

The dark elements of consumer behavior essay examples

[Business](#), [Company](#)



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Introduction

The psychology of the consumer is important for a company that hopes to gain a competitive advantage over their competitors. This is especially the case with the increased blitz of a marketing environment that is highly competitive. Companies are thus required to understand the reasons behind the consumer's decision. For companies to survive in the competitive economic system, they require accurate descriptions of consumer behavior. This entails what the consumer buys, where he buys from, why he buys the product and what product he buys. Modern managers aspire to know who makes up their customers why the consumer chooses their product over that of their competitor. This changes the role of marketing from convincing the consumer to purchase all the products from the company (Belk, 2010). In the contemporary society, companies focus on one of the products in their line with each marketing drive. The modern marketing company is concerned with how each stage of the business meets the needs of the

consumer. Today's firms are more oriented toward the customer and consequently this has become the new approach in business management. Presently, new strategies are incorporated into the marketing system. The aggressive advertisements or dark elements are some of these strategies. The dark elements of consumer behavior have been exploited by marketing companies to influence the consumer choice to their advantage. This paper will compare and contrast the dark elements of consumer behavior. It will be tempered with personal experiences and lessons learned individually.

Consumer behavior

This is the study that delves into the circumstances, motivations and the period of time when certain products are bought and when the same products are not bought. The two fundamental aspects of consumer behavior are the fulfillment of desires and satisfaction. The interaction of different psychological features and material products influences the consumer behavior. In order to understand the preferences, desires of expression and reasons behind certain consumer traits, a combination of knowledge from anthropology, economics and psychology is required. The following factors are pertinent to understanding the roots of consumer behavior: -

- The principle of gestalt: This principle states that in order to understand why a consumer acquired a certain product, one ought to consider the broader cultural context. For example, in order to understand why a certain consumer purchased a certain brand of soap and not another, one ought to evaluate the gestalt of behavior that is associated with bathing and washing.

- The principle of iceberg: This principle implies that not all the required details lie superficially. Going by this principle, it would be that the consumer behavior of majority of the buyers is influenced by deep underlying issues.
- The dynamic principle: This principle recognizes that human motivation is dynamic rather than static. Psychological and economic trends have an effect on all consumer behavior. Mostly, the questionnaire techniques used to obtain data on consumer behavior do not focus on getting the relevant information. For instance, the questionnaires seek to know the level of income at the time of study. However, they do not seek to know the stability of the financial situation of the consumers.
- Image and symbolism: Each and every product has an idea behind it. In order to appeal to the customer's consumer behavior, advertising agencies employ the image behind the products. For instance, rhythm, background, overall configuration, melody or even the candidate country are used to appeal to the consumer behavior. This is not just a vague phenomenon employed by advertising agencies. More precisely, scientific research has shown that the public tend to adjust its opinions more readily as well as interpret neutral statements in light of the knowledge of who the statements are associated with, especially if the individuals like the personalities or not. This shows that people respond to the identifying characteristics of the message faster than they respond to the content. These four principles form a better framework for understanding the motivations of consumer behavior.

The dark elements of consumer behavior

The simple advertisement methods are not enough for a company that wants to remain competitive. Owing to the fluctuation of products with similar qualities and cost, companies have come up with new advertising approaches to allure to the consumers. It is not easy for a customer to pinpoint the feature in the advertisement that he connected with. A consumer may purchase a product only to realize much later that the motivation was not need but due to the influence of advertisements. These are the methods referred to as the dark elements of consumer behavior.

Irrational behavior is totally different from rational behavior.

Rational behavior provides a link between the conscious and the subconscious. In the rational behavior, designing the plan of action is based on the computation of the disparity between what is achievable and its costs. On the other hand, irrational behavior is deprived of these attributes. As a matter of fact, irrational behavior is comprised of psychological mechanisms and is not related to clear calculations. Advertisement agencies are aware of this, and that is why they base the dark elements of consumer behavior on the irrational behavior of the customer.

There are three major mechanisms that are chiefly based on irrational behavior. These include inflection, imitation and influencing.

- Imitation

The imitation mechanism forms the basis of many forms of behavior, consumer behavior featuring prominently in that list. Individuals perform acts without the hint of suspicion. A good example of this mechanism in action is that many people will behave in a similar way as the people around

them when faced with common or similar situations. People tend to imitate because it is harder to find solutions by oneself as compared to imitating someone else's choices. A good example of imitation is spin offs. This is an instance where people vacate from companies and start others of their own on similar ideologies. Personally, I have also been a 'victim' of imitation. I own a television set that I purchased for the mere reason that my close friend owned one of the same make. At the moment, I had every reason to think that I needed the particular television set.

- Inflection

Inflection plays a crucial role in extending different forms of behavior. This is based on how people can catch a cold or mood from someone else or borrow good behavior from other people. Psychologists adduce that the characteristics of social inflection include people with a suppressed will. Social inflection results in the consolidation of traditions usually by bringing the people with suppressed wills in a particular state of mind via emotional empathy. Through mass affective stress, there is narrowing of the consciousness and the perception of one's preference to those images that exude the most emotional colors (East, Vanhuele & Wright, 2013). In a group situation, there exists mutual inflection. Mutual inflection implies that all individuals in the group infect one another. Everyone in the group contributes to the general atmosphere of the group. Depending on the mood of the state, any member of the group can be influenced by the mood from another member of the group.

- Influence

Influence is a method that is based on acceptance of information emanating

from external sources without criticism. The ability to influence and inspire is more in those individuals with respectable positions or individuals who are famous. These elements comprise the aggressive advertisement that is also considered as the dark elements of consumer behavior. Such advertising is believed to manipulate the consumer by 'forcing' them to purchase a product. Comparing this to the most honest advertising reveals interesting facts. One, the most honest advertisements are also intrusive and aggressive.

Aggressive advertising is problematic in that people are not aware of how to react to it. For instance, people are subconsciously set out to preempt trouble. Consequently, people are willing to meet the cost of knowing that everything is fine. In such instances, advertisements tap onto the subconscious of the human mind. They constantly bombard people with messages that remind them of possible troubles. These advertisements essentially deprive individuals of the psychological equilibrium. Without the psychological equilibrium, individuals are no longer able to think rationally (Lantos, 2011).

Analysis of the dark elements

The most common dark elements in the advertising system are discounts for higher prices. For instance, the quoting price for a new or an existing product in the market is inflated, sometimes up to even two times the asking price. The manufacturers then announce a fifty percent discount on the said item. The consumer is drawn to the immense discount offered on the product. In the mind of the consumer, he is making a fifty percent saving by purchasing

the product from the said retailer or manufacturer. At the end of the day, the cost of the product still remains the same. What changes is that the manufacturer sells the product more easily and probably in larger volumes than his competitors because of the gimmick. While the consumer feels happy for purchasing a very expensive product at a cheaper price, the manufacturer is happy because of making the sale at the asking price (Otnes & Zayer, 2012). Sometimes, the allure of the cheap prices forces consumers to purchase products that they do not need.

The 'gift for you' slogan is also another manifestation of the dark elements of consumer behavior. The advertisement promises a gift when you purchase a certain product. While in most cases might not be the expensive items that the consumers expect, the identity of the gift is never revealed until after the acquisition has been made. As a matter of fact, the consumer reveals to himself the nature of the gift by unwrapping it after making the purchase. The gift could range from company merchandise with logos like T-shirts and pens to wall or desktop calendars. Whatever the gift is, it will attract the attention of the consumer so long as its identity is revealed after the purchase.

During the Christmas holiday, giving gifts is expected of by loved ones. This particular Christmas was unlike others since I had spent up a significant amount of my savings on a holiday camp the November before. Just before Christmas Eve, one local dealer announced a promotion where you received a gift for purchasing a product from their store. This was a blessing masqueraded as a gift, or so I thought. My big idea was to purchase one gift for the price of two. What I thought would double up as a gift for a family

member turned out to be branded merchandise from the store outlet. I felt manipulated and forced into making the purchase.

Another marketing techniques tapping into the dark elements of consumer behavior is the 'buy one item and get a discount on the second item of the same type.' This technique gives the consumer the impression that he will spend less for the two items when bought under these terms as opposed to buying them singly (Hoyer & MacInnis, 2008). However, the client is not aware that at times, the costs on the first time are inflated in order to compensate for the discount offered on the second item of the same type.

The aim of this technique is to ensure that once the purchase is made on the two items, the revenue equals the amount equivalent to the cumulative asking price of the two products. This technique is usually employed on household items and footwear. More often than not, the consumer purchases items that he not in need of. This explains why I own more than one similar set of shoes, many of which I do not wear.

The impact of this knowledge on me as a future consumer

Conclusion

Marketing techniques are designed to make the prospective consumer think towards acquiring the said product. It is for this reason that they tap onto the dark elements of consumer behavior. The dark elements of consumer behavior have been exploited by marketing companies to influence the consumer choice to their advantage. Over time, bearing I mind the cutthroat competition that is rife in the market today, marketing companies will need even more effective techniques in order to sway the volume sales their way.

A consumer who is informed of the dark elements of consumer behavior is better placed to avoid the intrusive marketing that robs one of their choices and options.

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