

BEING A CONSUMER – ONE OF THE ROLES IN A PERSON'S LIFE

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Abstract: In his life, a person performs many different roles in different social groups. In each of them, we perform a role that we combine with our other roles. In the most significant reference group, the family, these can be: mother, father, son, daughter and others. This group is not only the most significant for each person, but also the one that accompanies him throughout his life. The changes that occur over time are related to a change in the role and its members. The other significant reference groups are the friend group, the interest groups, the team at work. In each of them, we fulfill a given role, which we reconcile with our other roles. Along with them, there is another role that is very different in nature, essence and purpose from the others. This is the role of the consumer. The main purpose of the consumer role in human life is to satisfy our needs and wants by participating in a process of exchange. The goal of this article is to make a brief review of the theoretical concepts of the consumer, refracted through the prism of different scientific fields, which will serve to build a more multi-layered appearance of this concept. The evolution in the understanding of the concept of consumer has been traced, presented through a historical review of theoretical concepts and research. Modern interpretations of the role of the consumer in the conditions of a market economy are discussed. The model of a consumer in modern society is about an individual who has needs, seeking to satisfy them in a rational way, so as to improve his quality of life. The goal of organizations is to know the needs of consumers by providing them with the most suitable product. An overview of the theoretical statements about the concept of consumer from the positions of an interdisciplinary approach is made.

The study of the consumer is subject of various scientific fields. This also allows for its deeper understanding. For one of the scientific fields, it is the focus of all the activities and that is marketing.

According to marketing philosophy, people have different needs. This is also the starting point for marketing - the existence of needs that are subject to satisfaction. Placing the consumer and his needs at the heart of marketing requires that they must be studied. This can be achieved through marketing research. With the wide distribution of the Internet, prerequisites were created for the implementation of online marketing research. From the point of view of marketing, the consumer exhibits a certain behavior that is expressed in the decisions and actions he takes in the selection, purchase and way of using a given product. Studying the needs and behaviors of the target consumer will help marketers create more effective marketing strategies.

Keywords: consumer, role, reference group

1. INTRODUCTION

In his life, a person fulfills many and different roles in different social groups. In the most significant reference group, the family, these can be: mother, father, son, daughter and others. This group is not only the most significant for each person, but also the one that accompanies him throughout his life. The changes that occur over time are related to a change in the role and its members. The other significant reference groups are the friend group, the interest groups, the team at work. In each of them, we fulfill a given role, which we reconcile with our other roles. Along with them, there is another role, which is very different in nature, essence and purpose from the others. This is the role of a consumer. The main purpose of the consumer role in human life is to satisfy our needs and wants by participating in a process of exchange. Various socializing agents such as family, friends and others participate in its learning and implementation. This shows her social side and integration with the other roles we perform. For example, a mother needs different products to prepare dinner for her family, which also puts her in the role of a consumer. This role has a strong vital significance for a person, since on the one hand we perform it in order to exist and on the other hand to develop as individuals and professionals. All these goals become achievable through consumption.

2. EVOLUTION IN CONSUMER MODELS

First of all, it is of interest how the understanding of the concept of "consumer" has changed. In marketing as Wendy Gordon (2000) points out, six consumer models are considered, which largely trace the evolution of the concept from a historical perspective:

- Marginalized consumer

In the years after World War II, the lack of disposable income and the coupon system shaped the market in America and countries like Russia, China, etc. People bought only what was provided by the manufacturer as there was little

or no choice. The understanding of a consumer in that period was "a person who buys something he needs". The prevailing understanding was that the company was best able to judge what to produce.

- Statistical consumer

In the 1950s, new marketing ideas took place as the market shifted from producer to consumer. Companies are becoming interested in what consumers actually want, which has led to the development of various methods of research and information gathering. The problem with the studies was that the results were averaged across all consumers, viewed as a homogenous group. The understanding of the consumer was: "all people who buy a product or service are a homogeneous group".

- The secret consumer

In the 1960s, marketers became interested in what influences consumers and what motivates them. It is defined as the era of studying motivation and interpreting consumer behavior using the tools of psychology. A consumer is seen as a "person with ulterior motives".

- The sophisticated consumer

In the 1980s, the concept that a consumer was "a person who consumes both advertising and products and services" was postulated. This hypothesis arose from the many studies during this period showing that people enjoyed the commercials more than the program. Emphasis is placed on advertising as the most powerful weapon of marketing.

- The satellite consumer

The emphasis shifts to the brand, and the so-called "satellite consumer" is perceived as "held in orbit by the brand". Marketers are beginning to develop brand models and explain what a brand is. It is looking for how to position a brand that is considered to be the most important asset of the enterprise.

- The multi-headed user

In the 1990s, the concept emerged that people choose a brand in a given case depending on external and internal factors. The study of these factors is the basis for understanding the behavior of the so-called "multi-headed user".

3. THE MODERN CONSUMER

Firat (2005) states that the model of a consumer in modern society is about an individual who has needs, seeking to satisfy them in a rational way, so as to improve his quality of life. The goal of organizations is to know the needs of consumers by providing them with the most suitable product. Therefore, needs are central to modern society. Clark (2007) defines the modern consumer as a creative and innovative individual who interacts with his own experience, shaping his behavior and decisions. Keat (2005) makes the statement that the modern consumer is a dreamer whose satisfaction derives from the possession of objects. This is a continuous process, since actual possession is unsatisfying.

Today's global consumer is very different compared to the consumer of a few decades ago. The modern consumer has many characteristics that did not even exist in the twentieth century. Samli (2013) offers seven of them:

- ✓ more knowledgeable – there are many alternatives to the modern consumer. He is more aware of the availability of products and services as this level of awareness could not be compared to that of his predecessors;
- ✓ well informed – related to awareness and the fact that the modern consumer has much more information about products and services. The modern consumer knows global brands such as Coca-Cola, Nike, Starbucks, among the many other products available in the local market;
- ✓ quality awareness – due to the fact that consumers are well informed, therefore they are also more quality conscious and able to compare with alternative products. This provides them with the opportunity to make choices that will better meet their needs;
- ✓ knowledge of global brands - in the era of globalization, global brands have the opportunity to reach consumers in every corner of the world;
- ✓ awareness of international currencies – the modern consumer has the opportunity to choose a product that is cheaper to buy in a given currency;
- ✓ global access to products - the modern consumer has the opportunity to buy a product from different parts of the world, as long as these products are announced in one of the global communication networks such as eBay and Amazon;
- ✓ fast delivery – global logistics systems are so well developed that the consumer has the opportunity to receive the product ordered by him in a short period of time.

Sachuk (2005) points out that consumers are active processors of information that they interpret, categorize, generate arguments and draw conclusions from it. Consumers demand not only high quality and low prices, but also convenient and fast personalized service. Shuster (2004) believes that in the modern conditions of globalization,

increased competition and growing consumer demands, companies strive not only to offer high-quality products and convenient service, but also to provide additional value to their consumers.

Through a marketing-historical perspective, the considered concept developed naturally, adapting to the times and conditions.

4. REVIEW OF THEORETICAL CONCEPTS OF THE CONSUMER CONCEPT

In the literature, the concept of "consumer" is the subject of research and interpretation of many sciences - economics, psychology, sociology, marketing, philosophy, etc. This versatility requires a thorough examination of the concept from different points of view as Zlatanova-Pazheva (2019) states.

In the Collins English Dictionary, as Wendy Gordon (2000) points out, there are two definitions of "consumer":

- "A person purchasing goods or services for his own needs";
- "Person who consumes".

According to Blythe (2007) the consumer is the end user of goods or services who enjoys the benefit of a given product. Sachuk (2005) adds that it is he who wants to satisfy certain needs and wants. It is necessary to take into account the fact that one person may make a purchase decision or actually make the purchase, and another person may be the user of the product. However, it is possible for the buyer and the user to be the same person.

Danziger (2004) describes the consumer as an individual who is using a product to satisfy his needs and wants. He buys products to improve his standard of living, influenced by many factors. On the one hand, the user is a member of various social groups, which is why the influence of social factors is great. On the other hand, the individual characteristics of the person also imply the influence of personal psychological factors. The latter are seen by Medvedev (2013) as consumer response processes in the desire to improve their standard of living.

According to Laskova (2012) from the standpoint of sociology, under the influence of multiple social factors, the consumer relates and adapts his behavior to the social environment in which he is, to the social class, social group and multiple reference groups to which he belongs or wishes to belong.

From the standpoint of psychology, it is considered by Solomon (2006) that "the consumer uses a given product to define his identity".

In the 21st century, it is of interest to marketers to understand how consumers make purchasing decisions. They seek to identify who makes and contributes to the purchase decision, as Kotler points out. In this sense Yordanov (2011) states that people can have five roles: initiator; a person of influence; decision maker; buyer and user.

The initiator is the person who gives the idea to buy, collects the necessary information and helps to make a decision. The influencer has the recognition to pronounce on given criteria and give an evaluation when purchasing. The decision maker is the one with financial authority and the right to allocate finance for purchases. The buyer is the person who actually purchases the product and arranges its delivery. The user or consumer is the one who will actually use the product.

Many authors like Denisova (2005), Blythe (2007) and Khan (2006) are of the opinion that all people can be considered as consumers. Solomon (2006) believes that they can take many forms, ranging from a child to the head of an organization. In this sense, as noted by Frank Kardes (2011), the term "consumer" can describe both individual and organizational users. Ganjina, Gilaninia and Maleknejad (2013) states that individual consumers purchase goods and services to satisfy their own personal needs and wants or to satisfy the needs and wants of others.

As Solomon (2006) notes, consumers are actors on the market stage. As Denisova (2005) points out a person can assume different social roles – parent, student, supervisor, etc. Regardless of the role he has adopted, he is daily embodied in the role of consumer. This stems from the fact that to satisfy one's needs and above all to exist, a person needs various goods and services. For this reason, it can be argued that one of the most important and undoubtedly vitally necessary roles is precisely the role of a consumer. It can be noted that the role that a person has adopted at a given moment in his life, for example of a student, teacher, parent, always goes hand in hand with the role of a consumer, independent of the life stage in which he is.

How many roles can one play simultaneously in his life and how many of them are permanent? Role theory is based on the view that people fulfill many different roles, which is why they can modify their consumer decisions according to the particular "role" they are embodied in at any given moment. The criterion used by consumers to evaluate products and services is different for the different roles they embody. A person can fulfill several roles at the same time, but the permanent role, independent of life stage, is that of a consumer.

In the sense of the theory of choice, it is appropriate to consider another aspect of the concept of "consumer", related to the economic side of the consumption process. James McNeal (2007) considers that all activities, behaviors and actions are performed by a person who is called a consumer. It defines a consumer as any person who performs any of the pre-purchase, purchase and post-purchase activities. The consumer is identified by Taylor (2010) as an economic agent allocating his income to the goods market. Daniel Harrison (2009) state that consumption is initiated

by a consumer whose goal is to buy and consume increasing amounts of products and services. The author shares Harrison's assertion that being a consumer today is one of the main roles of a person in life.

5. THE CONSUMER IN MARKETING

The study of the consumer is subject of various scientific fields. This also allows for its deeper understanding. For one of the scientific fields, it is the focus of all the activities and that is marketing.

According to marketing philosophy, people have different needs. This is also the starting point for marketing - the existence of needs that are subject to satisfaction. To exist, people need food, water, clothing, shelter, etc. In addition to these, there are needs for education, entertainment, etc., which in their essence are not vital needs, but are very closely related to them. Let's not forget the needs of technologies, machines, which are intended for the production of goods, with which other needs are satisfied. When the consumer realizes that he is missing something, he falls into a state of dissatisfaction, as noted by Zlatanova-Pazheva (2024, a). This awareness may be the result of a marketing stimulus such as a Facebook ad, an attractive showcase, etc., or it may not be caused by marketing efforts, but based on an internal incentive, social environment, etc.

In search of ways to satisfy his needs, the consumer exhibits a certain behavior. The consumer behavior is expressed in the decisions and actions he takes in the selection, purchase and way of using a given product. Its behavior is influenced by various factors such as:

- ❖ Cultural;
- ❖ Social;
- ❖ Personal;
- ❖ Psychologically;
- ❖ Situational.

Segmentation is one of the basic concepts in marketing, as pointed out by Zlatanova-Pazheva (2024, b). Its application in practice helps managers in choosing a suitable target market, which in turn is a guarantee for the successful formulation and implementation of the marketing strategy to ensure company growth.

In practice, four main types of market segmentation are applied:

- Demographic segmentation;
- Geographic segmentation;
- Psychographic segmentation;
- Behavioural segmentation.

Placing the consumer, his behavior and needs at the heart of marketing requires that they must be studied. This can be achieved through marketing research. With the wide distribution of the Internet, prerequisites were created for the implementation of online marketing research. As Zlatanova-Pazheva (2024, d) describes the possibilities that the Internet provides for conducting online marketing research are significant. This can be accomplished through means such as:

- Online questionnaires;
- Online focus groups;
- Experiment in an online environment.
- Some of the main advantages of an online research are:
 - Low costs;
 - 24-hour support;
 - Speed of implementation;
 - Possibility of visiting from a computer, laptop, mobile device, tablet through the Global Internet network;
 - Flexible options for entering a question, type of response, facilitating the process of statistical processing;
 - A wide range of respondents may be observed.

Disadvantages include:

- ✓ Not applicable to all age groups;
- ✓ The lack of direct control when conducting the survey, as pointed by Roopa & Rani (2012).

Studying the needs and behavior of the target consumer will help marketers create more effective marketing strategies.

6. CONCLUSION

In the conditions of modern society, a person fulfills and reconciles many different roles. One of them is that of a consumer. Its implementation creates prerequisites for satisfying diverse human needs through participation in

exchange. The main focus of marketers' attention is precisely the consumer and his needs. By studying them, prerequisites are created for offering a product that will best satisfy the requirements and needs of the target group of consumers.

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