CHAPTER III

BUYER BEHAVIOUR MODELS: A REVIEW

Classification of Models

A distinction is usually made between theories and models. These terms are, however, used interchangeably in marketing literature. Both theories and models are concerned with providing a coherent and systematic structure for a field of study.

Various analytical approaches have been used for the study of consumer behaviour. Lunn has classified the different approaches of marketing analysts into three categories: 'a priori', empirical and eclectic. Researchers adopting the 'a priori' approach have introduced concepts and theories adapted from other disciplines in social sciences, behavioural sciences in particular, to explain buyer behaviour. Since consumer behaviour is a specific aspect of human behaviour, the 'a priori' approach has some relevance. However, many of the concepts in behavioural sciences which are being adopted have been developed in contexts remote from buyer behaviour. Hence, the usefulness of the concepts are limited in marketing. The attempt of the 'a priori' researchers have been to fit consumer behaviour to already existing theoretical framework.
Researchers in the empirical category attempt to make generalisations based on empirical studies with limited scope, particularly based on observations from market research studies involving consumer panels.

Since the mid sixties the eclectic approach has been becoming increasingly popular. The attempt is to incorporate the strengths of the 'a priori' and empirical approaches and to avoid their weaknesses. The new research tradition attempts to synthesise the basic theories adopted from behavioural sciences with the findings of market research studies. The merit of the approach is the comprehensiveness of its perspective. The major problem is, however, the undue complexity of dealing with too many variables and interrelationships.

The state of the art, therefore, stipulates a synthesis of the theoretical postulates with empirical findings in any serious endeavour to analyse consumer behaviour.

Early Models

Some of the earliest behavioural models were used to explain the buyer's "black box". Kotler provides a summary of the relevant models.\(^2\) The Marshallian economic model stressed the economic motivations. Marshallian man is concerned chiefly with economic cues - prices and income - and makes a fresh utility calculation before each purchase. The Pavlovian man behaves in a largely habitual rather than thoughtful way; certain configurations of cues will set off the same behaviour because of rewarded learning in
past. The Freudian model was based on psychoanalytic motivations. Freudian man's choices are influenced strongly by motives and fantasies which take place deep within his private world. The Veblenian model stressed social-psychological factors. Veblenian man acts in a way which is shaped largely by past and present social groups. The political model of Thomas Hobbes stresses the integration of personal and group goals. Hobbesian man seeks to reconcile individual gain with organisational gain.

The buyers "black box" has been illuminated by some of these models. However, none of these models succeeded in putting all these pieces of truth together into one comprehensive instrument for the analysis of buyer behaviour.

**The Clawson Model**

This is one of the earliest models developed to explain the buying decision process. It draws heavily from findings in behavioural sciences and thus provides an example of the a priori approach.

Joseph Clawson's model of buying behaviour was influenced by Gestalt psychology and the 'field' or 'topological' psychology of Kurt Lewin. Clawson assumed that tension exists in the purchase decision process and that behaviour is affected by the outcome of psychic conflict. His model analyses intensively the facts of Lewinian field theory which have applications to marketing behaviour, and helps to an understanding of psychological pressures and reactions which are experienced in buying situations.
Individual consumers are said to set the positive aspects (valences) against the negative aspects of a product under consideration; purchase results if the positive valences outweigh the negative valences, although the value of these valences do not remain stable and independent of all the pressures influencing an individual at a particular time.

Subjectivity in perception is another feature of the model. The importance of recognising that many objective phenomena are not, in fact, perceived by an individual, or that distorted appreciation is made of them, is emphasised. Another important aspect of Lewinian theory as adapted by Clawson relates to ‘dimensionality’ - the recognition that qualitative aspects influence consumer purchase decisions. The strengths or valences of these forces are described as ideal, aspiration, and achievement levels. The model does not go into the details of the complexities of buying decisions and the variables considered are few.

1.0 The Andreasen Model

This model develops a comprehensive model of customer choice behaviour based on several conceptions about attitude formation and change drawn from social psychology. Alan R. Andreasen, the originator of the model, stated that the key to attitude change is exposure to different kinds of information. This exposure may be voluntary or involuntary: 'the entire process from stimulus to outcome comprises an information - processing
cycle' which involves four stages, viz., input stimuli, perception and filtration, disposition changes, and various feasible outcomes.

Andreasen developed his theory from a simplistic model towards a model of complex decision-making process. He assumed that two cardinal strategies are adopted by marketing practitioners in order to attract favourable purchasing decisions - market segmentation, and product differentiation. The former strategy 'seeks to make marketing efforts (product design, distribution programme, etc.) fit existing attitudes and behaviour'; the latter attempts to change attitudes so that customers will accept existing product, outlets, and so on. Andreasen believed that his model of buying behaviour should be useful as a detailed organising concept for marketing decision makers who must take customer decisions explicitly into account when employing either or both of these strategies.

Attitude formation and change are central concepts of the model. Selective perception and distortion of product information may occur, effectively altering or eliminating communication planned by the marketer. Because information must pass through this perceptual barrier, and in doing so may lose some of its original character, Andreasen drew particular attention to the important role of attitudes in influencing buying decisions.

He held that the beliefs, feelings and dispositions an individual holds about a class of complementary products or brands affect his attitude towards new items in that product class.
Similarly, changes in attitudes towards some products in a class may affect attitudes towards other products in the same class. Marketers who seek to influence attitudes towards their products should bear in mind that channels of communication themselves are subject to perceptual judgement.

Andreasen considered that his model of buying behaviour could be viewed as a useful guide for the integration of much of the diverse literature in behavioural studies and as an attempt to develop a theoretical foundation for studying customer behaviour. In evaluating the model, it should be pointed out that although the relationship between attitude and behaviour is complex, the model postulates a unidirectional influence.

The Nicosia Model

Nicosia is regarded as one of the leading figures in the eclectic approach. He developed a conceptual framework for analysing consumer behaviour specifying the major elements in buying decision process and their interactions. Nicosia gives the first comprehensive review of theories and findings in behavioural sciences relevant to consumer behaviour. A distinctive feature of the Nicosia model is the shift of emphasis away from the purchasing act itself and towards the buying decision process that precede and follow the purchase act. "The act of purchasing is only one component of a complex, ongoing process of decision making - a process of many interactions among many variables over time." The model makes use of the technique of computer flow charting.
Nicosia identified four basic 'fields' in his flow chart that explains the structure of a consumer decision process. Field one includes the firm's attributes and its products, media characteristics and target audience on the one hand and the consumer's space which is composed of environmental factors as well as the psychological factors such as personality characteristics and cognition, on the other. The message aimed at target audience is expected to result in the formation of an attitude towards the product or brand and this outcome forms the input for the next field.

In Field Two a search for and comparative evaluation of the advertised product take place. The model differentiates between internal search, the consumer's conscious and unconscious associations with the product, brand, etc., and external search, information gathered from both commercial and noncommercial sources. The input from the second field into Field Three may or may not be a motivation to buy the advertised brand. Field Three includes the possible transformation of the motivation into an act of purchase. If purchase takes place, Field Four is storage or use of the purchased item; the output is feedback which may or may not result in retention of the consequences of the purchase in the buyer's memory. The feedback of Field Four closes the "consumer's loop".
Critique

It is possible to level a number of criticisms at Nicocia's work. For instance, the search and evaluation process as represented is overrational, and although applicable to infrequently purchased high-cost products, it has little relevance for frequently purchased low-cost goods. Moreover, the definitions of attitude and motivation are unsatisfactory, and the attempt to formalise the model mathematically appears as prematurely ambitious. Further, his model is based on a very restricted example of advertising and product acceptance which tends to limit the usefulness of his theory.

The Howard-Sheth Model

The model is based on Howard's study in 1963. This was the first truly integrative model in consumer behaviour study. The model is comprehensive enough to handle different classes of consumers. Compared to earlier models, it is distinguished by a richer specification of variables and their inter-relationships, and it attempts a much deeper and more detailed integration of theoretical positions from several behavioural sciences. Four distinct sets of factors in the buying process were analysed in the model: (i) input (stimulus) variables, (ii) output (response) variables, (iii) hypothetical constructs, and (iv) exogenous variables.
In the Howard-Sheth theory the most significant stimulus affecting the buyer behaviour consists of information cues about a set of characteristics of the product or brand (quality, price, distinctiveness, service and availability). These may come to him from the product itself, as would occur in the shopping activity. A similar set of cues could come in symbolic form from other impersonal sources such as advertising. Both these sources are commercial, representing the efforts of the firm. The third source is social information cues which could affect behaviour towards the product or brand and which may come from family, friends or other members of the groups with which the buyer comes into contact or to which he aspires. This third source differs from the first two in two respects. First, it is not commercial. Second, the social source is personal while the first two were impersonal.14

Just as there is a variety of inputs there is also a variety of buyer responses, which become relevant for different areas of marketing strategy.15 The outputs, from a hierarchy, are the various dimensions of buyer behaviour—attention, brand comprehension, attitude, intention, and purchase. The most important among these from the point of view of a seller is purchase.

The first of the two sets of hypothetical constructs in the Howard-Sheth model are those concerned with perception. These concepts pertain to the way the individual deals with information available if not attended to (attention) and is not always crystal
clear in its meaning (stimulus ambiguity). Some information cues may bombard the individual without his explicit consent, although he may at times engage in an overt search for information. Finally, any information cues to which the individual may attend may be distorted (perceptual bias) as a result of his own frame of reference. All of these are complex states or psychological processes.

The second set of hypothetical constructs in the theory relates to learning. The actual purchase, the observable behaviour, is related to the individual's intention. The various motives are critical as representations of the goals the individual attempts to achieve through his buying behaviour. These goals are derived from his needs, which range from the basic physiological needs to the higher-level learned needs (such as the need for prestige or aesthetic satisfaction). Most closely related to the buyer's intention is his attitude towards the product or brand. As is clear from the model, attitudes affect and are affected by a number of other variables, as well as being quite complex on their own.

Other learning constructs are brand comprehension, "knowledge about the existence and characteristics of those brands that form the buyer's evoked set of alternatives", choice criteria, "the buyer's mental rules, which he utilises to evaluate brands as goal-objects"; and confidence or "the degree of certainty" the
buyer has about his brand comprehension, attitudes or intentions. Finally, the model includes a construct, satisfaction, to refer to the post-purchase and post-use evaluation of the output of the process. This is, of course, the major "feedback" mechanism and is of central importance to learning.

The theory includes a number of variables which are not explained but which do influence some or all of the constructs discussed above and indirectly through those constructs the output (purchase). These are taken as given and often assumed to be constant. Howard and Sheth include several such concepts which they call exogenous variables. Social and organisational setting is felt to have an important influence on much of the buyer behaviour.

The influence of our reference groups on all our behaviour indicate the fact that we are social animals and look at each other for guidance regarding what to buy. Social class is based on a rich research tradition in social stratification. Sociologists have developed copious volumes of information on the influence of social class on all sorts of behaviour, and researchers in marketing have found it useful in explaining the behaviour of consumers. Culture is the shared, somewhat consistent, behaviour of a group of people. Financial status refers to "the funds available for purchasing goods and services during some specified
time period”. Economists have too often over emphasised this variable (along with price, an input variable) to the exclusion of many others.16

Model Evaluation

Of the general models of buyer behaviour, some of which have been reviewed, the Howard and Sheth model appears to provide one of the most satisfactory explanations of consumer buying behaviour. The consumer is viewed not as a pawn in the business game, but as an active processor of data who has the ability to accept products. The complexity of many buying situations is usefully indicated by Howard and Sheth. It is a reminder that many decisions to buy, even those based on purely economic considerations, are subject also to so-called non-rational factors. This approach emphasises the essence of the marketing concept, viz., to supply goods and services that are designed to satisfy the identified needs of customer; to study the benefits which people are seeking to obtain through their consumption habits, and to offer them acceptable solutions to their problems of acquiring satisfactions both at the economic level and also at deeper levels involving emotions, cultural achievements, and related environmental needs.

Howard and Sheth have underlined the necessity for marketers to analyse their marketing strategy and tactics, and to relate these to some systematic appraisal of the buying influences which affect the acceptance of their products. The inter-
disciplinary approach offered by Howard and Sheth's model would be
a very firm foundation on which to build individual theories. 17

Engel - Kollat - Blackwell Model

This model 18 is a more recent development than the Nicosia,
and is conceptually simpler than the Howard and Sheth model while
still being adequately comprehensive. It analyses the behavioural
influences that affect the purchasing decision from the early
stages of awareness of need through to the final stage of post-
purchase evaluation. This sequential approach, based on the
decision-process model of buying behaviour, takes account of the
multiple influences to which the buyer is exposed. 19 This model
identifies the three major classes of variables that form the basis
for understanding buyer behaviour; (i) stimuli from the external
environment, (ii) characteristics of a buyer (the black box), and
(iii) the responses to external stimuli made by the buyer.

Stimuli provide information that consumers must process.
This task includes the stages of exposure, attention,
comprehension, and retention.

Stimuli must interact with personal characteristic to
produce consumer response. The central control unit of the Engel-
Kollat-Blackwell model consists of (i) personality traits, (2)
motives, (3) attitudes, (4) past information and experiences, and
Consumer decision process may be extended, limited or habitual. An extended decision process is the most complete type of decision making. It begins when a consumer recognises a problem which might be solved by the purchase of some product. For less important or more routine purchase decisions, a consumer may go through a limited decision process by evaluating only those product/brand alternatives already known, with no attempt to search for new alternatives.

Engel and Kollat revised the model in 1982. In its present form, the model contains five components: (i) input stimuli, (ii) information processing, (iii) a decision process, (iv) decision-process variables, and (v) external influences. The form of these components and how they relate to each other varies depending on the degree of involvement that the consumer is experiencing in a given purchase situation.

Under conditions of high involvement, as might occur when purchasing a new car, the consumer perceives considerable importance in the purchase situation and is likely to engage in extensive (involved) problem solving behaviour. This is usually characterised by a serious effort at information search and an intensive evaluation of alternatives. Low involvement situations occur when the consumer perceives little personal relevance or importance to a purchase. In such cases, the purchase is likely to be made on the basis of existing levels of information and with...
only modest levels of deliberation.

The core of the complete model in its high involvement version is the decision-process component which includes five basic stages, (i) problem recognition, (ii) information search, (iii) alternative evaluation, (iv) choice, and (v) outcomes.

Problem recognition occurs when the consumer is activated by awareness of a difference between his or her actual state of affairs and his or her concept of the ideal situation. This can occur through internal activation of a motive such as hunger, or by confronting some external stimulus such as advertisement. Purchase action occurs only when the consumer perceives a sufficiently large discrepancy between the actual and ideal states.

Once the consumer is aroused to action, the next stage is to undertake an information search. The first reaction is to review memory for stored information and experiences relevant to the problem. This information is in the form of beliefs and attitudes. The review leads to identifying a brand preference, and results in a routine purchase action. Many steps in the model will be bypassed because a satisfactory solution to the problem has already been identified. If an internal search does not provide sufficient information, the consumer will engage in an external information search and a more extensive problem solving behaviour. This results in exposure to a variety of informational inputs called stimuli, which can arise from personal sources as well as from published or mass-media sources. The extent of external search
will be influenced by the consumer's perception of the costs versus benefits of such activity.

The information inputs are to be processed. The stimuli must capture the consumer's conscious attention to influence extensive problem solving. The attention stage is highly selective. The comprehension stage then involves deriving meaning from information. The alternative evaluation stage involves comparing information about alternative brands to evaluative criteria which are product-judging standards that have been stored in permanent memory.

Changes in consumers beliefs will modify attitudes. Favourable attitudes will lead to formation of a purchase intention. As the model shows, another influence on purchase intention is normative compliance, which is the extent to which the consumer is influenced to conform to expectations of other important people such as those in a group or family members. The purchase process involves a series of selections including the type of retail outlet as well as the specific brand. The consumer's choices may lead to two outcomes. One outcome is satisfaction from using the brand. The experiences will feed back into beliefs about the brand. A second outcome is dissonance, which is post decision doubt about the merits of a purchase when compared to unchosen alternatives.

The model recognises the external influences that affect the consumer's decision process. Cultural norms and values
certainly can affect the consumer's evaluation of the worth of the products. The consumer's lifestyle will influence the evaluation criteria used to judge products. A second set of external factors affecting a consumer's behaviour work through reference groups and family members.\textsuperscript{22}

**Evaluation**

Advantages of the Engel-Blackwell model include its consideration of the many variables influencing consumers, its focus on levels of consumer involvement, and its emphasis on the decision making process involved in purchases.\textsuperscript{23} The model emphasises the necessity to investigate thoroughly the behavioural factors which may be particularly powerful in some buying situations.\textsuperscript{24} Also the flow of the model is quite flexible. For example, the authors recognise that in numerous purchase decisions many of the detailed steps are bypassed, as in the case of routine purchase behaviour. A serious drawback of the model appears to be a vagueness regarding some variables. For example, the influence of environmental variables is noted, but their role in affecting behaviour is not well specified. The role of motives in influencing behaviour is also quite vague. In addition, the model has been criticised as being somewhat mechanistic in its treatment of the decision process.\textsuperscript{25} One major criticism of the model is that the search and evaluation processes are portrayed as highly rational.\textsuperscript{26} However, despite the limitations, it has been updated
regularly to accommodate new evidence about the behaviour of consumers. Because of this, the model has withstood the test of time quite well since its first introduction in 1968, and it continues to provide a very comprehensive framework for understanding the many facets of consumer behaviour.27
References:


Chisnall, Peter M., op.cit., pp.228-29.


Lunn J.A., op.cit., p.41.

Chisnall, Peter M., op.cit., p.225.


Chisnall, Peter M., op.cit., p.219.


Chisnall, Peter M., op.cit., p.229.

Chisnall, Peter M., op.cit., p.223.


Ibid., p.300.


Ibid., p.39.

Chisnall, Peter M., op.cit., p.225.


Lunn J.A., op.cit., p.44.