

Consumer Behaviour



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Introduction

Consumer buying behavior denotes the process of the buying behavior of final consumers - which invariably include all categories of individuals & households - who purchase goods and services for personal consumption. The totality of all these final consumers adds up to form the consumer market. The most crucial issue for marketeers' has been the manner in which such final buyers respond to various marketing efforts. This issue is important and the main analytical ground for most marketing setups as this often leads to substantial upgrading and fine tuning of marketing efforts and improved sales. A crux issue, central to this analysis, is comprehending consumer buying behaviour and decision process leading to a purchase. It is often posited that consumers purchase products and services in pursuit of a targeted and maximized quantum of satisfaction or utility for their felt needs or motives (drives). What constitutes and contributes to utility and how the consumer goes about maximizing it, using his environment, is the main issue in consumer decision process. Consumer buying behaviour is complex and is affected by several factors. In this paper the factors affecting consumer buying behaviour are examined with the help of specific theoretical view in the form of models of consumer behaviour and through the study of various techniques used by sellers over commercial media to attract young consumers.

Consumer Behaviour Model

There is a five step process in the consumer buying process: need recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision, and post purchase evaluation. A model of buyer behaviour is furnished at Figure 1 in Appendix 1. Consumers can go through three types of decision-making. The first is routine decision-making which is used when the purchase is simple, inexpensive, and familiar. Another is called limited decision-making. The consumer uses this type when decision-making involves a moderate search and purchasing effort. The final decision-making process is referred to as extensive and is used when the product is unfamiliar or very significant to consumers. Consumers often and frequently do search for brand and outlets in combinations (Hawkins et.al, 1983). Most consumers are intensely affected by various groups in the consumer buying process-particularly those that are peer groups on demographic factors. Children of a particular age group, for instance, have common motives to select toys, educational equipments, games, confectionery, movies and even clothes. This made for success of films like Harry Potter books and films. Consumer choices are nested and interlocked across the assorted contexts of daily life (e.g., First and Dholakia 1982; Huffman, Ratneshwar, and Mick 2000). We examine these contexts in following paragraphs. Children ,as consumers,were deriving from nested and interlocked choices pertaining to their entertainment needs when they opted for Harry Potter books and films.

Motivation

Two viewpoints dominate analysis of consumer motivation. First view holds the Freudian position that forces shaping people's behavior are largely unconscious. People may be unwilling, or unable to reveal or identify what is motivating them. In such cases

identification of motivating factors becomes arduous. They have to be conjectured with the help of patterns of consumer behavior to given stimuli-often in controlled conditions. It has to be supplanted by additional efforts in indirect structured searching. For instance in case of Harry Potter books and films the context touched upon by the commercial producers were so far removed from 21st century concepts that it was hard to determine the consumer motives in mass buying of such products. Nevertheless a deeper analysis revealed that a hidden urge to be magical and potent and another hidden urge to view high end computer aided filming were the reasons for success of Harry Potter products on the block. Second view is attributed to the development of Maslow's need hierarchy. This view states that consumers are driven to satisfy certain needs at particular times and these needs can be arranged in a hierarchical pattern. According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, there are five categories of needs viz. (1) physiological, (2) safety, (3) social, (4) esteem, and (5) self-actualization. They form a pyramid structure with the lowest and broadest physiological need at the base. Pyramid also illustrates the fact that breadth of needs, as we graduate up the pyramid, gets reduced also indicating that the needs get finely tuned. In order to have fully motivated consumers each lower level needs to be satisfied before one can graduate to higher level needs. Maslow made a supplementary hypothesis that physiological, safety, social, and esteem needs on satisfaction, cease to motivate, while the self-actualization need motivated an individual more as they got satisfied. Maslow's premise was that it is the growth choice that propels an individual toward self-actualization – that of individual growth or “filling one's potential.” (Maslow, 1954). When parents choose for their children - from the purchase of toys and games...they are building on the motivations and attitudes that children will take to adult consumption, and pass to their children (Cross 2002; Moore and Wilkie, 2005). In order

to analyze consumer decision process marketers should be able to correctly place consumers in appropriate need category and direct marketing efforts accordingly. Often commercial advertising targets high end educational support products at parents rather than children themselves so as help parents build their children' future profiles. The selling USP in all such instances was not related to meeting educational needs of the children ;rather it was helping parents in building adult characters of their children. Similarly children insisted on buying Harry Potter products out of physiological (entertainment),social(belonging) and esteem(not belonging) needs if Maslow's framework was applied.

Learning

Learning theory concentrates on various drives which are essentially aroused needs or motives. These drives cause consumers to go in for actions to reduce the level of these drives. Actions, in turn, can be shaped by cues which help consumers to direct actions in certain directions. A successfully executed action(s) leads to consumer satisfaction, and are reinforced for future. Cues, in fact, are collected information and experiences by consumers. Learning refers to changes in an individual's thought processes and behavior caused by information and experience. The learning process is strongly influenced by the consequences of an individual's behavior; behaviors with satisfying results tend to be repeated. Inexperienced buyers use different types of information than do experienced shoppers familiar with the product and purchase situation. Consumers learn about products directly by experiencing them or indirectly through information from salespeople, friends, relatives, and advertisements. Though information collection may follow a hierarchy of effects (HOE) (Farris and Quelch, 1987).A confectionary

manufacturer, when presenting product characteristics of his latest chocolate, is in fact providing information to his target consumers i.e. children so that they can initiate a hierarchy of effects.

Demographic Factors

Demographic and economic descriptors of a market are often helpful but insufficient to explain what is purchased by consumers. They provide us with directional indicators of the total quantity purchased by variously categorized consumers but they are unable to pinpoint the specific choices of the consumers and what factors determined such choices. These factors can reveal little about the individual assortment of products purchased, brand choice, brand switching etc. Typical examples of such factors are age-wise, income wise, region wise, brand wise sales or purchase data. Such data can provide broad leads for future marketing efforts. The marketing efforts however can only be truly guided by deeper analysis of other factors as discussed below.

Culture and Sub cultural Influences

Culture is a basic determinant of a person's wants, behavior, values, and perceptions. Subculture refers to groups of people with shared value systems based on common life experiences for instance one can have Hispanic Consumers, African American Consumers, Asian American Consumers, Mature Consumers, youth consumers etc. Each of this categorization can have its distinct preferences as consumers and can approach consumer decisions in the same way as their group members do. Innovation or deviation

is normally disapproved. A thorough understanding of such factors can help marketeer achieve substantial sales.

Social class essentially reflect consumers layered according to occupations, incomes, education levels and wealth. People within a social class tend to exhibit similar buying behavior. Influence of social factors on consumer behavior takes place through groups. In particular reference groups serve as direct or indirect points of comparison for a person before he goes in for a purchase decision. There is a subscribed membership of these reference groups with preset qualifying criteria. There can be membership in two levels of groups. One, is primary group membership where members' interactions are regular e.g. family, school, work etc. Second relates to secondary group where members interactions are fewer than in primary groups. Examples of secondary groupings can be religious or political groupings. A correct placement of a consumer in appropriate grouping can reveal a great deal about his decision making process. For example we have references to luxury goods segment in almost all offerings in the market. These offerings are directed at social grouping of wealthy consumers. Other socio-cultural groupings can be aspirational groupings where consumers aspire to belong to a better group, better perceived to be so; disassociative groupings are those whose membership is avoided rather than being sought. Generally social factors manifest in the form of varied roles and statuses. These arise as consumers participate in varied groups. In order to function in an orderly fashion, each group assigns certain roles to its members. Each role carries an attached status. Consumption behavior is most affected by such roles and statuses as many consumption items can symbolize such roles and statuses. Opinion leaders are also important in group dynamics as they help formulate consensus. Analysis of consumer

decision making process can be simplified substantially if status, roles and opinion leaders are identified as these help explain not only consumer choices made in the past but also predict future consumer choice patterns.

Family Group Influences

Amongst the most important factors determining consumer decision process perhaps the social grouping of a family has an all pervasive influence. Two familial concepts are important in this respect-one that of a family of orientation and the other that of a family of procreation. In most cases both tend to be same; however a distinction is being made as increasingly in breaking nuclear family structures the two distinctions are emerging. Family of orientation is the one an individual is brought up in and socialized by. This is considered primarily responsible for the formation of the super-ego. Family of procreation is the primary buying unit studied in consumer behavior. Consumer decision making -either made on stand alone basis or for the family as a whole- is nevertheless determined by the family as one entity. Degrees of influence may vary according to the type of decision being made. Primary reason for this is the fact that a nuclear family tends to be the basic socio-economic unit in all cultures barring a few and all economic resources required for consumer decisions are concentrated in a few hands within family. However because of blood relations consumption patterns of all members are protected by the family income and wealth. Therefore it is usual for family members not only to segregate individual decisions from group decisions but also to ensure participation in all decisions -whether individual or group. It may be observed that a lot of affective and emotional inputs are used in all family decisions and approach decision making process

from a rational perspective as cognitive (i.e., problem-solving) and, to some but a lesser degree, emotional (Leon and Kanuk, 1997). Hence involvement becomes intense and threadbare. Protecting or enhancing family's social status in primary and secondary social groupings often becomes the major objective of almost all consumer decision making process.

Techniques Used in Commercial Media to Influence Consumer Behaviour

The under noted information was gathered from a study of the commercial advertising pertaining to advertisements concerning products for young viewers. Notes were taken from the viewing of a couple of commercial channels for an extended duration of three hours. For the sake of obtaining a focused study the viewing was preceded by a channel selection viewing during which the major channels advertising products for young viewers were short listed. Thereafter, for the sake of convenience, the viewing of these channels were divided into two convenient slots of an hour and half. Results of the analysis of the first slot were utilized in the second viewing for improving the notes and making the understanding more comprehensive. The observations obtained are carried in following paragraphs.

Initially the young consumers were mostly placed in the category of consumers lacking effective purchasing power. This was particularly true for high value products. They were, though, reckoned as important influencing factors in high value products' purchase decisions. In another products' category the young consumers were treated as having adequate purchasing power as the products were low value and were within the reach of spending money afforded to them by their parents.

In the former category one commercial advertisement pertained to high value and computerized and high tech toys. These toys were addressed to the buyer age group 6-15 years and the main theme of the promotional advertisement was comprised in highlighting few important entertainment games which could be played deploying these toys. These games clearly depicted that in order to use these toys the young potential buyer has to be technology savvy and adept. Thus the advertisement featured not only the excitement to be had from the toys but also stirred a challenge within young potential users that they needed to be tech savvy to use it. Thus advertising message was absolutely clear that all potential buyers would belong to a select group of technology savvy users and be able to provide high end excitement to themselves and their friends' circle. The information provided was fast paced but good enough to register and produce the necessary impulse after its digestion by the young viewer. Maslow's need hierarchy was distinctly used as it utilized esteem needs and social needs of the young buyers. Esteem need was utilized as owning this toy made a young buyer member of exclusive technology savvy young chaps and social need was clear in the fact that such ownership would tend to raise the status of owner within the derived social hierarchy of young people.

In another commercial pertaining to morning cereals; the advertiser had depicted an ideal scenario. It carried a group of smart and extraordinarily good looking young people's group specifically demanding only a particular branded morning cereal from their parent. The commercial was fast paced and went on to portray a short and quick discussion among the smart kids about chief product features emphasizing the nutritional

aspect of the morning cereal in its variant flavours. The concluding message was that all healthy children are so because they consume advertised cereal product. This advertiser was clearly more interested in addressing not only the young audience but also the care providing parent. Product information offered was more suitable for the parent target than the younger audience. However the medley of young kids shown in the commercial and their association with the advertised cereal depicted through a happy act of eating it was sufficient stimuli for younger audience to persuade their decision making parent to go in for the purchase of the cereal. Thus while motivation of the younger audience was the target of the advertiser; it was the information for adult parent which was the chief message.

In another commercial specific target were young females in the age group 8-18. The product was a hair care and hygiene product and was being marketed by a multinational organization. The commercial had shown a 12-13 years old girl complaining to her parent that she would wear headgear for a fun party or some similar occasion as when she removes such headgear dandruff falls in rain quite embarrassingly on her shoulders. The commercial moves to next day when the same girl is shown removing the headgear (possibly after return from a social occasion) quite confidently and lets her clear, shining and clean hair fall on her shoulders without a trace of dandruff. Now her mother smilingly concludes that it is all due to her diligence in using the advertised hair care product. In this advertisement product feature was the highlight and its main feature in cleaning dandruff off the roots was the focus. Young target was sought to be any girl who had dandruff related hygiene problems. The parent was used as a passive advertiser who simply was shown to know advertised product as an effective solution to the dandruff

problem. No specific product or price information was furnished. Neither did the commercial indulge in any comparative advertising comparing this brand with other competing ones. A physiological need for was addressed and a social need to remain clean like most mortals was utilized alongside.

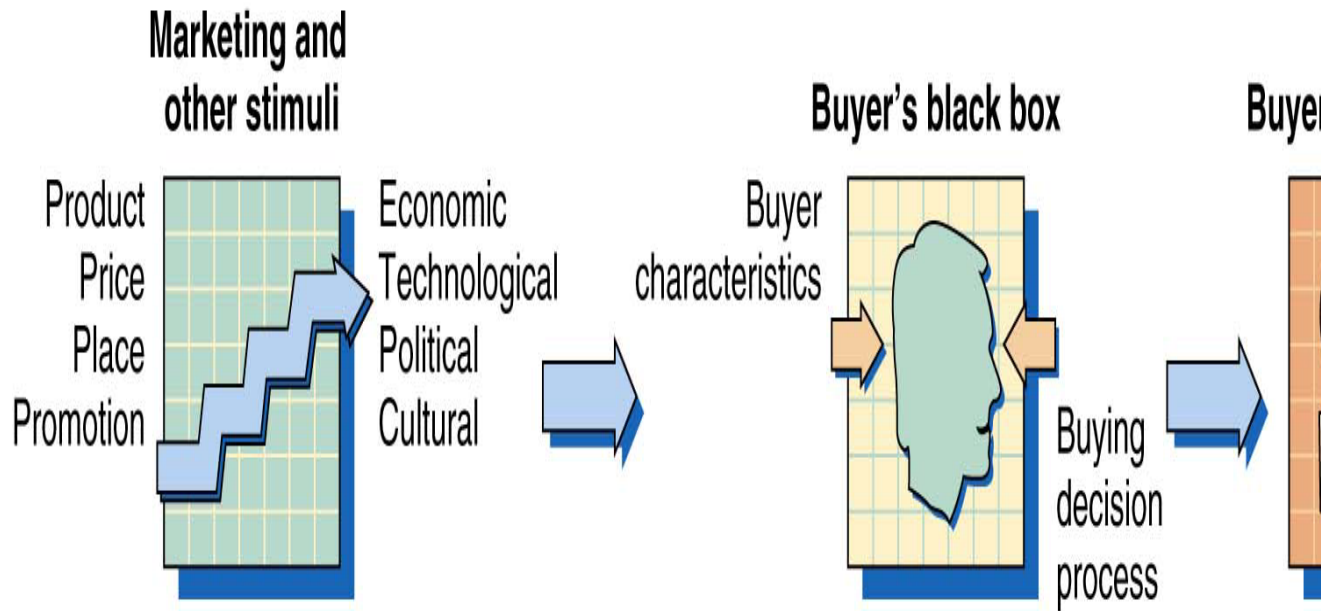
In the latter category a confectionary item was depicted which indicated that a new product has been launched which has sweet gelly inside a hollow biscuit which was otherwise salted. In fact this commercial was indulging in indirect comparative advertising as its prime message was that while others keep such biscuits only slated and hollow we have made them filled with gelly and given them another taste i.e. sweet. Thus the commercial was conveying a message of product innovation and challenging and enticing the viewers to go in for first time (possibly trial) purchases and hoping to bring about repeat purchase through positive first experience. The commercial also showed a clutch of normal looking kids eagerly munching the small biscuits from a pack. Thus the advertisers were also building upon imitating behaviour on the part of viewing kids. In another biscuit advertisement the advertiser had highlighted a product improvement and had urged young viewers to try on a 'new tingling cream' inside creamed and layered biscuits being sold regularly by it. This also worked on the curiosity of the young viewers as they were roused to taste the tingling taste.

In another chewing gum commercial a bunch of kids were shown ensnared into a tough situation like (a blazing fire) and looking desperately for help. The help was provided by a heroic figure who wore the dress derived from the wrapper of the advertised chewing gum and which was draped like the Superman or Batman dress. The

kids were seen pronouncing that only advertised gum could produce heroes like this and we should consume the gum to grow into future heroes. This commercial was working on the inspirational factor. It had aroused internal stimuli to grow into heroes. Advertisers knew well enough that there was little scope for available differentiating on product features and hence were more interested in generating a psychological stimulus addressing the enhancement of social esteem-imaginary and unrealistic though it was.

Appendix 1

Figure 1: Model of Buyer Behaviour



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