

The Psychology of Manipulation for the Education Consumer

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Abstract: The text will be focused on psychological techniques of influencing the behavior of the consumer in general and the educated consumer especially. Our efforts will be turned towards verifying the hypothesis which states that the transformation of the educational process in a marketing activity has led towards the distortion of its role.

We do a short analysis of the psychology-economy, about the way the formal economical thinking ignores the way the organizations use their power in their own interest, of the mode the illusion of option, of respect and especially of freedom of the consumer do nothing more then take the consumer to the standards the market is saving him most of the time from the effort of thinking.

The objective of our action will be complete after the establishment of a psychological profile of the consumer with an education.

We highlight, further, the importance of getting some clear final judgments of the educational process in accordance with the environment the educated consumer has to adapt. Also the limits and advantages, the moral side, but also the immoral side of the manipulating techniques of the consumers with a good education.

I. The consumer's behavior and the organizational behavior

One might state that the behavior, in general, and the consumer's behavior, in particular, has always constituted a point of interest for the economical theory. "the water and the diamonds' paradox", a problem raised by Adam Smith in the "Nations' Wealth", which demonstrates that what is rare or inaccessible receives a greater value, still remains the object of the researches in the behavioral sciences. Thus, Nicolas Guguen speaks in his work, "The Consumer's Psychology", about the *effect of rarity* in the estimation of an asset, and describes in parallel the experiments developed by Worchel and his collaborators in 1975 and by Aggarval and Vaidyanathan in 2003.

Interests in the consumer's behavior are to be found in the researches of the representatives of the marginality school, especially those made by Vilfredo Pareto and John Hicks whose hypothesis regarding the individuals' ability to compare and classify the choices according to a preference order, constitutes the starting point in the approach of "the

consumer's new theory". Gary Becker, T.W. Schultz, G.J. Stigler and K.J. Lancaster's works broaden the interest area in the traditional theory, by enriching the means of analysis and strengthening the scientific strictness. The consumer's new theory integrates into analysis the time costs and the human capital.

If the first psychological theories about the consumer's motivation have been based on the "physic-psychical determinism" type of approach, focusing on the humans' biological and psychological needs, nowadays, the researchers from this domain almost unanimously recognize the existence of six complex classes of reasons or determinations: affiliation, acquisition, prestige, power, selflessness and curiosity.

During the last two decades one might notice an extraordinary enthusiasm in the academic and research mediums regarding the techniques used to shape the markets while analyzing the consumer's behavior. All the experiments made in this way, whether they were carried out in the academic milieu, in the campuses or in various laboratories, or they were ad-hoc researches, converge towards the same ending point in the consumer's behavior and in the discovery of the methods which influence the latter. Therefore, the existence of two trends illustrating the consumer's behavior and the discovery of the methods which influence him are to be noticed: one which aims at revealing new techniques and strategies as well as educating the persuaders as a method influencing the behavior, the attitudes, the actions and so on, and another trend which both anatomizes and looks for new methods to fight against the former.

If the specialists belonging to the first tendency are concerned with the study of the factors that influence the consumer's behavior (Ph. Kotler – considered a genuine guru of the marketing, G. Armstrong, P. Peter, Olson Jerry, E. Hill, T.O. Sullivan, V. Balaure, C. Florescu and so on), those belonging to the second wave (K. Galbraith, Vance Packard, Nicolas Gueguen, D. Korten, Z. Bauman, etc.) harshly criticize the myth of the consumer's sovereignty, by bringing to light the methods of using the mass psychoanalysis in the great persuasive offence.

II. The psychology-economy connection

The economic literature describes man as a rational human being even from prehistory, preoccupied to ensure his living while making the smallest effort. In order to accomplish this, man had to organize his life, to establish objectives, to have a certain behavior, mostly dictated by the environment. Concerns regarding the satisfaction of the needs, the various activities developed in this direction, have been necessarily doubled by observations and analyses offered by an empirical psychology. An argument in favor of these concerns might be the Antique philosophers' works: Plato's *The Good City* and Aristotle's *About the Value, the Origin of Money and the Exchange*).

Therefore, psychology deals with the study of the human behavior commanded by the psychic while the economy uses data offered by the former science in establishing some rules, finding some solutions for the gradually difficult problems it copes with. However, on the other side, the more diversifying and satisfying economic activity creates a new medium and this medium is influenced by more and more factors, determining a certain behavior from the part of the human subjects that psychology ought to decipher now in different conditions. But these conditions, this new economic context, are the result of creativity, inventiveness, intelligence stimulated in the human behavior by efficient psychological methods.

In other words, the economic and social context influence the shaping of the personality and psychologically, the mature personalities can determine the evolution of society and its development.

Apparently bizarre, the human behavior that marks in many stages humanity's history and economic relations has been subsequently deciphered by psychology by bringing the "indices" which proved many times useful in fixing the economic directions.

When Galbraith wrote, in 1973, that „people are oppressed because they chose their own opprimation and that sometimes the economic behavior seems crazy because people are crazy”, psychology had already offered some of the answers with respect to the human behavior. The experiments performed by the researchers between 1960 and 1990 revealed a part of the answers and we could say that they even constituted the corner stone for the future researches in the economic domain, especially in management and marketing.

In the „Philosophical Anthopology”, Cioran warns us about the fact that „most of the people have no destiny – thus, they cannot constitute cases”. They are obedient towards some ranks, as shown in the experiments initiated by Milgram (1963) and continued by Mantell (1971), Kilham and Mann (1974), Shanab and Yhya (1977, 1978) and many others, which have also revealed to us the transcultural character of obedience. The persons „who lack destiny” find it easier to borrow the others' ideas and let them think for them. Those who can become or who are already „a case” are useless for any organization. Persuasion can't have any effect on them, the illusion of liberty, a strategy which is frequently used by the organizations has no influence upon them and thus, they can't be victims of the cheap seduction practised by these ones because they do not belong to „the products ranged on the life shelves”, presented by Carlo A. De Ferrariis and Paolo Savignano in „Love Marketing”.

The formal economic thinking ignore the way in which the organizations practise their power in self interest and, in many of the situations, in the detriment of the social factor. The individual is mainly determined to give up his objectives, ideals, dreams, and to accept those belonging to somebody else or to some other organization. The abilities of the organizations to exercise its power, by denying it, can be measured by means of simple indicators: low standard of living, unemployment, poverty, hunger. The discourses about the economic development, free markets, which produce prosperity for everybody (anyone can become rich in a capitalist economy of the free market and the failures are caused only by the drawbacks of a personality behavior), are projected as a real mind maze. The stories are real seeds for a „culture of fear”. The liberalism and the initiative become alternatively benefic and threatening to the spirit of the community.

Fear is a culture, attentively looked after by the elite in order to increase the consumption. The consumers mustn't be given any moment of inactivity, they must be kept active so as to intensify their capacity to consume, they must be transformed after the consumption market. The factors which influence the behavior leading it to an increase of consumption, will also raise the individual and the community's degree of endebtedness; although they have the possibility to expres their option, they often arrive in a situation of insolvency, due to their financial short-sightedness. The raise strategy of the consumption, by encouraging the credits by all means, comes to worth, at a certain moment, even the consumer's own freedom.

The illusion of the option, respect and especially the consumer's freedom are the most practised marketing strategies, and alongside the techinques like psychological prices, subliminal images, publicity, persuasion, apparently harmless messages, music, light, colours, behavioral primer and many others, are meant only to bring the consumer to standards according to the market and inevitably spare him many time of the intellectual effort.

Generally, the human behavior, once considered unpredictable and undecipherable, proved however to be decipherable and sometimes predictable, after a series of studies offered by the behavioral sciences.

Global methods regarding the consumer's behavior (the Marshallian, Pavlovian, Freudian, Veblenian, Hobbesian models) stand at the basis of some schemes and analytical models made to predict and shape the consumer's behavior.

The models elaborated according to the extracted and processed theory from the behavioral sciences, like those dealing with motivation, attitude, learning, become real techniques of human needs development for different characteristics of a product. Moreover, there are theories which speak about the influence of the consumer's behavior through the conditions offered by his belonging to a social group.

One of the recent discoveries with respect to creating models is the theory of the informing process, associated with the consumer's behavior. Professor Iacob Catoiu explains the way in which people think and take decisions, by processing the information consisting of different stimuli and reactions from the market medium and once perceived by the personal medium and stored in the memory as verbal concepts, they offer a behavior which can be studied.

The abundance and the great volume of the information, make impossible its rational processing. The information becomes therefore a real trap for man's cognitive activity, by offering to the researchers the possibility to elaborate other techniques of influence which affect the consumer's behavior.

The option – the decision to buy a certain product, to refuse another is nothing but an illusion in the contemporary consuming society. The economic theory explains the way in which the aggregated demand, formulated according to an option, without the influence of some other factors, controls the economic system, meaning that the society's option is the power source and that the organizations has no power. They don't do anything but serve the society and the individual's interests. They have been created in order to find the best solutions for the human needs.

In reality, the interests of the society superpose with the interests of the organization, by speculating its members' consuming capacity. In today's society, the human potential is shaped so as to be a consumer. The human resources must possess the ability and the availability to respect the norm imposed by the consuming society.

The organization doesn't assume anymore its responsibility. All it does is to respond to the options of society. That organization applies this way of exercising the power on the economic system, by denying it, to the human resources as well since they serve their interests. The organization declares, every time it has the possibility, that its people represent the most important resource. Yet, the first adopted measure by the organization in order to reduce the costs is the personnel's dismissal, by demonstrating that man is nothing but a factor of production which can lead to economic efficiency if he is intensely exploited. In these conditions not even the organization can ask for loyalty anymore from its members. If the studies regarding the consumer's behavior have succeeded to find models and techniques for it, applied successfully in the marketing, in the management they are conceived and applied according to the researches performed by the behavioral sciences, strategies of obtaining the best results from the employees. The human resources are evaluated in the teaching institutions where their modeling starts according to the standards of the consuming society.

In 1967, as A. Daniels say, the USA Government created a program named "The continuous pursuit project", so as to compare a large spectrum of teaching methods and therefore to find some efficient techniques for teaching disadvantaged children. The results

showed that the “direct instruction and behavioral analysis” methods situated on the first and second place while the traditional method occupied the 22nd place, respectively the last place. The Government assigned funds for the traditional method and not for adopting the methods which proved to be superior from the educational point of view.

The same happens in Romania; the Government assigns funds for projects with no finality for the teaching system which has to suffer a perpetual reform, with a school syllabus apparently conceived by amateurs, with alternative textbooks of a doubtful quality. The teaching institutions included in various European programs which assigns unreimbursable funds (apparently because they are repaid by means of the contribution to the community’s budget), ought to respect the algorithms imposed by these programs and the pupils’ specializations. These specializations are, in general, commerce and services.

III. Programs for the adults’ formation – persuasion and manipulation

The mental exercise of the influence and of manipulation on the consumers, in general, and of education consumers, in particular, by means of various methods and techniques, represent a positive side and a negative one, with an immoral character but also a moral one useful to the society.

Thus, the moral character of these methods and techniques might be translated by the confidence that they offer to the consumer of education by means of the acts and facts useful to the society that its members are determined to perform. For example, the management of a class of students would be practically unconceivable without the application of the various methods of manipulation meant to determine the educable and to adopt a certain behavior, a certain attitude towards learning, that of acceptance, assimilation and processing of information which finally leads to the accomplishment of the wanted transformations. Persuasion and manipulation occupy an important part in the teachers’ activity. Without a solid knowledge of the education consumer’s psychology in order to find the most efficient methods which help to intervene on his formation, this activity is destined to failure from the very beginning. In this situation, persuasion and manipulation, not only are they allowed but they are also indicated, if we take into account the factors that contribute to the individual’s formation.

The attitude’s change by applying some strategies of manipulation of the opinions and behavior has constituted the object of some systematic and assiduous studies of psychologists. Thus, we meet strategies which can be really useful in the educational process, especially in the actual context in which extrinsic motivation is very reduced, and the intrinsic one lacks almost entirely from the educable’s perspective. The best-known strategies are:

- “foot-in-the-door technique” – this strategy for influencing decisions has been proposed, analyzed and verified experimentally by Jonathan L. Freedman and Scott C. Fraser in the mid 70s of the previous century. This strategy presupposes to ask for little in the beginning in order to eventually get what you firstly had in mind;
- “door-in-the-face technique” – presented for the first time by Robert B. Cialdini and his collaborators in 1975, is the fruit of many experiments. This strategy is based on the principle: ask for more in the beginning in order to eventually get exactly what you wanted;
- “lowball technique” - strategy conceptualized and verified experimentally in 1978 by R. Cialdini and his collaborators; it refers to the obtainance of the decision for action from the part of a person, without knowing the real price of the action or taking into consideration a

fictitious advantage. In other words, this strategy means “ emphasizing the hidden costs after the subject has taken the decision to perform the action” (Stefan Boncu, apud Chelcea, 2006, 238);

- “the contextualization of the situation” – a recent strategy which aims at a psycho sociologic understanding of the communication process. Communication must be regarded now as a construction of senses that things earn among people. Assigned to Alex Mucchielli, this strategy shapes itself in a genuine art of manipulation, by concealing the invisible components of the situation.

The analysis of these strategies and their application in the educational process, taking into account all the implied factors (context, the stage of the psychogenetic development, the medium to which the subject belong, etc), can undoubtedly lead to qualitatively better activities. We consider that persuasion, manipulation and propaganda can be used as much as the benefit goes to the individual, as part of the educational act and, eventually, of the whole society which invests in this act.

Persuasion has been thought of and defined differently by great philosophers and theoreticians throughout the history. That is why we will mention some different authorized points of view regarding persuasion and manipulation.

Septimiu Chelcea (2006, 130) warns us that the authors define persuasion according to their domain of activity. Thus, psycho sociologists will subordinate the persuasion to the processes of attitude changing while the theoreticians will assign this role to the processes of social influencing found in mass-media.

Herbert W. Simons (apud Chelcea, 2006, 130) considers persuasion as being “any human communication destined to influence others’ judgments and autonomous actions. Persuasion is a form of attempted influence in order to modify others’ way of thinking, feeling and acting, but it differs from other forms of influence”. “Persuasion is not the iron hand of torture; neither is the attempt to change opinions, attitudes and behaviors by means of material stimuli, nor the pressure for obeying the group norm or the authority” – is Septimiu Chelcea’s warning for us (2006, 130).

We could say that with respect to manipulation, things are quite different. If persuasion results from the combination of some actions of the source and the receptor (the receptor of the message cannot be persuaded if he does not participate at this process), manipulation doesn’t grant to the subject (submitted to this process) the right to option. By means of manipulation, subjects’ choices are limited. They are “spared” of the thinking effort. The result is, in this case, a high degree of obedience.

In the actual context of some rapid changes, often revolutionary, in which the abundance of information seems to be as damaging as its absence, more or less tendentious questions arise. Do the actual educational programs constitute in methods, techniques and instruments of manipulation? Are the persuasion methods appropriate in this kind of “periplus”? Is it useful for the society to approach the educational system from the perspective of a business?

The adults’ formation constitutes, in the last period, in many various programs suggested by the offerers of education. The predictions of the superior forums (School Inspectorates, Ministry of Education) indicate a substitution of formation by means of the high school an professional teaching, with programs means to form the adults.

Although relevant and mostly explained by the consumer’s rationality (who would rather prepare for a profession in a short term – a 3 months course – rather than experience a 4-5 laborious school) for a long period, they are considered ungrounded. Moreover, we think that this kind of programs is made up of the education consumer’s manipulation instruments.

Due to this first aspect, this manner of approach of human resources is fully justified by the consumer's psychology, which claims for an efficiency able to accomplish more with the least of efforts. The emphasis put on efficiency, by ignoring the quality (totally or partially), presents a high risk: a greater production of "human offals" (as the sociologist and philosopher Zygmunt Bauman names this effect). According to the same author, "human offals" are thought of as human society's unwanted outputs. Consequently, they must be eliminated. Thus, a question rises: if the series production will lead to the creation of a growing amount of "offals", what would be the ratio price-quality?

Due to the second aspect, the situation is justified by the actual conditions of the modern times industry, as highlighted as the new economy or the informational society. This frame addresses to new forms of society's constructive ordination. Without diminishing human resources' role, in general, the new order springs however from the segregation of the useless human material. Which are/will be the segregation or even the removal criteria?

Recent studies have shown the fact that along with the psychological profile, the efficient employee (who is expected to be endowed with autonomy, perseverance, stress resistance, mobility, etc) ought to have already another work place. In this case are we in a difficult closed-circuited situation on the job market?

Trying to find an answer for this question, Chauvot (apud L. Dagot, 2007, 22) answered 288 job offers, by using the CV of a fictitious candidate. In half of the situations he mentioned that he had a work place, and in the second half he said that he was unemployed. Thus, he obtains 9, 02% of the positive answers to the CVs where he mentioned that he had a work place; as for the second situation, where he said he had no work place, he received only 6, 25% of the affirmative answers. It is easy to notice what employment chances a professionally inactive person can have as well as the explanation of the long term unemployment.

In these circumstances, how useful can be a course of professional formation for a temporarily inactive person? Can we consider from this point of view that the situation is a manipulative one by means of the statistics indicators which create the illusion that employees are needed in various domains of activity?

A third aspect which shapes as a consequence to the above-mentioned is that the situation can present short-term advantages, but is destined to a long-term failure. The segregation and even the removal actions of the "employed human capital", will lead to the adults' reorientation with respect to the education-formation possibilities. A change will undoubtedly happen in the interest shown in the evening school or distance learning type of education.

Another reason for the failure of these types of activities (formation programs for the adults) is that the role of education (seen from the professionally formation perspective) must not be mistaken with propaganda. The goals of education are to teach people how to think in logic and correct way. Propaganda transmits nonfactual information and presents opinions as objective facts (Chelcea, 2006).

Perhaps the term of propaganda is not the synonym of manipulation, as Septimiu Chelcea explains (2006, 132), who also warns us that " we deal with the manipulation phenomenon only when the ultimate aim of the persuasive agent brings prejudices to the persuaded person; when the transmitter and the receiver's final goals are divergent, but not contrary (the one loses and the other wins) then we deal with propaganda".

From our perspective, no matter whether the two expressions are synonymous or not when we use one of them in order to describe the situation we referred to, it makes no big difference as well by not appealing to anyone of them. Given the goals of these ways of

education and formation of the human resources, they can be considered as manipulation and propaganda techniques.

In order to understand if these persuasion, manipulation and propaganda techniques, practiced by means of the strategies presented in the previous pages, have or not an effect on the adult consumer of education, we will try to make a psychological profile of this one.

Beyond the unique psychical characteristics, there are some stable coordinates which offer us the possibility to make the profile of the adult who takes part at the formation programs. In order to establish this psychological profile we will not take into consideration the frame in which the courses are performed or some other medium factors. We will only limit only to a robot profile, obtained after interviewing 55 persons who have finished formation courses for adults:

- a person with at most medium level of education;
- looking for a workplace according to the job market demands;
- animated by the desire to develop an activity which needs a reduced effort (usually, an office activity, and that is why formation courses in informatics or accountancy);
- generally, this person has no idea about the tasks of that activity and that is why the courses will be thought of as highly difficult);
- this person is ignorant, and therefore he/she has the illusion of knowing everything;
- the person considers that he/she attends this course only to receive a diploma which is expected to give him/her the possibility to utter pretensions regarding the workplace;
- during the work, the same person shows his/her superficiality (this is due to the fact that the study hasn't been a main concern for him/her till now);
- in the end of the course, the person will state that the course was useless and a waste of time and financial resources.

We consider that these data are sufficient in order to understand how easily these persons can be manipulated. However, we mustn't minimize the improvement effect of this kind of courses, if we consider the fact that in the end, the person becomes aware that he/she hasn't learned anything, although he/she doesn't admit that the information that should have been assimilated goes hand in hand with knowledge data base previously created.

IV. Instead of suggestions

In today's society, a good administration of the human resources is unconceivable without a capable management based on behavioral studies. Aubrey Daniels warns that the managers, who will not possess knowledge about behavioral psychology or about its application, will inevitably cause problems to their organizations, which often cope with a hostile business medium or with a strong rivalry.

The performance management uses scientific strategies of changing behaviors. For this, managers ought to know how and when to evaluate the employees in order to establish an objective way in which employees can be motivated, the way in which the organizational climate or the ergonomic conditions can be created.

Furthermore, we may say that without applying a performance management regarding education (starting with the management of the institutions, continuing with the class management and ending with the person's management), we do not have the right to ask for results according to the established objectives or to put simpler: to ask for quality.

We also consider of utmost importance the goals and the finalities. Before looking for persuasion or manipulation strategies, we must establish concrete objectives, the standards we want to reach. Nevertheless, in order to establish the objectives, first of all, we must ask some questions to which we must definitely answer: Are we aware of the context that we are

trying to analyze? What do we prepare the educable for? Why should we prepare the educable? What is the medium they have to adapt to? Why do we form or shape the human resources? What are the real standards that they have to reach and which are the standards they relate to when we evaluate them?

Our belief is that, the moment we have an answer to these questions, we can proceed according to the management's laws.

This is the threshold of profitability. From now on, we can apply efficient policies:

- establishing clear, concrete rules;
- evaluation standards or criteria according to society's expectations (which is the greatest investor in the educational process);
- designing the activities by relating them to finalities;
- focusing on goals;
- establishing concrete missions of the educational institutions according to the social expectations and demands (if any);
- creating a new motivating medium for the learning-formation activity on the background of an order governed by clear laws.

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