

THE INFLUENCE OF PRODUCT VALUE DURING THE PROCESS OF PURCHASE DECISION

Associate Professor PhD Nicoleta CRISTACHE

Lecturer PhD Irina SUSANU

Lecturer PhD Sofia DAVID

Dunarea de Jos University of Galati

Abstract:

The success of the organisational actions is ensured by the permanent dialogue that is hold with the consumer in order to know and anticipate his needs and desires, in order to satisfy them better through the offered goods and services. Found in the face of a polyvalent consumer, the marketing specialists of the companies are provoked to find new landmarks in order to understand the mechanisms that guide the behaviour and to highlight the consumers' profile. Regarding the respect that must be granted to the consumer, this begins with a real knowledge and understanding of the elements that are the basis of his decisions, respectively of the forming of his behaviour. Nowadays consumer is permanently searching for a direction that is not always compatible with the notion of rationality or utility.

Key words: consumers' behaviour, decision, value.

The values are principles that orientate and guide the behaviour of the consumers. These appear as a result of the information process and are relatively stable in time. In the evaluation and decision actions for a certain product it appears the value distance concept. This one expresses the difference between the image reflected by the product and the image that is searched for by the customer. In general, at the acquisition of a product the common values area is searched for that appears at the intersection between the personal values of the individual and the perceived values of the product.

The value closeness generates at the level of the buyer a high degree of appreciation for the product, affectivity towards the product and afterwards an increased liability possibility. In exchange, once with the increase of the value distance it appears the non-interest phenomena accompanied by negative feelings and even disrespect towards the product.

The studies regarding the direct and indirect influence of the values upon the choosing of some products or rejecting other products are relatively recent.

The direct influence of the values is manifested when the product is accepted or rejected on the basis of which the product symbolises and not so much upon the technical and performance characteristics (for example the buying of a certain car brand that has a power and fortune symbol associated to it). The direct influence can be positive or negative. The negative direct influence acts in the sense of reducing the purchase impulse and respectively the refusal of buying a certain product. On the other hand, the positive direct influence generates the intensification of the wish to buy and purchase. Many times it happens that the symbolic value of the product is bigger than the functional one.

The indirect influence appears when the people have the tendency of according a special attention to certain

characteristics of the products. (for example: purchasing some products with the help and utilisation of which it is protected the environment).

Cultural connotations of the products

Each product can be associated to certain cultural and valuables connotations that offer weight and content to its symbolic image. The fact that the consumers have the tendency of associating to the product a certain valuable load that enlists in the line of the principle of equilibrium stereotype. According to it, to the user of a product there are automatically transferred the socio-cultural values of the typical holders of that product. Thus, this phenomenon of associating the life style and the products determines a polarization process and a socio-valuable one of the products: certain products become symbols of a mode and life style, communicate the consumers' belonging to a certain group or his adhesion to a certain value system.

The value of a product is a summative concept that takes into consideration the following facts: the number of necessity states upon which the product has the possibility to act, the power of influence exercised upon only one need and the relevance of the need category for the client. An increased value can be obtained as it follows: the increase of the number of approached categories or the unifying of the resources in order to create resolution power for types of priority needs for the individual.

At the level of the companies, the strategic management tries to offer to the clients personalized solutions depending upon their system of values. The involvement of the consumer in the creation of new solutions requires the reconsideration of the terms of the communication process between the organization and the public. Thus, the value creating process requires the development of some evolved

communication systems between the organization and the customer that take into account the feedback and especially the mechanisms that govern the choices of the customers.

In general, the customer does not buy in the total absence of information about the product or about the trademark. It presents interest for the marketing specialists the manner in which the consumer gathers the information about the products or the trademarks, how they interpret them, how they use them in their buying decisions, which are the questions for which they search for answers. Thus, all these activities can be grouped in a logical series of steps:

Acquisition, processing and depositing of information

The consumer gathers consciously or unconsciously a considerable amount of information about products and brands. Afterwards, his effort is concentrated upon the management of this information in order to take an immediate or a later action.

Exposure – is the physical confrontation between a person and a stimulus. In general, this exposure is accomplished due to the presence of the media environment. But the simple exposure is not enough for the activation of the perceptual process. It must be encouraged in order to achieve a minimum intensity level.

Attention – the consumer is uncovering his stimuli. The attention is selective, thus that from a wide range of available information, the consumer channels his attention on the permanent interest information that can solve his problems. The main difficulty for the company is to build a stimulus capable to attract the public's attention, respectively to cause the distraction from other necessities.

Understanding – the information must be treated and interpreted by the consumer according to the consumer's own mental structure. In general, a person focuses his stimuli on categories

according to the characteristics and distinctive properties, respectively the attributes of the objects: shape, colour, flavour, brand, weight, etc. These are used by the consumer to make mental comparisons. Afterwards these comparisons are used as a basis for the favourable or unfavourable appreciation of a brand or of a product.

Acceptance – not any information is accepted by the consumer. Thus, some information can be rejected if they are not considered credible or according to the beliefs of the consumer. This situation is frequently seen in the designing and unfolding of the publicity campaigns. For the making of publicity messages we have to consider the use of some symbols that can be easily decoded by the public and that present relevance in the evaluation process for the product or for the brand.

Impact – refers to the capacity of information to be memorized by the consumer. This mainly depends upon the conviction power of the sent message and upon the credibility of the message. In this way the information is deposited in the memory of the consumer.

The memorizing and the depositing – what the consumer memorizes can be divided into three levels:

The first level refers to the sensorial memory – is the one that sorts the information received according to their signification, retaining only those that present a real importance.

The second level refers to the short term memory, respectively in real time and simultaneous. According to this concept, a person gathers a series of maximum 6-9 units. This type of memory is used during the understanding, acceptance and perceptual process impact phases.

The third level refers to the long term memory that allows the depositing of information – its capacities are immense and can vary from one person to another. The data are deposited as a

network and these are organised according to many categories.

The information sources

The variables of the marketing “communication” and “distribution” actions are essential informational vectors especially during the publicity actions, publicity at the shop, sale force and public relations.

Usually, the choice represents the result of successive steps made by the buyer before the purchase:

1. Attributes and choice criteria;
2. The evaluation of the trademarks before the purchase;
3. The final choice;
4. The post-purchase appreciation.

Attributes and choice criteria – at the level of the consumer the products and the brands can be represented using a large number of characteristics and attributes (for example price, colour, solidity, aesthetics, etc.). These characteristics are considered choice criteria or determining attributes. An attribute becomes determining if it is first of all important and it allows the brand to distinguish itself from the other brands.

The evaluation of the brands before the buy – for the buying of the brands according to the choice criteria, the consumer proceeds to a internal research for the information available in his memory. If the quantity of information is not enough he can also make an external search based upon the following information sources: publicity, counselling by the seller, merchandising, etc. Usually, the consumer confronts himself with a situation in which he has to choose from known brands, familiar brands and unknown brands, that he usually tends to eliminate. For the known brands, the buyer has available a certain number of personal evaluation criteria. Thus, the consumer positively evaluates some criteria and negatively other criteria, a fact that generates a favourable or unfavourable attitude according to his judgement and experience.

In these conditions the publicity communication is facilitated by the knowledge of the criteria that govern the choice of the consumers. The publicity has to demonstrate that the brand is excellent according to the essential criteria of the potential buyer or in other words the brand corresponds exactly to the exigencies of the consumer. In this decisional process, the buyer has at a certain moment a set of determining criteria that allows him to make up a favourable or unfavourable global attitude for each brand. Generally, the attitude marks a favourable or unfavourable attitude towards a product or a brand on the basis of some durable criteria. During the marketing researches there were identified four rules for the formation of the attitude, called choice models.

1. *The compensatory rule* – the additive linear model – the consumer appreciates the brands according to a choice criteria list. Each brand obtains a series of grades that are added in order to form a global score. The model is compensatory because a poor mark for a criterion can be compensated by a good mark for another criterion.

2. *The lexicographical rule* – the chosen brand is the one that obtains marks over the average at the choice criteria considered to be important by the consumer. If two or more brands are equal, the consumer will decide according to the second or the third criterion.

3. *The conjunctive rule* – the buyer considers that the chosen brand must meet a minimum exigency level. This one will establish its nominal criteria list that will be taken into account. The brand that is noted is the one that gets scores in the above mentioned criteria. If none of the brands fulfils the conditions the buying can be postponed.

4. *The descendent elimination rule* – has at its basis the mixed procedure, according to which the consumer compares the brands according to a single choice criterion. If this unique

criterion ensures the minimum exigency level the product is noted.

The final choice – the buyer operates a first sorting of the brands before reaching at the selling point. Afterwards there are taken into account only the brands that meet the established choice criteria assembly and that are evaluated according to the rule presented previously.

Post-buying appreciation

Regarding the consumption of products and brands the consumer wants to obtain satisfaction on one or more dimensions.

Utility – the product must be in accordance with the precision criteria regarding the performance. In this case there does not represent a priority the name of the brand or the price of the product.

Hedonism – the consumer is searching to obtain pleasure by buying the product, emotions, and sensations: the pleasure of the taste, the dream of an escape from routine or a seduction, etc.

Social – the brand or the product is perceived as a distinctive sign that contributes to the self image of the buyer (status, personality).

If the chosen brand meets all the conditions of the buyer that should generate liability at the level of the buyer. The liability can be absolute, aspect that requires that the respective buyer will buy only the respective brand, or mixed in the case in which the buyer will alternate choosing in certain moments also other brands.

In the case in which dissatisfaction appears, the negative perceptions are noted in the memory of the buyer acting as blocking elements in the future evaluations of the respective product.

The context of choosing a product modifies the buying process because most of the structural elements are present in the environment. These depend of the buyer and of the buying situation for the product. If the consumer is aware that his choice can

lead to a disagreeable result, the buying act is perceived as a risk. Thus there can be identified many types of risks:

- Financial risk – perceived as a loss of money;
- Physical risk – corresponds to an eventual degradation of the consumption results;
- Psychosocial risk – refers to the perception of other people that are near the buyer;
- The risk of losing time – is an indirect consequence for buying a faulty product.

According to the nature of the product, the significance given during use and after the use, the consumer can be involved more or less. Generally, the involvement means the analysis of five aspects: interest, symbolical value, pleasure value, risk, the trust in the choice made.

1. Interest – the buying can be considered important as long as the product is nearer the interest area of the buyer (professional area, pleasure area).

2. Symbolical value – buying certain products a person can defiantly offer the persons from his entourage signs that he belongs to a certain status or a certain social category. The brand is a distinctive sign that allows the sending of signals about the self image of the customer.

3. The pleasure value – the buyer or the consumer is also searching to obtain an agreeable sensation.

4. The risk associated to the acquisition – highlights the possibility to lose from the financial point of view and also from the symbolical point of view.

5. The trust in the choice made – refers to the subjective probability to make errors in choosing a brand.

Often the perceived risk differs from the real risk. This difference is given by the produced particularity and the buying capability of the consumer. The attitude of the consumer towards risk ranges from its hazardous

assuming followed by its conditioned assuming (with warranty) and reaches even to the rejecting of the product when the perceived risk is too high. The specialists have identified a series of rules in order to reduce the risk:

- To be liable to the recognised brand;
- To choose the products that have a good image and reputation;
- To individually test the product;
- To use the sale locations with an increased reputation;
- To critically evaluate the samples;
- To negotiate the guarantee for the merchandise exchange;
- To use brands previously tested by governmental institutions;
- To evaluate more sale locations;
- Not to make from the lowest price a unique criteria.

The experience in the category of products

For the consumer, the first buy from a certain category of products represents also a source of questions that afterwards will become landmarks for the orientation of his choices. The situation in the moment of the buy or the prediction of the consumption framework plays an important role in the choosing decision. In the case of the touristic products the consumers rely mostly on information gathered from *personal sources*, taking into account the personal experience of their friends, family and specialists, information that presents high degree of credibility although these sources are not very accurate. An efficient communication with the consumer has to be systematic, coherent and must develop a relations system that is based upon fulfilling the expectancies of the consumers as well as fulfilling the interests of the company on a long term. A good communication requires:

- The easy access of the consumer to the services of the service provider.
- An effort from the service provider to maintain a permanent contact with the consumers.

- The influencing of the expectation level of the consumer, opening the path for exceeding them, using explicit or implicit promises, but that must always be respected. The promises made by the service provider must reflect the real quality of the service to be offered and not an ideal imagine. Some specialists recommend even an under-appreciation

of the made promises in order that the surprise will offer the consumer an increased satisfaction.

A successful company must exceed not only the accepted level, but also the aimed level, to overpass the expectations of the consumer, to surprise him.

REFERENCES

[1] Trevisani, D., *Psihologia marketingului și comunicării*, Editura Irecson, București, 2007.

[2] Cristache, N., *Comportamentul Consumatorului*, Editura Cartea Universitara, Bucuresti, 2008.

[3] Catoiu, I., Teodorescu, *Comportamentul Consumatorului*, Editura Uranus, Bucuresti, 2000.