Modelling the Consumer Behaviour

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Abstract: The study about the consumer’s behaviour can use in a remarkable way a series of models of human behaviour taken from the psychology and sociology. Among these there can be mentioned: the Pavlov model (based upon the finding that man can conditioned, by repetition and teaching, to react in a certain way), Freud model (based upon the psychoanalytical theory regarding the human being, the consumer’s behaviour being approached by means of some biological and cultural elements), Veblen model (based upon the theory of conspicuous consumption, respectively on the motivational resources), Hobbes model (which was one conceived especially for the study of the behaviour of the organizational consumer), Maslow model (having as basis the thesis according to which the human needs are ranged on an hierarchical scale, on many levels of a pyramid), Marchall model (which has at its basis the idea that, once a need is satisfied by a good, an extra quantity of that good has a lower value) and others.

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Introduction

The oldest concerns regarding the study of human behaviour [1], which were then exploited in the study of consumer behaviour, took the form of motivation study, through which they could explain many of the decisions of individuals about purchasing documents. Thus, psychoanalysts were among the first specialists who wanted to discover the motives or reasons that make the consumer to adopt certain behaviour. Thus, since 1938, the psychologist HA Murray [1] has made up a list of 30 fundamental motives of behaviour, that allowed the development of a book of personality. In 1952 AH Maslow [2] devised and presented a theory of hierarchy of needs of individuals, lately concerns on such issues have multiplied greatly [2].

Marketers have addressed this issue in a comprehensive, integrated and making concrete studies on global patterns of human behaviour to adapt to the specific study of consumer behaviour. Reference to the literature is set forth in the following models:

1. The Pavlov Model

Adapted for the study of consumer behaviour, Pavlov model operates with four main concepts: impulse, suggestion, response, relapses. It is especially useful in studying the influence of marketing stimuli - advertising, special offers, etc. The model is based on the fact that man can be conditioned through repetition, to react with certain behaviour. Creating the same configuration of suggestions, one may change in the desired behaviour of the individual.

Based on learning theory, this model operates with the following concepts: impulse, suggestion, response and relapse.

a) Impulses are the result of strong stimuli (needs, motives, aspirations etc.) that require the individual to take action. They can be of two kinds:
• primary (hunger, thirst, cold, etc.);
• acquired (learned) social relationships (fear, shame and so on).

b) suggestions are, like impulses, also the result of stimulus, but weaker, features both for the environment and the individual, which determine the way in which the individual reacts (but only to the existence of certain configurations of factors).
c) Reaction is the appropriate response to a configuration of suggestions – being not necessary that the same configuration always lead to the same response (while maintaining the same configuration suggestions, the repeating of the reaction being influenced by the individual experience).

d) Relapse is nothing but the strengthening of a certain reaction (if the experience was according to the individual expectations). Because of the way they are formed, the reactions learned can be generalized (in the sense that the same reaction can be caused by similar configurations of suggestions), or the reverse phenomenon, discriminated ones.

At its core, Pavlovian model is useful in solving problems such as launching a new product on the market or developing new promotion strategies.

2. The Freud Model

This model is based on psychoanalytic theory on human being, addressing consumer behaviour being made in terms of biological and cultural elements. The model requires motivation research - that emphasizes on the study on consumer behaviour being the analysis of attitudes.

*Attitude* is a psychological variable real unobservable directly, which is interposed between reason and action, expressed in different behaviour.

To assess of attitudes it is necessary to know:
- attitudes direction (which may be positive, neutral or negative);
- attitude strength (measured by scale);
- centrality, coherence and specificity;
- the emergence of the attitude, linked to environmental demands in which the individual is formed.

Closely related to the attitude, arises the question of the *opinion*, which is its verbal expression.

3. The Veblen Model

Prepared by T. Veblen, this model is based on the theory of conspicuous consumption, respectively on motivational researches, supplemented by the study of social influences exerted on consumer behaviour. Unlike Freud model, it supports no knowledge of consumer behaviour both in terms of motivation required to meet the needs, but by the desire to obtain a certain prestige.

According to this model, the variables that affect the behaviour of the company are:
- culture and subculture;
- social classes;
- reference groups;
- groups of belonging.

1. *Culture* carries some of the most long-lasting influences on consumer behaviour the latter assimilating these fundamentals by traditions, customs and values. With the increasing number of people, culture loses its homogeneity, developing subcultures.

2. *Reference groups* are those social entities in which the individual does not belong, but the latter one identifies:
- similarities in terms of aspirations;
- in terms of social behaviour (including the category of consumer).

3. Ranging all the social entities of which the individual belongs ( family, friends, neighbours, co-workers, etc.) belonging groups influence definitely the consumer behaviour, their establishment being influenced largely by occupation, residence, age, etc.. The most important role within this group is played by the family, a reason why the latter becomes an important entity for a research for the multiple aspects of consumer behaviour.
4. The Hobbes Model

Also called factors of organization model, it was designed by T. Hobbes particularly for the study of organisational consumer behaviour faced with acts of purchasing goods for companies or institutions. The model is based on the idea that, in essence, consumer behaviour is determined by the predominance of rational reasons related to the interests of the organization, and of personal interest. Lately, due to accruals as concerns the methodology and of applicative order, there were developed a number of synthetic models of consumer behaviour in a systemic - integralistic vision. This explains the mechanism of buying and consumption behaviour based on different theories that operate with independent and dependent variables, target groups etc.

5. The Maslow Model

This model is based on large studies, which concluded that human needs are arranged in a hierarchical, multi-levels of a pyramid including: physiological needs, safety, integration, to be respected and for self achievement. According to this model, the individual tries to satisfy physiological needs first and integrating into groups, on which its existence as a being relies, after which the individual will be concerned with the attempting of the upper levels of the pyramid. As the most important need (at a certain moment) is satisfied, the next need becomes more pressing. Maslow hierarchy principle has been questioned by some experts (especially by those equilibrium theorists).

6. The Marshall Model

This model is based on the theory of marginal utility that purchase decisions are the result of rational economic calculations made by consumers - here is based on the idea that, as one need is satisfied by a good, a greater amount of that good worth less and less. People spend their income to purchase those goods that give them the greatest satisfaction versus the spent amount of money.

In essence, the model is based on the effect of one variable on the buying process, namely price (other variables are considered constant), assuming that:

- the choice of goods on the market is given by the marginal utility that determines the order the needs satisfaction;
- measuring the intensity of needs, attitudes, opinions, arguments, etc. of individual is given by the so-called “measuring ruler of money”;
- “homo economicus” aims primarily to register personal benefit by strictly measuring “the consequences of happiness” offered by the action of purchasing the goods.

Combining the most important factors that determine purchasing behaviour there have been developed and a number of other models.

7. Complex Behaviour Models

7.1. The Cognitive Processing of Information Model

It addresses the consumer as an information processor involved in receiving sensory data about the environment (through advertising, for example), followed by their perception and interpretation according to the experience, opinions, goals, personality structure and their social status and also by the development of some beliefs, attitudes and purchasing intentions for choosing goods offered by the market. In other words, the consumer is regarded as an employee of the marketing system of the company, engaged in the formulation of rational beliefs and their rapid rational change based on new information, answering afterwards in an affective way (by "I like" or "I dislike") at each alternative, finally formulating their purchase intention of those goods that fit most their goals and aspirations.

Studies show that a client uses the information in a neutral way, rather spontaneous than structured. For instance, opposite the nutritional quality information printed on food packaging, it was found that most buyers do not know them, nor use them in product selection. Even if you say that they need as much information about products, consumers do not use them significantly for making rational decisions. Even when it comes to choose durable goods, which are expensive and rarely bought, buyers go through a process of information search extremely limited, often visiting one store and only
the sources of information in the store. This means that only a small part of the information sent pique the interest of the consumer, being used as a factor influencing behaviour.

Experience shows that often a good choice is not the result of any noticeable, decision making, and this happens not only because the decision process is compressed to the repeating purchase, but also because, in many cases, there is no such process even at the first purchase (especially when the differences between the competing brands are minimal and have little or no importance to the buyer). For instance, in the case of the so-called impulse purchases, the model of consumer that processes the information, who actively solve problems and takes decisions rationally and is but an overvaluation of the force of external stimuli controlling their behaviour - especially information sources dominated by marketing. Therefore, far from creating attitudes conducive to acquiring a brand, advertising produces, at its best situation, only small changes in the perceptions of the receptors, and this only after many repetitions.

Since most classes of products include resembling brands from the point of view of the physical characteristics, the large majority of buyers do not distinguish between them and do not always come to prefer a mark against all others. Most of them buy different brands in different circumstances, choosing products from a range of related marks, tried and tested. Therefore, not all brands of a product class have the same chance to be chosen, since people are not casual buyers.

### 7.2. The Awareness - Test - Repeat Purchase Model

The model was conceived through careful monitoring of consumer choices that consumer makes when they come to shopping. According to it, repeated purchasing is the result of an individual's elaborated cognitive process, but depends on the usefulness of the mark, its testing and acquisition experience.

Performing, repeatedly, several acts of purchasing and consumption, the individual is able the shape the attitudes and future purchase intentions. The repeated purchase is based on strengthening the potential positive benefits conferred by the use of a certain mark, as well as on personal estimates regarding the usefulness of the product - and not just on marketing stimuli contained in the advertisement or on determined mental states presumed to derive from them. In the way in which testing is a way of raising the awareness of the opportunity of a purchasing act, it only rarely happens that individual buy brands that they have not heard in a first instance from their acquaintances or from other sources. Therefore, advertising is especially important for new brands, its main role being to raise curiosity and provoke a positive assessment, even in a weak proportion, which could ultimately lead to testing those goods.

However, the model recognizes the role of each component of the marketing mix in making the decision to purchase, accepting that:

- **promoting** is necessary for facilitating product before testing it and reminds him of the potential benefits that the customer can get - thus stimulating repeat purchase;
- **the product** is by its nature and by concordance or discordance their consumer demands is the most important element in achieving the act of buying;
- **distribution** is the one that makes it possible the product purchase and testing;
- **price** is the one that can hasten or delay (or even prevent ) the decision to purchase.

In contrast, the awareness - test - repeat purchase model emphasizes the role of evaluation which makes the test product and the consumer compares it with the goods (in the same class) that they bought before. At the same time, this model provides the opportunity to clarify some important mechanisms underlying the consumers' way of rationing when selecting products on the market. Thus, the class of products that the buyer may be highly motivated and interested, which explains the frequency of which they review and evaluate each component of it in order to formulate alternatives. The similarities between these options may cause some buyers certain indifference against a brand or another. Therefore, especially when they have at least one brand of the list, they are tempted to buy it. Instead, over several successive purchase occasions, most consumers make their option for diversity. Here are envisaged consumers having a rational behaviour, well informed and experienced.
However, a more comprehensive knowledge of consumer behaviour on behalf of such a model should be based on its monitoring over the life cycle of a typical product market, knowing that in the first phase, the latter (based on a new product, the adoption of which can be done with a considerable change of old patterns of consumption) has discontinuities. Subsequently, the continuous emergence of several versions of the product, there may appear only a few weak disturbances of the consumer behaviour, consumers becoming familiar with the respective product class.

Discontinuous renewing brings to consumers facing them a behavioural model based on an extensive process of solving problems. Thus, as long as there is on the market similar products, the potential buyers of the new product will compare it with similar existing products, this situation being maintained a relatively long time after start-up and growing stages of the life cycle of the new product. This situation will allow the buyer to judge the new mark against the extra benefits which it can carry. People who buy the product in these stages are relatively insensitive to price and can be described as courageous and innovative. They are dominated by their inner impulses; they are relatively wealthy compared to those who will adopt the product later.

Within the growing stage of the cycle, consumers familiar with product attributes begin to be more available to compare different brands appeared on the market. In this stage more producers are attracted on the market, offering slightly different versions of the product, being based on the consumers’ capacity to appreciate correctly the successive innovations and in this way being capable to diversify the range of decisions. During this period, it appears on the market a new category of consumers - the late - adopters to which price becomes a more increasingly variable.

As soon as it appears on the market a dominant design for the respective product, as a result of technological advancement, and of the reporting of production and marketing to the clearly defined customer requirements and their purchasing patterns, brands are becoming increasingly standardized. It appears thus a segmentation of the market, forced by the criterion of consumer willingness to pay for different levels of quality and perfection of brands. Within each segment, there are many competing brands that meet specific requirements of buyers, for whom the “solutions to clearly defined problems” involve complex and informed processes of decision.

The maturity stage of the life cycle includes the launch of a lower number of new brads but closely conforming to the design and definition of the product that dominates the respective segment. Consumers are now able to evaluate each new release with a wide range of alternate attributes that are class products. Their purchases can be accurately described as “routine answers”. The most important buying criteria are availability, price and the condition that the brand new meet the standard compelled by previous versions.

Conclusions
Life cycle approach aims the consumer strongly involved, which, even when there appear new brands on the market for the first time and very different from previous ones, is trying to make decisions based on a careful assessment of costs and benefits arising from the purchase. It is the buyer somewhat experienced, for which the purchase of one of similar brand appeared later is preceded by a limited decision making, apparently uninvolved, interested in the product as provider of certain benefits clearly defined, but less interested in the possibility of choosing among several competing brands, which can deliver these benefits.

References

Supplementary recommended readings
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