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## UNDERSTANDING THE CONSUMER DECISION-MAKING PROCESS

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### **Abstract**

The consumer decision-making behavior is a complex process. Understanding the consumer decision-making process is imperative to any business. Every single step plays a significant role in the consumer decision-making process. The buying behavior of the consumers is determined by different kind of factors. This article reviews the steps involved in the decision-making process. Moreover, this article provides understanding about the basic problem of the consumer decision-making process for the marketers in order to build up their products as well as services diverse from others in the market.

**Keywords:** Behavior, Consumer, Decision – Making, Process, Purchase, Product.

It is very essential for the firms to understand the consumer environment for its operation because of the firm belief of marketing oriented company that holds the view that 'the customer is the centre around which the whole business revolves'. As a result, marketing individuals have to be aware of all the processes that their customers go through while building certain decision during the purchase. The decision-making process of the customers entails a series of interrelated and chronological stages of activities. The whole process starts with the invention and identification of an unfulfilled desire and need. When the want becomes a drive, then the consumer starts seeking out information. This exploration of information then gives birth to a range of alternatives. In the end, the decision to purchase is finally made. In this way, the buyer assesses the post purchase behaviour in order to be acquainted with the level of satisfaction. The whole process can be comprehended with the help of a diagram which is given below:

## Steps in Decision Making Process

<b>Need Recognition</b>	<b>Information Search</b>	<b>Search Evaluation of Alternatives</b>	<b>Purchase Decision</b>	<b>Post- Purchase Behavior</b>
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### 1. Need Recognition

When an individual has an unfulfilled want or desire, the process of buying begins in order to gratify the requirements. The requirement may be triggered either by internal or external factors. The intensity of the need point out the pace with which a human being progress to accomplish those wants. The order of the priority also depends upon the need and its urgency. For example, a person looking for supplements or multivitamins identifies his/her need as good health and fitness. Though, searching for information and assessing different kind of alternatives is totally absent here.

### 2. Information Search

Needs when recognized can be fulfilled only when the required product is well-known as well available without difficulty. Though diverse products are obtainable in the marketplace, but the buyer must be acquainted with the manufactured goods which gives the utmost satisfaction. For this purpose, a person has to look for appropriate information of the item for consumption along with the brand or location. Consumers can employ various sources in order to obtain the relevant information such as family, friends and neighbours. Even marketers also offer significant information all the way through advertisements, announcements, dealers, personal ads, retailers, sales promotion and window displaying. In addition, the platforms of mass media such as radio, television and newspaper also provide pertinent information. In this day and age, internet has become a noteworthy and steadfast source of providing and sharing relevant information. Marketers are also expected to give most up-to-date, trustworthy and ample information. Information for different kind of products and services can be achieved through various sources that are discussed below:

- a. **Commercial Sources:** Commercial sources include promotional campaigns, commercials, sales person and packing of a product.
- b. **Personal Sources:** Personal sources are generally the family, friends and relatives who offer recommendations about different products and services.
- c. **Public Sources:** Public sources consist of newspaper, radio, magazines and so on.
- d. **Experiential Sources:** It means that the own experience of the consumer in using a particular product matters a lot in making the decision.

### 3. Evaluation of Alternatives

It is the most decisive stage in the process of buying. When the customer determines what kind of product satisfies his need, he will start seeking out the best option available in the marketplace for that particular product. The elements that play an important role in the process of evaluation of alternatives are the following:

- a) A product is taken as a bunch of attributes. These characteristics are used for the assessment of products or brands. For instance, in case of an air conditioner, a consumer keeps into consideration the capacity, cost, model, technology, quality and size.
- b) Factors such as brand image, company, country, distribution network and after sales service also turn out to be crucial in evaluation.
- c) Marketers should be aware of the significance of these factors to consumers while developing as well as marketing their goods.

### 4. Purchase Decision

After passing the above discussed stages, the customer reaches at a point where he makes the final decision to make the purchase. The result of the evaluation builds up likes and dislikes regarding alternative brands or products in the mind of consumers. This approach towards the brand persuades the customer to make a decision whether to buy a particular product or not. Hence the potential buyer moves towards the final selection of the product. Besides all the above factors, situational factors such as dealer terms, finance options, falling prices etc. are also measured carefully. In short, at this particular stage, customer has evaluated all the facts and has reached at a final decision which is based upon personal experiences, emotional connections and influence of marketing campaigns and so forth.

### 5. Post- Purchase Behavior

The purchase of the product is then followed by the post-purchase assessment that refers to the review as to whether the product is valuable for the consumer or not. This type of behavior of the buyer also plays a very significant role. Consumer obtains the preference of brand only when that particular brand lives up to his anticipation. This predilection of brand logically reiterates the sale of the marketer. A satisfied buyer acts as a mode of silent advertisement. However, if the brand used by the customer does not yield required satisfaction, a kind of negative reaction will arise and that feeling will ultimately lead to the development of negative approach towards the brand or product. This phenomenon is known as cognitive dissonance. The marketers often make an effort to employ this phenomenon to catch the attention of user of other brands towards their brands. Diverse promotional-mix elements can lend a hand to the marketers to keep hold of their customers as well as to catch the fancy of new customers.

## The decision-making style of the consumers depends on the following:

1. **Quality of the Product:** The consumers are in search of quality products which they get from these malls. These consumers are very much particular about the quality of the product while purchasing any kind of item. Although they get alternative choices to decide upon from the malls, in particular, what product to purchase. Buzzell and Gale (1987) argue that company-level data put forward a relationship between higher quality, higher market share and improved profitability.

2. **Price Conscious:** It is mostly seen that consumers struggle to get the items at lower costs. They are likely to be comparative consumers. They make choices based on the cost and sometimes not focusing on the quality or some other factor. They are cognizant to get the best cost for the items they purchase. They check and analyze the costs of items before acquiring them. They even prefer to check the price of the item they want to purchase from one shopping Centre or store to another centre or store in order to get the minimal cost. Valuing/ price are a standout amongst the most urgent determinants of decision making. Other than the real cost, how the value offering is displayed to customers likewise influences the consumer decision making.

3. **Role of Moods:** This sort of consumers generally enjoys shopping and they shop just for the sake of fun. This category of buyers prefers to buy various products in order to entertain them for the reason that they are moody individuals. The music and environment of the store puts an impact on these shoppers (consumers) state of mind which could influence the time and money spent on shopping as well.

4. **Brand Conscious:** Consumers having high scores on variety looking nature are likely to switch brands, regardless of whether their present brands fulfil their requirements. They may likewise switch brands to encounter better options or to expand incitement by bringing something new into their lives. Customers are frequently seen to complete a considerable measure of brand exchanging. For- example, in case of a purchase of 'face wash', the customer may have few convictions, and pick a brand of face wash without any kind of assessment and evaluate the face wash while using it be that as it may, whenever; the customer may go after another brand out of a desire. In this way, brand exchanging normally happens after experimentation.

5. **Compulsive Shopping:** Compulsive behavior is depicted as 'A reaction to an uncontrollable drive or wants to get, utilize, or encounter a feeling, substance or action that leads on people to monotonously participate in conduct that will eventually make hurt the individual and/or others'. Compulsive shopping is unmistakably a difficult issue to customers themselves and adds to their families. Due to more appealing shopping condition of the present day, enthusiastic customers are expanding. They have a tendency to be the owner of credit cards. Dittmar et al., (1995) revealed two set of preferences that can be related to impulsive buying consumption behaviour. The two sets of preferences are discussed below:

- (1) Myopic Set, which considered pushing buyers in the direction of purchases.
- (2) Far-sighted Set, which believe remembering buyers that a bill must be settled.

However interestingly, neither myopic set nor far-sighted set could be concluded that it is more linked to impulse buying behavior of consumers.

## Conclusion

Every consumer has different needs in their day-to-day life. It is these diverse needs which make us human beings to make different kind of decisions while making mind for the purchase of particular product. There are five important stages of consumer decision-making process. The consumer decision-making behavior starts from a need to post-purchase activities. Hence we can say that the consumer decision-making process is a complex course of action.

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