brand which launches an appealing advertisement campaign. These influencers are fickle-minded and are happy to connect with their consumers at the emotional level by recommendation based on mass media advertisement.

Factor 5 – Mass Engagement Benefits: Influencers are influenced by techno commercial aspects of a brand offering facilitated by customer engagement programs conducted by lubricant marketers. They are genuinely eager to technically upgrade themselves, while not missing out on financial rewards. They capitalize on the opportunity to interact with officials of lubricant firms as well as the enhanced instant rewards that emanate out of sales promotional campaigns.

The most critical factors out of the five factors extracted are the first two factors, viz., Personal Financial Benefits and Mass Visibility Benefits, as they account for the largest values of 21.17% and 18.00% of the total variance respectively.

Conclusion

Mass advertisement through electronic and print media is expensive and serves limited purpose in a low involvement product category like automotive lubricants. Automotive lubricant customers generally do not exhibit purchase behaviors directly related to brand awareness, while mechanics have been observed to largely usurp the decision making as strong influencers. Lubricant marketers therefore need to focus their marketing efforts on influencing the influencers of automotive lubricant customers. The five factors extracted indicate the psychographic profile of influencers. Marketers engaged in designing promotional campaigns are well advised to segment influencers based on these factors.

They should thereafter design and deliver customized promotions appealing to the needs of each segment of influencers. This will ensure that the desired end result of favorable recommendation of their brand is achieved cost-effectively.

This research provides an insight into the factors influencing the influencers of customers in purchase of automotive lubricants. This research therefore indirectly highlights the need for the increased awareness and involvement of customers regarding automotive lubricants, as not all recommendations are in the best interests of the customer. A large segment of vehicle owners prefer to use services of non-franchised independent mechanics. It is imperative that these mechanics are properly trained, and regularly updated, and that it is ensured that they use spares, consumables and lubricants of proper specifications. This can be ensured to a larger extent by well-informed and vigilant customers.

Limitations: This research is limited to factors influencing influencers of one product category, viz, two-wheeler lubricants in two cities of Maharashtra. The research lacks generalizability as it suffers from restricted scope and low sample size. Researchers are invited to extend the research to rural and semi-urban markets in other states covering wider categories of lubricants. The researcher found little evidence of long-term consistency in brand advocacy by mechanics, which indicates no consideration for personal experience of differentiated field performance of brands.

Future Scope: Further, research may be carried out to study the factors influencing changes in their recommendatory behavior over time. Additional factors like increased awareness of consumers, extended annual maintenance contracts, shift in consumer preference to authorized or franchised service stations and emerging trend of branded non-franchised service station chains could be included in future studies. Researchers are also invited to extend the research to cover other product categories, viz., house construction materials, medicines, books and service categories, viz., medical, legal, private tuition, maintenance, investment, travel services, etc. where customers trust and rely on their influencers to a large extent.✪

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Appendix

Questionnaire

S.No.:	Location:	Date & Time:

Survey on Usage of Synthetic Lubricants For Two-Wheeler Motor Vehicles – Mechanics

Dear Respondent,

I am carrying out a research on the usage of Synthetic Lubricants for two-wheeler motor vehicles. I shall appreciate your valued opinion and request you to kindly respond to this questionnaire.

Please put a tick(√) mark in the box that reflects your choice of the 4T oil:

	Statement	Choice				
1	I recommend the following for my two-wheeler motor vehicle customers:					
A	Type of 4T engine oil	Synthetic (including semi-synthetic)			Normal (mineral oil-based)	
B	Brand of 4T engine oil	Servo	HP	MAK	Veedol	Gulf
		Castrol	Mobil	Shell	Elf	Others

Please read the following statements and put a tick(√) mark in the option that best fits your opinion, for each of the following statements:

	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
2	I normally advise all my customers which 4T oil they should use in their two-wheeler.	1	2	3	4	5
3	My customers often do not take my advice and decide the brand of 4T oil to use in their two-wheeler.	1	2	3	4	5
4	My customers take advice of the lubricants shop salesperson on choosing the brand of 4T engine oil.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix (Cont.)

	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
5	Till today, I was not aware that synthetic 4T oil for two-wheelers are available in the local market.	1	2	3	4	5
6	I wish to know more about the benefits of using synthetic 4T engine oils.	1	2	3	4	5
7	I think synthetic 4T oils give better protection to the engine of two-wheelers than normal 4T oils.	1	2	3	4	5
8	I think synthetic 4T oils improve the engine performance of two-wheelers.	1	2	3	4	5
9	I feel oil change period for synthetic 4T oils in two-wheelers is much more than normal 4T oils.	1	2	3	4	5
10	I feel that there will be loss of my income if I advise customers to use synthetic 4T oils, as these customers will need to visit my workshop less frequently.	1	2	3	4	5
11	I feel that there will be increase of my income if I advise customers to use synthetic 4T oils, as more customers will visit my workshop.	1	2	3	4	5
12	Using synthetic 4T oils instead of normal 4T oils is a waste of money as I feel that synthetic 4T oil does not provide more benefits than normal 4T oil.	1	2	3	4	5
13	When I discuss about two-wheelers with other mechanics, I give them more information than what they give me.	1	2	3	4	5
14	I often try to convince other mechanics to use the brand of engine oil for two-wheeler motor vehicle of my choice.	1	2	3	4	5

Appendix (Cont.)

Please first read all the alternatives in each of the following 3 statements and then put a tick(√) mark in the option that best fits the actual events, for each of the following statements:

	Statement	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Disagree Nor Agree	Agree	Strongly Agree
15	I have chosen to recommend the type and brand of 4T oil mainly due to:					
A	Attractive display in shops	1	2	3	4	5
B	Attractive posters in shops	1	2	3	4	5
C	Hoardings on roadside	1	2	3	4	5
D	Advertisements in newspapers	1	2	3	4	5
E	Advertisements in magazines	1	2	3	4	5
F	Advertisements on FM radio	1	2	3	4	5
G	Advertisements on TV	1	2	3	4	5
H	Advertisements on websites	1	2	3	4	5
16	I have chosen to recommend the type and brand of 4T oil due to the following activities by the Lubes company:	1	2	3	4	5
A	Sales campaign at nearby petrol pumps	1	2	3	4	5
B	Sales campaign at nearby lubricant shops	1	2	3	4	5
C	Sales campaign at our workshops	1	2	3	4	5
D	Good incentive schemes – free gifts	1	2	3	4	5
E	Good incentive schemes – free tours	1	2	3	4	5
F	Good incentive schemes – lucky draw.	1	2	3	4	5
G	Training Programs	1	2	3	4	5
H	Certificate of training					
I	Signboard, wall/shutter painting, uniform	1	2	3	4	5
J	Agreement – Loyalty scheme	1	2	3	4	5
17	I have chosen to recommend the type and brand of 4T oil mainly due to:					
A	Advice by a friend who has used this 4T oil in his two-wheeler.	1	2	3	4	5
B	Advice by a friend who is more knowledgeable than me in this field.	1	2	3	4	5
C	Advice of expert mechanics.	1	2	3	4	5
D	Advice of company/distributor/ shop salesperson.					

Reference # 03J-2014-11-02-01