

# Environmental factors influencing purchase

Behaviour always occurs within a situation. Situational influence arises from factors that are independent of either consumer or the object (product) of the purchase behaviour. Situational influences involve both people and objects, and the influences that are inherent in the situation itself. Situational influences can be defined along five dimensions, which are a) Physical surroundings, b) Social surroundings, c) Time, d) Task e) Antecedent states

## Physical surroundings

These include geographical location, décor, sounds, smells, colour, lighting, weather and the layout of the product displays surrounding the product. The physical surroundings affect the mood of the individual and therefore will occur individual's attitude towards the product. A restaurant in a shabby, dingy place will obviously not attract people whereas a restaurant by the side of river obviously will attract people. Décor in retail outlets is often designed to be relaxing, so that the shoppers will stay longer and perhaps buy more; this is the reason why the supermarkets are decorated in a nice manner. Some stores use soft music to enhance the shopping experience. Colours affect consumers' perceptions and behaviour in a subtle way. Warm colours such as yellow and red are more attractive, whereas cool colours are more relaxing but are also less attractive. Research has shown that warm colours are more suitable for the outsides of shops (so that customers are attracted in) and cool colours such as blues and greens are more suitable for the insides of shops, so that consumers are encouraged to remain within the shop, thus increasing the chances of product contact.

## Social surroundings

These are concerned with presence (or absence) of other people in the situation. The macro social environment refers to the interaction between large groups of people (social and cultural factors) whereas micro social environment is concerned with psychological and personal factors.

## Time

This is concerned with the moment the behaviour occurs. This could relate to the time of day, the day of the week, the season, or the relative time since the last (or next) purchase.

- i) Time of day: Much consumption is geared to time of day. For example, most people have a clear idea of what constitutes suitable breakfast food, and will often have the same thing for breakfast every day, even though this judgement may change from one country to another (culture factor).
- ii) Season of the year: It dictates purchasing behaviour. Sales of refrigerators, AC machines, ice creams or cold drinks rise during the summer whereas people buy sweaters and other woollen garments or hot coffee during winter season.
- iii) Day of the week: It also affects purchases. Young executives and businessmen more prefer to go to hairdressers, nightclubs or eating hangouts on Fridays and Saturdays. (The common terminology TIGF i.e. “Thank God Its Friday” used in software industry signifies this trend)
- iv) Elapsed time: This signifies the time of last purchase. This factor is very relevant to many people who regularly change their car or mobile models to remain as contemporary.

## Task

This comprises the particular goals and objectives that the consumer has at the time. For example, buying Christmas, Id or Diwali presents for the family involves a completely different approach from buying items for the consumer's own use. Buying a car with the objective of impressing the neighbours (or clients) will lead to a different solution from that of buying a car to go on a holiday. (Remember Onida TV ad “Neighbour’s envy, owner’s pride”)

## Antecedent state

It is the temporary mood or condition that the consumer brings to the situation: tiredness, excitement, lack of cash, or perhaps a new purchase, which needs an accessory. Antecedent

states need to be distinguished from states that occur in response to the purchasing situation, personality in that they are temporary. They do exert considerable influence on buying behaviour: somebody who is running short of money will often spend much more time considering purchases than will somebody with plenty of cash on hand, or alternatively somebody who is in an excited state might well be more reckless with money and make rapid, impulsive decisions.

These five characteristics of situations come into play in different ways according to the type of situation the consumer is faced with. In *information acquisition* or *communications* situations, the consumer is sometimes overloaded with information and finds it difficult to sort out the wheat from the chaff. For example, TV advertising during an exciting cricket match typically comes in two-minute breaks, which contain between two to three advertising messages. Since the messages are usually intense, stimulating bursts of information, the TV viewer finds it difficult to ignore them without actually turning off the sound or leaving the room, but at the same time the amount of information contained cannot be taken in all at once. Likewise, magazine advertising is so intense that the reader cannot possibly read all the ads, and therefore skips pages with ads on. This is called *advertising clutter* and is a growing problem for marketers, since it results in ever-increasing rejection of advertising by consumers. Typically, people use the advertising breaks to make a cup of tea, go to the toilet, make a telephone call, or otherwise avoid the message. TV remote controls are used to turn off the sound, or the ad breaks are clipped out of video recordings so that the programme can be watched uninterrupted.

Communications situations often involve a dilemma for consumers, in that their desire for information is moderated by a fear of being 'sold to'. In other words, even though the advertisement might be of interest, or the salesperson might be worth talking to, the consumer may avoid the situation rather than risk information overload, or being inveigled into something.

*Shopping situations* refer to the retail environment. This can range from a pedestrianised shopping street to a high-fashion supermarket area. Each has its own atmosphere and characteristics, and each will generate specific consumer behaviour. For example, out-of-

town retail shops will mainly attract car drivers, since the public transport accessibility is usually limited. This means that such retail parks are predominantly used for major shopping trips, either to make major purchases of consumer durables or to buy the weekly grocery shopping. Shopping behaviour will be different in a shopping centre from behaviour in a street market, and in each case the consumer's expectations of price, quality, and service will be different.

*Purchasing situations* refer to the retail environment within the shops themselves. The factors included in the purchasing situation range from the social (the attitude of the shop assistants) to the physical (the décor and layout of the shop).

*Store atmospherics* are particularly important in this respect, and since most of the situational aspects of consumption are beyond the marketers' control, much attention is paid to store atmospherics, which can be controlled by the marketer. The general *ambience* within each shop will affect the consumer's perception of the store.

For example, discount stores such as Big Bazaar deliberately use not so flashy décor, basic displays and rather Spartan surroundings because these convey the impression that the goods are therefore cheaper than they would be in more expensively fitted shops. At the other end of the scale, the upmarket fashion houses provide luxurious surroundings. The effects of store atmospherics on customers are shown in the following table:

Effects of store atmospherics

Effect of atmospherics	Explanation
Shape the direction and duration of consumers' attention	If the customer stays in the shop longer, this is likely to lead to greater <i>product contact</i> . This, in turn, might lead to the customer buying something extra.
Express various aspects of the shop to its customers	A shop with a cheap decor and basic displays portrays a low-price image; a shop with luxurious decor and artful displays portrays a high-quality image.
Convey emotions such as pleasure and interest	If the consumer is enjoying the shop, s/he is likely to spend more time (and money) in it.

*Consumption situations* surround the actual use or consumption of the products. In most cases, marketers have no direct control over the consumption situation, and can only make suggestions through advertising. For some products, the consumption behaviour may take

place over a long period (for example, consumption of a microwave oven may take ten years or more). On the other hand, products with high service content may allow marketers to control the consumption environment better. Brewers are able to control pub environments with a considerable degree of accuracy; and for purely service-orientated products such as hairdressing or healthcare services, the product is delivered entirely within a controlled environment.

*Disposition situations* are of increasing interest to marketers. These are the situations under which consumers would dispose the used-up and unwanted products. In some cases these products are simply thrown away, but in others the consumer gives the product to a charity shop or trades it in for a newer model (exchange offer in case of TV or refrigerator). In each case the marketer has an interest. In the case of discarded products, many marketers now feel obligated to ensure that the product will not pollute the environment or represent a health hazard. For example, fast-food outlets are under considerable pressure to ensure that uneaten food and soiled packaging are not simply left in the surrounding environment.

The *person-situation interface* refers to the synergy between the person and the situation. Not everybody responds in the same way to a given situation: for example, although most people tend to spend more on food items when it is a long time since their last meal, overweight people do not do so to the same extent.

## Other Factors

Other factors include factors, such as political factors, legal factors, technological factors and ethical factors, which influence the buying behaviour of consumers.

**a) Legal Factors:** In every country, consumer expenditure is governed by legal factors like taxes, tax laws, etc. If the taxes are low and legal restrictions are less, consumer expenditure will be more. On the other hand, if taxes are high and restrictions on the purchases are more, consumer expenditure will be less.

**b) Technology:** Consumers, usually, prefer more up-to-date and sophisticated goods. Technological advances contribute to the production and availability of modern goods. As more and more modern goods are released to the market, the more will be the consumer expenditure on those goods. So technological logical advances also influence the buying behaviour of consumers.

**c) Ethical Considerations:** Ethical considerations (i.e. the sense of morality) have an important effect on the buying behaviour of the consumers. For instance, if people are religious and spiritual minded, they spend less on modern comforts and luxuries. On the other hand, if people are educated, civilised and advanced, they spend more on comforts and luxuries.

**d) Political Factors:** Political factors have an important impact on the pattern of consumption. In a controlled economy, the consumption pattern is determined by. But in a the Government free capitalistic economy, consumers have economic freedom and wider choice and are free to spend their Income in any way they like.

Thus we saw a set of factors which are external to the consumer and has a major impact on the consumer behaviour. Consumer adapts himself or herself according to those factors as they are external and out of control of the individual consumer.