

The notion of post purchase dissonance

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Since the beginning of the marketplace consumers have bought, used and disposed of products and services to satisfy their needs and wants. Over time as products and services evolved and sales records were available, businesses, particularly marketers, have had an interest in observing, researching and analyzing consumer buying decisions and patterns. The earliest framework breakthrough of a buyer decision process was introduced by John Dewey in 1910. Dewey, a philosopher, psychologist, and educational reformer, created a five-stage consumer buyer decision process which described the “ decision-making process used by consumers regarding market transactions before, during, and after the purchase of a good or service”. This process still serves today as the main support of popular consumer behavior. Later studies, Engel/Blackwell/Kollat, expanded on Dewey’s initial findings, however; the linear flow of stages stayed constant throughout. The stages of the consumer buyer process are: problem recognition, information search, alternative evaluation, purchase decision and post purchase behavior.

Post purchase behavior “ is the final stage of the consumer decision process where the customer assesses whether s/he is satisfied or dissatisfied with a purchase. How a customer feels about a purchase can significantly influence whether s/he will purchase the product again or consider other products within the brand repertoire. A customer can influence the purchase decision of others as s/he will likely feel compelled to share their feelings about the purchase”. This is a very critical point in the decision process for both the target consumers and a brand marketer. One “ psychological state”, within the post purchase behavior stage, which happens routinely to consumers is

called post-purchase dissonance. This will be the focal point of this research paper. This research paper will define and review post-purchase dissonance through scholarly research and determine its effects. The paper will also look into any opposing viewpoints to post purchase dissonance and conclude with this author's personal view on the subject with recommendations.

Post purchase dissonance, also known as cognitive dissonance or buyer's remorse, " is a term used in modern psychology to describe the state of simultaneously holding two or more conflicting ideas, beliefs, values, or emotional reaction. This discomfort is triggered by a situation in which a person's belief clashes with a new evidence perceived by that person. When confronted with facts that contradict personal beliefs, ideals, and values, people will find a way to resolve the contradiction in order to reduce their discomfort". In a consumer behavior situation, " the consumer would be experiencing feelings of post-purchase psychological tension or anxiety".

Cognitions to Post Purchase Behavior

A study by Egan et al. (2007) states that " cognitive dissonance is one of the most heavily studied phenomena in the history of psychology. Social psychologist Festinger (1957) first proposed a theory of cognitive dissonance. Cognition is defined as any element of " knowledge, including attitude, emotion, belief, or behavior". Cognitions which contradict each other are termed ' dissonant'. Cognitions which agree with each other are termed ' consonant'. Cognitions which neither agree nor disagree with each other are termed ' irrelevant'. As previously mentioned, cognitive dissonance is described as an uncomfortable tension resulting from having two

conflicting thoughts at the same time, or from experiencing conflicting phenomena, or from engaging in behavior that conflicts with one's beliefs. The theory claims that an individual will try to reduce his/her dissonance by inventing new thoughts or beliefs or by modifying existing beliefs". The theory of cognitive dissonance was soon applied in explaining some aspects of consumer behavior, especially the post-purchase behavior (Appendix 2). In relation to this concept, the majority of purchases (other than routine) cause a certain degree of anxiety concerning the decision.

According to Strydom et al., " after purchasing a product, the buyer will experience some level of satisfaction or dissatisfaction. The marketer's job does not end when the product is bought but continues into the post purchase period. Marketers must monitor post purchase satisfaction, post purchase actions and cognitive dissonance. The buyer's satisfaction or dissatisfaction will influence future behavior. A satisfied buyer will purchase the product again and recommend it to others. Dissatisfied buyers will respond differently. They may stop using the product, return it, or take some form of public action'. In support, Lamb et al. states that ' when buying products, consumers expect certain outcomes or benefits to accrue from the purchase. How well these expectations are met determines whether the consumer is satisfied or dissatisfied with the purchase".

Hawkins et al., highlighted that the " probability of a consumer experiencing post purchase dissonance, as well as the magnitude of such dissonance, is a function of the following: purchases which are irrevocable, unselected alternatives which have desirable features, several desirable alternatives,

available alternatives which are quite dissimilar in their qualities and no pressure applied to the consumer to make the decision”. Hawkins later consolidated his list down to three key conditions where post purchase anxiety would be post prevalent in relations to consumer behavior: “ decision is an important one psychologically or financially, or both; there are a number of forgone alternatives; the forgone alternatives have many favorable features”.

In relation to marketing, according to Zikmund and d’Amico, “ marketers need to take into account any areas associated with their offerings likely to produce cognitive dissonance and attempt to reduce them as much as possible in their communications and the products themselves”. Every aspect of the customer experience must be designed with this in mind. This includes the moment a consumer learns of the product (i. e. Advertising), physical packaging, the buying experience, product functionality and post purchase support. Overall, there is a general consensus among scholarly research that in consumer purchasing, post purchase dissonance occurs. However, there are some variances among scholarly research on best practices that marketers can implement to mitigate post purchase dissonance.

Opposing views on how to post purchase dissonance

According to research, Personal View Cognitive dissonance is a reality in the purchasing cycle. I’ve personally experienced post purchase dissonance after purchasing my first car in 2009. This was my first large financial purchase and I had several alternative options which came with many favorable

features. Once I decided on the purchase of a specific car, and after a few days before delivery, I had feelings of buyer's regret. I started to ask myself, if I had made the right purchase and whether some of the other cars had better features or performance aspects. During the waiting period for the car, I did not hear from the dealership at all, which upon reflection, only allowed my buyer's regret to fester. I remember trying to address my own dissonance by trying to change my product evaluations and seek new positive information about my choice. In terms of product evaluations, I tried to improve the attributes of the car in my mind and decrease and the importance of the other car's attributes. I also remember, researching the car more, even after I purchased it, to seek additional information in order to confirm the wisdom of my purchase. Both of these actions were ways to try and reduce dissonance on my part as the consumer, with no reinforcement from the sales team.

Conversely, in 2016, I purchased my second car. Although the purchase process was quite the same as the initial, the post purchase communication between this new sales team and me was quite different. For instance, after I purchased the second car, the sales team proactively reached out to reinforce my purchase decision. The sales team reiterated the amazing features of the car and how much I would enjoy driving it. Also, this experience was different due to the fact that I had family members who were longer term customers at this dealership. Their recommendations and past experiences reinforced my decision to purchase a car there and minimized buyer's regret. Upon reflection of these personal experiences and the research conducted for this paper, it is evident that post purchase

communication along with positive reinforcement of the purchase can be an effective tool to reduce cognitive dissonance. Also, it is evident that past positive customer experiences can lead to purchase recommendations from satisfied clients.

Now looking at this topic from a marketer standpoint, it has always been evident to me that brand honesty and brand trust are important pillars to improving consumer interaction and purchasing, while potentially decreasing post purchase dissonance. This connection with the consumer can be created and maintained through a consistent and strong communication strategy which echo's the products purpose, the products benefits and its differentiation from competitors, not only before purchase and during purchase but after the purchase as well. Coupling this communication strategy with a strong physical product image (i. e. packaging, functionality) are ways to create consistency and credibility with a brand, which in time can improve the consumer interaction and improve the trust in the choice of that brand, which may just reduce post purchase dissonance.