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Consumer behavior: An integrated review

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ABSTRACT

Consumer behavior affects marketing strategy. With the changing mindset of consumers and rapid changes in social and economic backgrounds, consumer decision making is strongly impacting on marketing strategies. Consumer behavior is a complex phenomenon because each consumer has a different attitude towards purchase, consumption and disposal of a product. Understanding the concepts of consumer behavior can help in developing successful marketing and services strategies. This conceptual paper aims to provide an integrated review of consumer behavior studies by exploring the embedded features based on a review of theories, research findings and reports from relevant literature. Such an integrated review of consumer behavior can enhance a better understanding of consumer behavior from both economic and psychological perspectives. Additionally, findings are discussed, and future research is proposed.

Keyword: Consumer behavior, consumer behavior conceptual, consumer behavior theories, systematic review

Introduction

For all organizations, whether a modest start up or a multinational organization, an effective marketing strategy is a crucial road map for developing and establishing a coherent and well considered organization strategy (Kaplan & Norton, 2001). Undoubtedly, a comprehensive and effective marketing strategy is something businesses must employ irrespective of their size. Consumers' expectations must be taken into consideration (Liao & Cheung, 2002), and a detailed analysis of an organization's operations will view their business from a customer's perspective. The overarching focus of the organization's marketing strategy should be based on the concept of developing and growing awareness of consumer's behavior. In order to achieve this, organization's must implement the right marketing strategies in response to their consumer's behavior.

Currently, many factors influence consumer's behavior (Ladhari, Souiden, & Dufour, 2017; Ramanathan, 2017). Social media and the wider Internet play a role in both negative and positive ways. Negatively, a consumer can use social media and the Internet as tool to damage an organization's image. For example, in 2012 there was an uproar surrounding how little corporate tax global leviathans like Google, Starbucks and Amazon, among others, were paying in the UK. Consumers turned to the internet and social media to express their anger at what they deemed to be underhand and borderline criminal activity. Irrespective of the fact that the firms had legally done no wrong, public opinion was swayed strongly against them. Incidents such as these should serve as a stark wake-up call to businesses (Summerfield, 2014). Positively, an organization may use social media and the Internet to improve their strategy in response to the market. For example, by 2020, Cannon business will operate across a far broader domain than they did in the past (Fortune Asia). Similarly, Tokyo Cheapo's Kirkland have expanded their range of business partners to include hotels and Wi-Fi rental services in response to customers' needs (Fortune, 2018).

This notion echoes the importance of orienting marketing strategies to be in line with consumer behaviors. Consumer behavior influences organizational marketing strategy. Understanding consumer behavior can make the difference between success and failure in consumer marketing strategies. Consumer behavior can be viewed from different perspectives, e.g. economic or psychological. Theories of consumer behavior attempt to explain all possible variables and influences on consumer behavior. There is no one best theory that attempts to explain consumer behavior. This paper provides an integrated review of consumer behavior throughout the theoretical framework by integrating the theories embedded in the field. The research question has been set based on integrated theories of consumer behavior as “To what extent does the existing literature explain consumer behavior?”

Literature Review

This section has three main parts; (a) definitions and concepts of consumer behavior; (b) theories and models of consumer behavior; and (c) related studies on consumer behavior

3.1 Definitions and concepts of consumer behavior

Consumer behavior consists of psychological and social processes (Richard, Zypop, & Joseph, 2002). It is defined as “activities people undertake when obtaining, consuming, and disposing of products and services” (Blackwell, 2012, p. 4). Blackwell (2012) proposes that consumer behavior consists of three activities; (a) obtaining - activities that lead to buying products including how the consumer purchases products, (b) consuming - how, where, and under what circumstances consumers use products including whether consumers use the products at the office or at home, and (c) disposing - how consumers dispose of products or packaging including how consumers recycle products. Solomon (2018) argues that consumer behavior is “the processes involved when individuals or groups select, purchase, use, or dispose of products, services, ideas, or experiences to satisfy needs and desires” (p. 28). He proposes that consumer behavior is an exchange process of giving and receiving between two or more parties and consists of five steps: (a) recognition, (b) information search, (c) evaluations of alternatives, (d) purchase, and (f) post-purchase behavior.

Furthermore, Babin (2018) proposes that consumer behavior is “a set of value-seeking activities that take place as people go about addressing and attempting to address real needs” (p. 4). There are six basic processes: need, want, exchange, costs and benefits, reaction, and value. East et al (2017) describe consumer behavior from a marketing viewpoint which includes the consumer’s belief factor, the environment factor, and the product factor. As they focus on consumer decision making, three models are proposed; (a) the cognitive model; (b) the reinforcement model; and (c) the habit model. Similarly, Forbes (2015) proposes that consumer behavior is grounded in the emotions of human motivation. Motivations are very specific emotions that are behind every decision a consumer makes. Kenning, Huber and Linzmajer (2012) emphasise the consumer internal factor they describe as *consumer neuroscience*. They define it as a “black box of the human organism” (p. 419). Tsiotsou and Wirtz (2012) describe consumer behavior in the service business. They propose that consumer behavior is based on how they perceive a product’s value will contribute to their satisfaction. Furthermore, Craig and Douglas (2012) note that culture is an important element in consumer behavior. Consumer behavior is shaped by values, socio-cultural norms, lifestyles, consumption and behavior patterns observed within the country.

In conclusion, consumer behavior has been defined differently. It is classified as activities or processes (Babin, 2018; Blackwell, 2012; Solomon, 2018). Activities represent a consumer’s actions in response to using any product. It begins from the time he or she decides to get a product and how to use the product. Processes

present exchange activities between more than two parties. It reflects the activities of the relationship. Furthermore, activities and processes may depend on cultural contexts. To understand consumer behavior, its meaning must be clearly defined so as to be used as a guide for marketers to understand, communicate, and manage effectively.

3.2 Consumer behavior theories and models

This section presents consumer behavior theories drawn from existing works. Consumer behavior theories and models have been developed to describe the behavior of individuals. Both economists and psychologists have produced a large body of theories and models that deal with consumer behavior decision making.

The theory of consumer behavior is in line with economic theory. It explains how consumers make decisions on purchasing. In the beginning, the study of consumer behavior was known as the theory of consumer's choice (Edwards, 1954). Later, many theories described consumer behavior based on different perspectives. In the Theory of Psychological Reactance (TPR), Brehm (1966) suggests that individuals expect to have freedom/control over certain behaviors. If this control is reduced or threatened, psychological reactance will occur. The Perceived Risk Theory (Cunningham, 1967) proposes that consumer risk perceptions directly affect consumer's behavior and purchasing patterns. It consists of social risk, financial risk, physical risk, performance risk, time risk and psychological risk. Recent evidence from consumer product markets indicates that perceived risk can be a powerful influence on consumers' behavior. Particularly, marketing managers use it as a power tool to make a strategic plan (Michell, 1992). Perceived risk influences every stage of the consumer decision-making process. It is useful for marketers to use this knowledge to gain a competitive advantage.

Michell (1973) developed the Traditional Theory of Choice. He proposed that consumer behavior in the market place depends on the income of the consumer, price of products, and tastes of the consumer. Therefore, implying that utility is derived from goods and services purchased in the market place. This theory has generally been formulated in terms of monetary prices and monetary income. Hence, its application has tended to be restricted to the market sector where transactions are most easily quantified by the measuring rod of money. While, the Household Production Function Approach (Michell, 1973) views the primary objects of consumer choice as a various entity, called commodities, from which utility is directly obtained. It represents a fundamental reformulation of the theory of consumer demand. Goods purchasing depends on consumer demand and terms of use. Additionally, it implies that consumer behavior will be changed by the price of the product.

Bettman (1979) proposes that consumer behavior depends on how the consumer processes the available information. This theory is called an Information Procession Theory of consumer behavior. It proposes that individual consumers and decisions are developed from the consumer's processing, acquiring and evaluating information. He provided an extensive treatment of choice or decision rule heuristics which are missing from or only lightly treated in other theories. This theory focuses on the constructs of memory, motivation, conflict, and choice heuristics. They are treated in much more detail than in other theories.

Based on an integrated perspective between psychological factors and positive economic perspective, Kahneman and Tversky (1979) develop the Prospect Theory. They focus on gains and losses rather than final asset positions. The Prospect Theory attempts to describe human decision-makers coping with a very complex and demanding world. Psychological factors explain why a consumer decides to purchase while economics describes why the experiences in losing a sum of money appears to be greater than the pleasure associated with gaining the same amount. Recently, several models of consumer behavior have been conceptualized. Mendel et al, (2017) propose that consumer behavior begins when a person perceives a self-discrepancy, or an inconsistency

between one's ideal and actual self (Higgins, 1987). This model is called compensatory consumer behavior. It proposes that self-discrepancy plays an important role in connecting with society and others. Self-discrepancy consists of direct resolution, symbolic self-completion, dissociation, escapism, and fluid compensation. Self-Discrepancy Theory explains that a consumer will compare himself with others and also how he or she is a member of the group. Self-Discrepancies produce affective, physiological, and cognitive consequences that may give rise to the motivation to engage. On the other hand, Self-Discrepancies can produce negative emotions such as disappointment, dissatisfaction, anxiety, or dejection.

Uses and Gratifications Theory ((Herzog 1944; McGuire 1974)) describe the consumer's motivation based on his/her behavior. There are three dimensions proposed by this theory to explain a consumer's attitude; (a) entertainment, (b) informativeness, and (c). The Theory of Reasoned Action (Ajzen & Fishbein, 1980) adds more to the description of consumer intention. The most basic proposition of the Theory of Reasoned Action is that behavior is determined by behavioral intention. The behavioral intention is in turn postulated to be a function of the individual's attitude toward the act and the social norms. Whether the attitude toward the act or the social norms exerts the greater influence on the behavioral intention depends on the individual and the decision object (Ajzen and Fishbein 1980). However, Falk and Fischbacher (2006) explain that consumer behavior is based on the process of reciprocity. The Theory of Reciprocity explains responding to a positive action with another positive action and rewarding kind actions. As a social construct, reciprocity means that in response to friendly actions, people are frequently much nicer and much more cooperative than predicted by the self-interest model.

Moutinho (1987) notes that a consumer's self-image influences his behavior. The consumer's concept structure is dealing with three classes of self-concept; (a) actual self-concept; (b) expected self-concept; and (c) ideal self-concept. The intermediate "expected self-concept (the way the person expects to see himself or herself in the future) may be a more realistic target to predict consumer behavior. Campbell (1990) explains consumer behavior based on Self-Concept Clarity Theory. Self-Concept Clarity Theory is defined as the extent to which the contents of an individual's self-concept are clearly and confidently defined. It has been postulated to be related to a number of personality traits to explain the relationship between consumer self-concept clarity and his behavior.

3.3 Related studies on consumer behavior

Consumer behavior studies have been conducted in many contexts e.g., Australia (Grimmer, 2016); China (Godey, 2016); Germany, Hungary, Japan (Sudbury-Riley, 2016); the US (Dailey, 2018; Shephard, 2016); and the UK (Krasnikolakis et al, 2018). It is found that culture plays an important role in consumer behavior. Culture is the lenses through which people perceive and interpret which influences their purchasing behaviors (Sobol, 2018). The study of Shephard et al (2016) supports that notion. The results of this study indicate differences in shopping behavior between Hispanic and non-Hispanic white consumers with fashion consciousness exhibiting a greater influence on enjoyment for Hispanics than non-Hispanic whites. In addition, non-Hispanic Whites preferred fashion discounter patronage, whereas Hispanics preferred department store patronage above other shopping channels.

Culture shapes an individual's self-concept, personality, expectation or attitude. Self-concept is postulated to be related to several personality traits. Mittal (2015) reveals that low self-concept consumers seek uniqueness more. A low self-concept leads a consumer to use purchasing as an escape and uses the products to bolster self-concept. In the context of the foot-in-the door technique of persuasion, Burger and Guadagno (2003) found that the persuasion technique worked only for low self-concept consumers. A similar effect of low self-concept was found by Lee, Lee, and Sanford (2010), who studied consumers' product and service choices in

the context of online recommendations. The study of Wu (2016) reveals that individual factors including attitude, knowledge, skills, life value, age, and gender were affected by social norms and influence consumer behavior.

Marketing strategies have been driven by big data. It shows that technology is one of the key factors that influence consumer behavior. Big data helps to predict the potential of each stage in the consumer decision-making (Hofacker, Malthouse & Sultan, 2016). They suggest that organizations need to analyze consumer behavior from big data more than in the past as consumers have changed their shopping behaviors. This influences marketing strategies to emphasize more on factors that respond to consumer needs such as store lay out which makes shopping more enjoyable (Krasonikolakis et al, 2018). Godey (2016) reveals that a product's brand image and consumers' brand awareness has been impacted by social media marketing which stresses brand preference, price premium and loyalty to the brand. Additionally, price fairness has been observed as a factor influencing consumer behavior (Malc, 2016). He notes that the strength of behavioral responsiveness towards the seller increase according to perceived price fairness.

Over the decades, ethical issues in business have become more pronounced as consumers have become more concerned with quality of life and the environment. Product innovation may be perceived by consumers to link with their environmental consciousness (English, 2013). The literature indicates that the ethical decision-making process of consumers influences their judgments on purchases (Palihawadana, Oghazi & Liu, 2016). They reveal that policymakers should consider consumers' prioritization of legal responsibility in relation to business practices by improving the CSR strategies of companies. Sudbury-Riley and Kohlbacher (2016) developed a scale to measure the ethical mindedness of consumers. The scale was tested in four countries including the UK, Germany, Hungary, and Japan. The scale includes five factors; (a) the deliberate selection of environmentally friendly products over less environmentally friendly alternatives, ECOBUY; (b) specific recycling issues, RECYCLE; (c) refusal to purchase a product based on environmental issues, ECOBOYCOTT; (d) refusal to purchase a product based on social issues, CSRBOYCOTT; and (e) a willingness to pay more for an ethical product; PAYMORE.

The existing literature on consumer behavior has been conducted across a wide range of disciplines; culture, technology and ethics. Internal factors are involved in consumer behavior such as attitude, expectation, age, and gender. Expanding understanding on consumer behavior can help marketing strategists to develop effective policies.

Methods

This study follows the document research method to seek convergence and corroboration through using different data sources (O'Leary, 2014). The keyword *consumer behavior* was used for the search and yielded results from different databases including ABI/INFORM Global, ScienceDirect Journal, Elsevier, ECONIS, Taylor & Francis, Springer, Emerald Insight, JSTOR, and Wiley. The search was limited to research works published in peer reviewed journals between 2013-2018.

Findings

The theories and models of consumer behavior have been developed from different perspectives. There are four embedded key concepts that explain consumer behavior as follows.

(a) *Individual factors* influence the pattern of behavior of consumers. An individual consumer is driven by different motivations, attitudes, and perceptions and exhibits various types of satisfaction, trust and loyalty. Existing literature supports the belief that, at the personal level, consumer behavior is influenced by various shades of likes, priorities, morals and values. In some industries e.g., fashion, food, and personal care; the personal

view and option of the consumer pertaining to style and enjoyment plays an important role. Even though advertising enhances this factor to some extent, the individual factors of likes and dislikes exert greater influence on the end decision made.

(b) *Cultural factors* comprise a set of values derived from ideologies, religion, age, geographical location, and status of a society or group of individuals. Cultural factors create a significant effect on individual decision-making to purchase. Every individual has a different sets of habits, beliefs and principles which have been instilled from family and community. Culture can be divided into subcultures wherein people are classified based on their shared values and beliefs.

(c) *Technology* drives the market. Consumer behavior has become more complex because of advances in technology. Consumer behavior has been influenced by social networking and media, search engines and websites. Thus, marketing policies need to reinvent their strategies to keep up with fast-technological changes. Technological advancement helps to fulfil consumer expectations and keep product providers connected with their consumers.

(d) *Ethical awareness* is related to ethical issues involved with consumer concern about the effect of consumption on the environment and society. Consumer ethical purchase behavior is one of the factors that influence consumer purchase intention. It is an underlying driving effect and frame for consumer behavior. Therefore, organizations must satisfy the ethical concerns of consumers and avoid developing products and advertisements that lead to undesirable consumer behavior, are misleading or hurt personal or social sentiments.

Discussion

Consumer behavior has been studied for over 50 years. This section will discuss the research question. Implications will also be proposed.

To what extent does the existing literature explain consumer behavior?

For over 50 years, theories of consumer behavior have been developed based on economic and psychological theory. Economic theory tries to explain the relationship between buyer (consumer) and supplier (provider) in the market (Edwards, 1954; Kahneman & Tversky, 1979). However, psychological theory highlights individual factors. Individual factors are built from sub-factors e.g., age, gender, life values, idealism, attitude, traits, and personality (Mittal, 2015; Palihawadana, Oghazi & Liu, 2016; Wu, 2016). Consumer behavior can be better explained using a combination of both perspectives.

Furthermore, the definitions of consumer behavior vary according to the theories or models being used. Two key constructs are (a) activities; and (b) processes (Babin, 2018; Blackwell, 2012; Solomon, 2018). If market policies focus on activities, policies should take into account the factors that motivate such activities. On the other hand, strategic plans may be required to develop an effective process of consumer behavior. It will benefit market policy developers to expand knowledge of both activities and processes.

Implications of this study

The theoretical implication is unclear which theory better explains consumer behavior. Each theory focuses on a different perspective and has its own strengths that can be further developed for practice. The practical implication is that this integrated review enhances understanding for practitioners in marketing and encourages them to pay more attention to consumer behavior. The key concepts of this study explain areas of interest and reduces the gap between academic researchers and marketing practitioners. In conclusion, different areas of consumer behavior have been examined, definitions have been provided and existing theories based on

economic or psychological perspectives have been explained. The key findings that influence consumer behavior include, (a) individual factors; (b) cultural factors; (c) technology; and (d) ethical awareness of consumer. Future research into consumer behavior may help bridge the gap between theory and practice.

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