

Buyer Behaviour Models

The influence of social sciences on buyer behaviour has prompted marketing experts to propound certain models for explaining buyer behaviour. Throughout the 1960s attempts were made to integrate a variety of theories, research findings and concepts from the behavioural sciences into a general framework which could be used to explain and predict consumer behaviour. In doing this, the principal writers, such as Nicosia (1966), Engel, Kollat and Blackwell (1968), and Sheth (1969), moved away from the general perspective that had previously been adopted by economists and which in a number of ways is typified by Marshall's work and the Marshallian model of 'economic man'. Instead of viewing consumer behaviour simply as a single act made up of the purchase itself and the post-purchase reaction, a far greater recognition was given to the consumer's psychological state before, during and after the purchase. This process has been summarised by Howard (1983) who suggested that buyer behaviour is largely determined by how the customer thinks and processes information. This idea of an information-attitude-intention-purchase sequence has also been commented on by Foxall. According to him, all of the models are founded upon rational decision sequence. They credit consumers with considerable capacities for receiving and handling quantities of information and undertaking extensive pre-purchase searches and evaluations. They rely heavily upon the idea of cognitive decision making in which information is received and classified by the individual and, via mental processing, transformed into the attitudes and intentions which determine brand choice and related aspects of purchase and consumption. Consumer information processing has sometimes been described as analogous with that of computers; the consumer has been depicted in terms of a 'central control unit' and the cognate elements of information technology. Whatever the details of explanation, however, hypothesised decision makers use evaluation criteria to predict the outcomes of each available option in terms of their objectives; employ decision rules or other methods of comparative evaluation in order to decide upon a course of action; receive and process information, storing it in and retrieving it from memory - all in the course of making a decision or solving a problem before purchasing a brand.

Broadly, the buyer behaviour models include the economic model, the learning model, the psychoanalytical model, the sociological model, the stochastic model, and the systems model.

1) The Economic Model:

According to the economic model of buyer behaviour, the buyer is a rational man and his buying decisions are totally governed by the concept of utility. If he has a certain amount of purchasing power, a set of needs to be met and a set of products to choose from, he will allocate the amount over the set of products in a very rational manner with the intention maximising the utility or benefits.

2) The Learning Model:

According to the learning model which takes its roots from the Pavlovian stimulus response theory, buyer behaviour can be influenced by manipulating the drives, stimuli and responses of the buyer. The model rests on man's ability at learning, forgetting and discriminating. This model maps the inter-relationship of environmental (like culture, social groups, market) and internal influences (like self-image, perception, motivation, lifestyle, mood) in order to understand the effect they have on consumers' decisions to purchase or not to purchase.

The stimulus response learning theory states that there develops a bond between behaviour producing stimulus and a behaviour response (S. R. Bond) on account of the conditioning of behaviour and formation of habits. This theory may be traced to Pavlov and his experiments on salivating dogs. Pavlov's experiments brought out associations by conditioning.

In his well-known research with dogs, a bell was rung every time food was served to a dog. Eventually, the dog started salivating each time upon hearing the bell though no food was served. The dog's behaviour is conditioned; it is related to behaviour-producing stimulus (bell ringing) and behaviour response (salivation). The S.R. bond so established causes a set pattern of behaviour learnt by the object i.e. dog. In terms of consumer behaviour, an advertisement would be a stimulus whereas purchase would be a response.

Learning Process: According to the stimulus-response theory, learning is dependent on drive, cue (stimulus), response and reinforcement.

Drive: Drive may be defined as any strong stimulus that makes a person to respond to a need and impels action. It arouses an individual and keeps him prepared to respond. The drive is an internal stimulus and is caused by the drift from the desired state to the actual state. If a gap opens up between where the person is now and where s/he would like to be, a drive to correct the situation is generated. The strength of the drive will depend on the size of the gap between the desired and actual states. For example, becoming thirsty leads to a drive to find something to drink; the thirstier one becomes, the greater the drive to have a drink. But once the person has quenched the thirst, the relentlessness of thirst disappears and attention formerly devoted to finding a drink will become channelled elsewhere. From a marketer's viewpoint, the main way that drives can be generated is by encouraging a revision of the desired state by getting the person to feel dissatisfied with the actual state. The drives may be classified as primary drives and secondary drives. Primary drives are based upon innate physiological needs such as thirst, hunger, pain avoidance, and sex. The secondary drives are based upon learning. They are not innate and are derived from the primary drives. These include the desire for money, fear, pride, rivalry, etc.

If the drive state is at a high level, the individual is more open to suggestions about new ways of satisfying the need. Somebody who is thirsty may be prepared to try a new soft drink if the usual brand is unavailable. If the drive state is at low level, the individual may still be stimulated into taking action by reminder. This is why you can see many big hoardings of inns or dhabas (providing economic meals and ambient environment) by the side of highways.

It is very much stimulating and enjoyable to allow some gaps to develop between desired and actual states, which keeps life interesting for most of the people. Allowing one to grow hungry before going out for a meal or working up a thirst before purchasing soft drinks make the subsequent experiences more enjoyable. Each individual has a level at which the stimulation is enjoyable and challenging without being uncomfortable or worrying. This is called Optimum Stimulation Level (OSL). If external stimulation goes above the optimum level, the individual will seek to satisfy the need and reduce the drive whereas if the stimulation falls below the OSL, the individual will seek to increase the stimulation to bring it back up to the OSL. OSL varies from one individual to another. People of high OSL level tend to be the younger or rich, fashionable persons who prefer novelty and risk taking. On other hand, people with low OSL prefer tried and tested one and do not want to take risk by experimenting.

Cue: Cue or stimulus may be defined as any object in the environment Perceived by the individual. The aim of the marketing man is to find out or create the cue of sufficient importance that it becomes the drive stimulus or elicits other responses appropriate to his objective. Here, the objective is to find out those conditions under which a stimulus will enhance the chances of eliciting a particular kind of response.

Response: Response is an answer to a given drive or cue. When a man feels thirsty, he attempts to get water at any cost. Here attempt to get Water is a response to the primary drive of thirst. Response also includes attitudes, familiarity, perception and other complex phenomena. Responses may be generalised or discriminatory. Generalised response refers to a uniform response to similar though not identical stimuli. Discriminatory response refers to the selective response to similar stimuli. Undifferentiated products such as cigarettes and detergents normally elicit generalised consumer responses but by huge advertising outlays companies try to induce consumers to perceive differences in brands and to make discriminatory responses.

Reinforcement: Reinforcement or reward means reduction in drive and stimulus. It has been defined as "environmental events exhibiting the property of increasing the probability of occurrence of responses they accompany". Thus, when consumption of a product or a brand of product leads to satisfaction of the initiating need (drive/stimulus) there is reinforcement. If at some later date the same needs are aroused, the individual will tend to repeat the process of selecting and getting the same product or brand of product. Each succeeding time that product or brand brings satisfaction, further reinforcement takes place, thus, further increasing the possibility that in future also the same product or" brand will be bought. This type of behavioural change - increasing possibility that an act will be repeated is called learning; reinforcement increases the rapidity and vigour of learning.

3) The Psychoanalytical Model:

The psychoanalytical model draws from Freudian psychology. According to this model, the individual consumer has a complex set of deep-seated motives, which drive him towards certain buying decisions. The buyer has a private world with all his hidden fears, suppressed

desires and totally subjective longings. His buying action can be influenced by appealing to these desires and longings. The psychoanalytical theory is attributed to the work of eminent psychologist Sigmund Freud. Freud introduced personality as a motivating force in human behaviour. According to this theory, the mental framework of a human being is composed of three elements, namely,

The id: This is the instinctive, pleasure-seeking element. It is the reservoir of the instinctive impulses that a man is born with and whose processes are entirely subconscious. It includes the aggressive, destructive and sexual impulses of man.

The superego: This is the internal filter that presents to the individual the behavioural expectations of society. It develops out of the id, dominates the *ego* and represents the inhibitions of instinct, which is characteristic of man. It represents the moral and ethical elements, the *conscience*.

The ego: This is the control device that maintains a balance between the id and the superego. It is the most superficial portion of the *id*. It is modified by the influence of the outside world. Its processes are entirely conscious because it is concerned with the perception of the outside world.

The basic theme of the theory is the belief that a person is unable to satisfy all his needs within the bounds of society. Consequently, such unsatisfied needs create tension within an individual, which have to be repressed. Such repressed tension is always said to exist in the sub-conscious and continues to influence consumer behaviour. The formulations of the psychoanalytical theory may be explained by the following example.

A young business executive Mr. Ghosh on his way home from office stops at a store dealing in readymade garments. He needs a necktie to match his recently bought shirt. He gets an appropriate match and buys one necktie. While getting out of the shop, a woollen suit catches his attention. He stops to examine it.

Mr. Ghosh examines the suit and finds that the colour, style and texture of the suit matches his needs and tastes. He takes a trial and finds that the suit fits him perfectly and also makes him look very elegant and impressive. He believes that the suit would impress his wife, friends and colleagues (*the id is aroused*). But at this time, he is reminded that his wife needs a sari and his son has been asking for a tricycle. Besides, his disposable income is also limited. His instinct says that the purchase of the suit would deprive his wife and son of their requirements

(*the superego intervenes*). Thus, his conscience restrains him from buying the suit because in his opinion it is not the right thing to do.

Here, the id and the superego are in conflict. As such, *the ego intervenes* and helps to resolve this conflict and provide the appropriate solution. The ego may offer two alternative solutions.

One alternative may be to purchase the suit so that he can impress his boss and be more confident of himself while dealing with people. This may result in an early promotion or a raise. Moreover, the needs of his wife and son may still be met by buying their requirements on credit. Alternatively, he may abstain from purchasing the suit on account of budgetary constraints.

The process of id-superego conflict and ego-conflict resolution as described above explains human behaviour. Behaviour depends upon the relative strength of each of the three elements in the personality and the specific ways in which they combine to produce solutions to consumer problems.

From the theory's formulations it is obvious that it is impulse that motivates' people to act or behave in the manner as they do. However, this motivation is (only) for the reasons ascribed to it but is attributable to the subconscious drives that are unknown to people themselves. Some of the interesting examples consumer behaviour as motivated by the subconscious includes the following:

- Many businesses executives do not fly because of a fear of posthumous guilt: if he crashed, his wife would think of him as stupid for not taking a train.
- Men want their cigars to be odoriferous in order to prove that they (the men) are masculine.
- A woman is very serious when she bakes a cake because unconsciously she is going through the symbolic act of giving birth.
- Consumers prefer vegetable shortening because animal fats stimulate sense of sin.

4. The Sociological Model:

According to the sociological model, the individual buyer is influenced by society by intimate groups as well as social classes. His buying decisions are not totally governed by utility; he has

a desire emulate, follow and fit in with his immediate environment. And several of t buying decisions may be governed by societal compulsions.

5. The Stochastic model:

This model is based on the assumption that earlier observed behaviour forms a valid basis for predicting the future. For example, a consumer who has bought Pepsodent toothpaste on 8 out of last 10 purchasing occasions will be assumed a probability of 0.8 of purchasing it on future shopping trips under the same necessity situations (i.e. want for toothpaste).

6. The Systems Model:

In recent years, some efforts have been made marketing scholars to build systematic buyer behaviour models totally from the marketing man's standpoint. The Nicosia model and the Howard and Sheth model are two important models in this category. Both of them belong to the category called the systems model, where the human being is analysed as a system with stimuli as the input to the system and behaviour as the output of the system.

Francesco Nicosia, an expert in consumer motivation and behaviour put forward his model of buyer behaviour in 1966. The model tries to establish the linkages between a firm and its consumer in terms of how the activities of the firm influence the consumer and result in his decision to buy. The messages from the firm first influence the predisposition of the consumer towards the product. Depending on the situation, he develops a certain attitude towards the product. It may lead to a search for the product or an evaluation of the product. If these steps have a positive impact on him, it may result in a decision to buy. This is the sum and substance of the 'activity explanations' in the Nicosia model. The Nicosia model groups these activities into four basic fields.

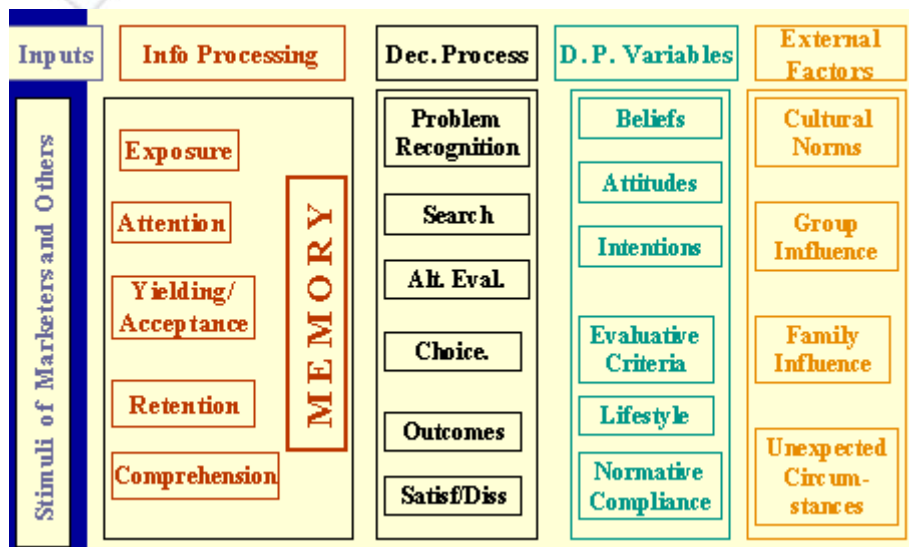
- *Field-One*: It has two sub-fields: the firm's attributes and the consumer's attributes. An advertising message from the firm reaches the consumer's attributes. Depending on the way the message is received by the consumer, a certain attribute may develop, and this becomes the input for Field Two.

- *Field-Two*: This is the area of search and evaluation of the advertised product and other alternatives. If this process results in a motivation to buy, it becomes the input for Field-Three,
- *Field-Three*: This consists of the act of purchase.
- *Field-Four*: It consists of the use of the purchased item. There is an output from Field-Four, which is the feedback of sales results to the firm.

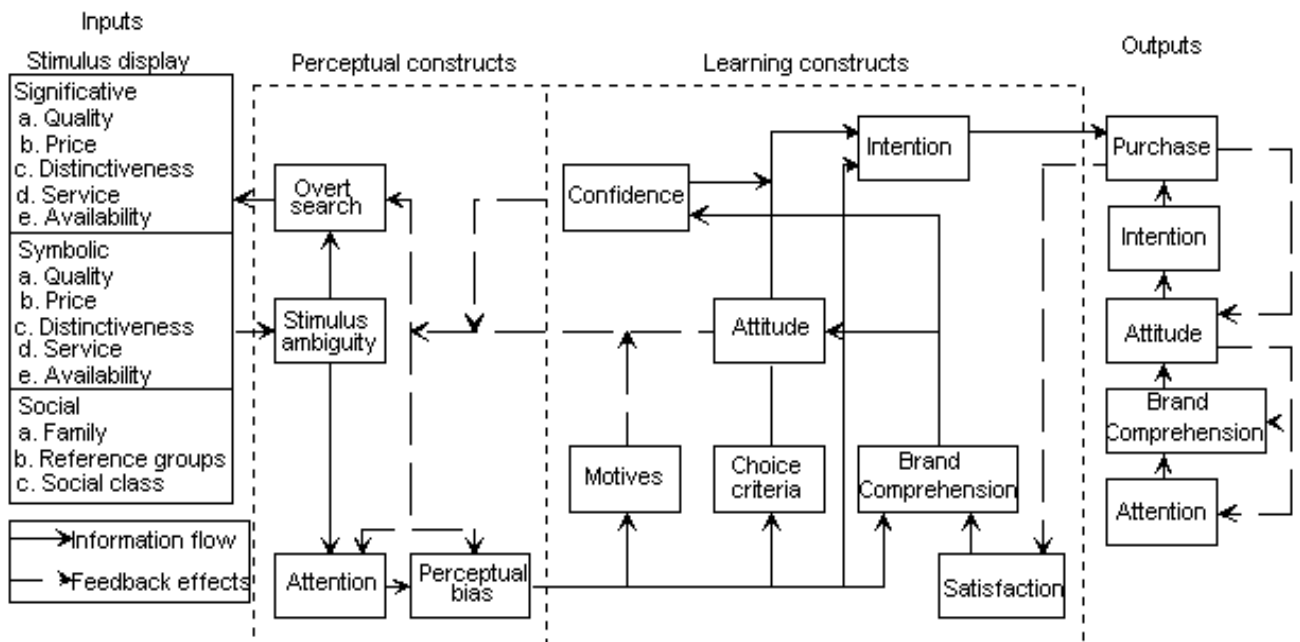
An early model of CB



EKB Model of Consumer Behaviour

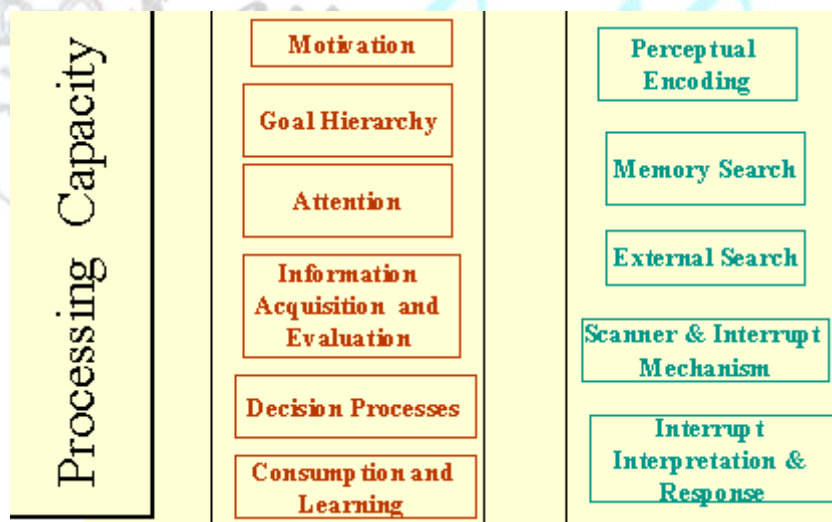


Howard Sheth model



Solid lines indicate flow of information dashed lines indicate feedback effects

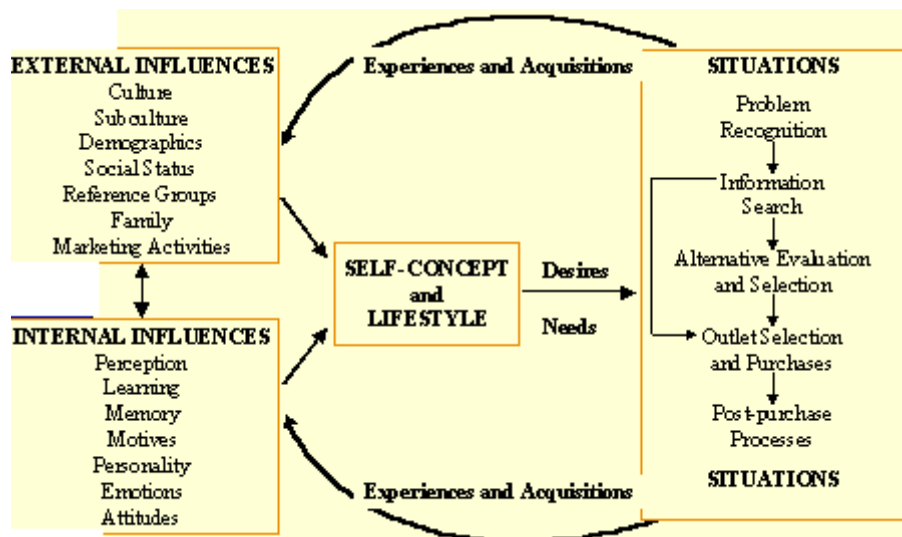
Bettman's Model of Information Processing



Highlights:

- Emphasis on information processing
- Unique constructs based on the premise that consumers are active environmental monitors scanner/interrupt mechanism

HCB Model of Consumer Behaviour



Although these models have been of value in extending our understanding of the decision process, their value has been questioned in recent years. The principal criticisms that have been made by Foxall are as follows:

- The models assume an unrealistic degree of consumer rationality;
- Observed behaviour often differs significantly from what is described;
- The implied decision process is too simplistic and sequential;
- Insufficient recognition is given to the relative importance of different types of decisions- each decision is treated by comprehensive models as significant and of high involvement, but the reality is very different and by far the vast majority of decisions made by consumers are relatively insignificant and of low involvement;
- The models assume consumers have a seemingly infinite capacity for receiving and ordering information-in practice, consumers ignore, forget, distort, misunderstand or make far less use than this of the information with which they are presented;
- Attitudes towards low involvement products are often very weak and only emerge after the purchase and not before as comprehensive models suggest;
- Many purchases seem not to be preceded by a decision process;
- Strong brand attitudes often fail to emerge even when products have been bought on a number of occasions;

- Consumers often drastically limit their search for information, even for consumer durables;
- When brands are similar in terms of their basic attributes, consumers seemingly do not discriminate between them but instead select from a repertoire of brands.

In the light of these criticisms, it is perhaps not surprising that the results that have emerged from attempts to test the models have proved disappointing.

