

Motivations for the purchase of symbolic products



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The main subject for discussion in creating relevant goods is consumer's perception of the product itself. People are different as their views for certain things differentiate from each other. Managing and designing proper communication to bring the most important characteristics of products to consumer has become effective due to the study of potential customer's attitude and beliefs. For example, when it comes to the appearance of the product and some will think of it as crucial attribute, efforts should be made to be assured that customers see the product view desirable. However, it is not possible to concentrate only on one aspect. Same product can carry different values for different people. Thus, it becomes substantial to identify which aspect is the most significant one for consumers in order to manage the product successfully.

In order to understand and disclose real motives behind purchasing symbolic products the marketing research was carried out. The objective of research was to identify motives leading people to buy perfume.

1. Theoretical aspects for purchasing symbolic products

1. 1. Product classification identified by needs

A person is driven by a number of needs or wants which motivates him or her to buy a particular product. Motivation itself defined as a driving force within personalities that impels them to action (Shiffman, Kanuk, 2010). The process of motivation is built around human needs, which in the most general form is feeling of lack of certain things. The goal to fulfil the needs generates motivation. Depending on type of need people do want to satisfy different types of motivation can be defined. According to the various

theoretical approaches there are several ways to categorize needs. One of them divides them into functional, hedonic and symbolic needs.

Functional needs originally motivate people to search for products that solve consumption related issues, which can be current or future issues. For example, purchasing a garden scissors solves a current need whereas buying burglar alarm, which prevents a potential problem.

On the other hand hedonic (experiential) needs are those that desire for product that provides sensory pleasure and cognitive stimulation. For example, people can chose flying first class to enjoy gourmet meals and plusher seats.

Finally, symbolic needs are defined as desires for products that fulfil internally generated needs for self-enhancement for role position, group membership, or ego-identification (article). These needs relate to how people perceive themselves, how they are perceived by others, and the esteem that others give them.

1. 2. Intrinsic and extrinsic motives on symbolic product preference

As Hirschman (1982) argues, symbolism constitutes an important source of innovation, and by communicating new and different social meanings, a product can operate as a symbolic innovation.

According to Truong, McColl and Kitchen(2010) buying a symbolic product such as perfumes or new and fashionable clothes may depend on two basic kind of motives-

Intrinsic – individuality, relationship, confidence

Extrinsic – welfare, popularity, self-image.

The Intrinsic motives are those motives which are internally driven and fulfilled by a person for self-satisfaction. The excitement of bringing a new acquisition back from the shop, showing it to friends and family members are important dimensions of experiencing these symbolic products. The feelings related to new products in the metaphoric portraits include excitement, happiness, joy, and curiosity. When a consumer purchases such products, a period of exploration begins. A person involves himself in purchase of these products for some special occasion or celebration as well irrespective of their gender, age and cultural capital level.

The Extrinsic motives are those motives which a person fulfils because of one or the other external factor. A consumer purchases these symbolic products in order to show their status and power in a society. These products have long been associated with power and status. According to Marx (1954), such expensive products reflect the class relations within the society. Marx regards this as the most significant means through which social distinctions and inequalities among people are constructed, experienced and legitimized. Symbolic products may also be purchased to show-off and to impress the group a person will appear in.

1. 3. Low and high levels of product involvement

Another aspect of defining consumer's motives to purchase symbolic products is people's involvement into the purchasing process. According to

Schiffman and Kanuk (2010) the level of involvement with a product alters depending on individual's interest. Some people may be passionate to buy a new suit associating it with their lifestyle and social acceptance while others prefer to purchase the same product as ordinary clothes for the job. This is what they call the concept of enduring and situational involvement according to Schiffman. The ingrained kind of enduring involvement explains that the connection between the consumer and product lays on the usage of symbols and images.

By concentrating in specific symbolic product category – perfume, consumer involvement can diversify beginning from high involvement to low. In previous studies Kapferer and Laurent identified five main aspects of consumer's motives in buying symbolic products:

Product significance. People buy their favourite product when there is a connection between them, if product represents consumer's self-image, values, or demonstrates important features. However, based on the study, it is a penultimate motive for purchasing a perfume.

Emotional attraction. For some consumer being emotionally attached to the product plays an important role. For example, many buyers of Nokia phones remain loyal to that brand explained by affinity for the product even if its functional appearance is not as good as Apple's Iphone.

Constant interest in product. Consumers who have certain interests in one category of products will constantly purchase it, for example trendy people.

Level of risk. Several types of risks can be gained varying from financial, physical, social or technological. Nevertheless, risk is considered as the least important one among all components to purchase a perfume.

Identified as a norm by society. All people live in the society and every society has its own rules and norms, so the majority of consumers buy certain products to meet these requirements, for example if girl wants to go to the graduation party or ball, she must buy a dress even if she does not wear it usually. Therefore, by the research “ badge value” was identified as the most significant motive in buying perfumes.

In order to understand and to disclose the real motivation towards symbolic products purchase behaviour the marketing research was carried out. The target population focused on young people age between 20-30 years. The research was conducted through organising two focus groups, which consisted of eight respondents each. The focus groups were divided by gender for men and women to understand variant factors relevant to consumer motivations behind buying perfumes. Perfume, which is the bright example of symbolic products, was chosen to be a topic for discussion in focus groups meetings.

The obtained results of the research shows, that, initially, women`s attitude towards perfumes overall, is mainly cognitive, they perceive the perfume as something personal and inseparable from themselves. For a question “ why do you like your favourite perfume(s),” the group was converging in two minds. The first one is that every perfume associates with the certain mood, for instance, if the mood is cheerful and playful, women opt more floral and

sweet aromas, whereas the sense of sadness and melancholy forces them to choose profound and fresh aromas. Consequently, it can be noted that the perfume in some way emphasizes the current internal state of the individual. The second view is based on the fact that a particular smell plays a significant role in creating the self image through which person is identified by other members of the society. One of the respondents elucidated that when she has an important day for her as a presentations or interviews, she picks a stronger perfume, which helps her to feel self-collected and represents her as a serious person. Two other respondents also agreed in that the use fragrance to build up special character; they prefer bold and recognizable odors in order to attract attention and to position themselves as self-confident personalities.

Different answers were received when asking the main question about the motivation that stands behind the purchase. Generally, females stated out that they buy perfume to be liked by opposite sex, to create recognizable image, to feel belonging to the fashion and arts world (one of the participants pointed out she considers its design of the bottle as a work of art), as well as to be unique and separate from the rest of the crowd. As it can be seen, all of these motives are emotional rather than rational.

According to the group discussion, rational motives does not influent purchasing process much, it was identified that perfume perceives as one of the way of self expression, social role identification and only at last resort it is a mean of protection from unpleasant smell. During the conversation it was defined that for majority of respondents extrinsic motives are more valuable than intrinsic, while for the rest of respondents intrinsic factor has a

high-priority meaning. Those who impacted by extrinsic factors stated that they are reflecting themselves as a respectful and high status personalities through using branded and expensive perfumes, and the other members indicated that the smell and the mood that is provided by perfume are significant for them.

Another finding is that the advertising has also has a considerable impact when choosing a perfume. Any advertisement is initially constructed to indicate and represent particular personal image. People immediately begin to fit created image on themselves or want to be like a celebrity, who advertises the perfume while watching advertisement. If the person does not like the character and the image of the advertising, the likelihood of that he or she will buy this perfume is very small, as well as if he or she does not like the celebrity in that commercial. Conversely, if a person is inspired by advertising and / or by celebrity, then the probability of purchasing that perfume is more, even if the perfume`s functional characteristics are not totally satisfy the costumer, because the emotional component is much stronger here than rational.

Both analogous and rather contrary facts were denoted while comparing the female group responds and male group responds. The men focus group could generate a number of responses which reflected the perception of the group members. Some of the informants who were economically well off rather blasé attitude towards purchasing of expensive perfumes. They believe that by working hard they earn the right to spoil themselves with expensive perfumes. For informants with lesser financial means, an opposite case emerges. Thus, few of the informants always purchased expensive

perfumes like Channel or Calvin Klein, falling for its brand image while on the other hand few informants had a perception that these expensive perfumes are unique, mainly for young people and give them a sense of freshness. On the contrary few informants just went for the “feel good” factor and ignored the brand image of a particular perfume. Five of the informants who were economically well off had almost same criteria for selecting a perfume for themselves, they would keep the brand of a perfume as their first preference, fragrance as their second and Price as their third preference. While on the other hand, three informants who were not very well off, would think about price or the fragrance, and give no importance to brand.

It is important to note that compared to female group, which was positive towards advertisement influence, all the male group members had a common view that the advertisement has no impact on buying of any kind of perfume for them, as one of the informants quoted “advertisements are misleading and most of the time will not reveal the truth”. Another remarkable finding relates to the functional side of the product, participants explained that wearing different and new perfume to every meeting they attend is almost a requirement, in order to eliminate social embarrassment of having a bad odor, which can be interpreted as importance of the functional motives for male respondents more than for females. On the other hand few of the informants feel that a perfume should not only satisfy the basic need, but must be good enough to impress the group they are in. Members also had a interesting perception that purchasing a perfume of a particular fragrance depends on the climate as well, as one of them said “perfumes which have base notes of musk or woody aromas are more

suitable to the winter time when it is cooler. Floral notes in the perfume tend to be associated with the summer or hotter climates. When asked about the amount of money they would like to spend on a bottle of perfume, all of them had different views, one informant who was economically well off noted that brand is what they care about not price, another informant who was also prosperous felt that expense too much on a small bottle of perfume is not worth, even though he had ability to buy it. Few of the respondents who were not economically stable marked that the price is the most important criteria for buying a perfume.

Correspondingly to female group, men also feel that one of the main reasons for them to buy these expensive perfumes with strong and long lasting fragrance is to attract members of the opposite sex and some of them feels that it provides a person a sense of self confidence and helps positioning himself better in his social group. It was agreed that a simple application of favourite scent is enough to feel sexy and in control

Thus, in a nutshell we can say women are inseparable from perfume, but of course now men are also not far behind in wearing it. However motives behind buying these expensive perfumes are driven by a number of factors, such as Gender, social and economic class, climatic conditions and sometimes to show-off and to build a good repo in their social surroundings.