

Elements of consumer behaviour



Consumer behaviour is one of the essential elements to be explored by marketers when the operation processed in a particular market. It is the decision process and physical activity that individuals and groups of individuals engaged in when estimating, arranging, acquiring, and using of the goods and services they expected to satisfy their needs. (Schiffman, 1997). Consumer behaviour could be influenced by variable factors, in this essay, the several stages influencing consumer behaviour would be discussed, they include different categories of consumer needs, how motives affect consumer's purchasing decision and factors of goal setting. Otherwise, two purchases, McDonalds and Apple electronics will be illustrated and compared with referenced journal articles in this essay.

The fundamental for a consumer's purchasing decision is the consumer's unsatisfied need. Consumer needs emerged when a buyer becomes aware of a discrepancy between a desired state and the actual state. Consumption behaviour is directly influenced by consumer needs. According to individual needs and interpersonal factors, consumers could adjust their purchasing decision. However, to satisfy all types of needs, consumer's choice would come from different levels. Based on the hierarchy of needs identified by Abraham Maslow (1947) in the 1940s, it suggested people seek to satisfy needs from lower order to higher order. The lowest order needs, which represents the physiological factors: food, water, shelter, clothing, sleep and sex, are the fundamentals of survival. Only when these lower order needs being satisfied, the higher order needs would be concerned by consumers. Needs for emotional safety and security which includes protection from elements, security, order, law, limits, and stability, will come after the

satisfaction of physiological need. Furthermore, needs for love or belongingness, needs for esteem and needs for self-actualisation are the higher order needs in Maslow's hierarchy. For example, McDonald's is world's largest chain of fast food restaurant. It supplies hamburgers and chips to satisfy consumer's needs of food, which is the lowest order in the hierarchy of needs. Once this level of needs has been satisfied perfectly, the next stage of needs will come out. To be more competitive in the market, an expansion occurred in McDonald's. The corporation start to improve the environment of the restaurant in order to offer a more comfortable atmosphere for meals. As a result, the needs for safety have been satisfied. As the supplementaries become more completed, higher order needs would be satisfied. Therefore, consumers prefer McDonald's than any other fast food restaurants.

Maslow's hierarchy of need presents a macro perspective of the consumption, it indicates a general process of a how a need formed. However, more specific factors could be the reason for choosing the products. " One of the more engrossing concepts in the study of consumer behaviour is that of personality. Purchasing behaviour, media choice, innovation, segmentation, fear, social influence, product choice, opinion leadership, risk taking, attitude change, and almost anything else one can think of have been linked to personality" (HAROLD, 1971, p409). Personality and characteristics are important factors determine how consumers acquire their needs.

Culture and social status are two other factors influencing consumer needs. The culture here should be defined as the system of knowledge, beliefs,

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values, rituals and artefacts by which a society or other large group defines itself (Greg, 2010). For example, Eastern countries have a larger demand of rice than western countries, but the demand of bread is to the opposite. Social status or social value is equally important. If a product could make the consumer appear more dignified or competitive in a place where those values are extremely regarded, the product will be highly responded by consumers. Compare the McDonald's in China and Australia; the meals they offered are quite different because of different religion. McDonald's has to adjust the strategy to satisfy consumer's need in different culture backgrounds.

According to Maslow's hierarchy of needs, motivation has been identified as "an inner drive that reflects goal-oriented arousal" (Arnould et. al, 2004, p259). Behaviour is initiated through needs. "Motives," "needs," "urges," "wishes," and "drives" should not be used as synonyms claimed by some physiologists. There is one virtue in the term "drive" in that it carries the implication of a force pushing the individual into action. James recognised that motivation arises out of tension-systems which create a state of disequilibrium for the individual. This causes a series of psychological events directed toward the selection of a goal which the individual anticipates will get rid of the tensions and the selection of patterns of action which has been anticipated to achieve the goal. A basic list of the human needs in motivation theory is obtained. Psychologists agree that needs could be divided into two general categories-those arising from tension-systems physiological in nature (biogenic needs such as hunger, thirst, and sex), and those based

upon tension-systems existing in the individual's subjective psychological state and in his relations with others (psycho genie needs).

To explore the theory, Jolene. M identified motives into achievement, power, uniqueness/novelty, affiliation, and self-esteem motive. These kinds of motives are present in one way or other within the consumer' decision-making process (of purchasing a product, good, or service). These kinds of motives are defined by Arnould et. al. (2004) as follows: Achievement motive: The drive to experience emotion in connection with evaluated performance; Power motive: The drive to have control or influence over another person, group, or the world at large; Uniqueness/novelty motive: the drive to perceive oneself as different from others; Affiliation motive: the drive to be with people; consumers sometimes experience a strong motivation to reconnect and associate with groups; and Self-esteem motive- credit for successes, explain away failures, (consumers) see themselves as better than most others. The motivation of consumers plays an important role in the market, the success of McDonald's is not only because the convenience service of food but also the supplementary service and the strategy to stimulate consumers. The ' Value packs', an example of McDonald's promotion activity, stimulates consumers' motivation to purchase more products. ' McCafe' and ' Macca'splayland' are both the strategy to motivate consumers from different levels of the society consume in McDonald's. To encourage people's purchase, different service plans are offered.

Consumer's motivation could be influenced by every detailed improvement.

Another factor to be discussed is the consumer goals. " Accumulating evidence points to the pivotal role of goals in our daily lives: they provide us

with a sense of direction and clarity for our actions and influence the way that we think and behave. It has been demonstrated that goals can serve as an effective self-regulation, an important source of experienced utility and an avenue to satisfy ‘innate psychological needs’ such as competence and autonomy.” (Leonard L, 2006, Vol33). Consumer goals could be identified as task-related goal, epistemic goals, regulatory goals, consumption goals (Ratti, R). For example, the products of apple are variable and each of them has different functions with different prices. They are designed for the consumers with different goals. An ipod might be the choice of consumer who desires a personal entertainment goal, and a macbook could be purchased by the consumer with an epistemic goal. To compare with any service consumption, like McDonalds, it has quite similar process to set up a goal. However, some goals were made unreasonable. They were set emotionally. Pride is the emotional outcome of successful goal attainment, some research indicates it proves goals can achieve desirable results (promotion goals) or avoid undesirable results (prevention goals), Regulatory focus theory(Higgins et al, 2001) differentiates promotion pride, which originates from achieving positive outcomes and involves behavioural self-regulation toward the achievement of ideals, from prevention pride, which arises from avoiding negative outcomes and involves behavioural self-regulation toward security(Maria J, 2004). These unreasonable goals are preceded among consumers in higher social status. Therefore, consumers’ goal setting could follow a well-organized structure or might be influenced by emotional factors. Most of the consumer behaviour is goal-direct, it is important to identify the aim of purchase and the corresponding outcome.

In conclusion, consumer behaviour could be affected by the consumer needs from different order level with specific factors. Personality, culture and social status could be the reason why the decisions have been influenced. The second factor which has been discussed is consumer's motivation. According to the example of the McDonald's, a consumer's behaviour could be motivates by different level of needs which have a close relationship to each other. To understand each level of needs and provide corresponding purchase, a company like McDonald's could be successful. The last point being mentioned is to set a goal. Building on a basic need, a goal would be set up to help consumer make a purchase decision. The process of setting a goal is strict and ordered. Most marketers evaluate the products on the basis of goal setting process. However, a goal set by the consumer with emotional impacts or different status could different. Distinguished from an ordinal goal, marketers should be flexible to adjust their strategy in this condition. According to these three elements, the consumer behaviour would be comprehensive influenced. They are the keys to be considered when the markets being more focus on the consumers rather than itself.