

CONSUMER BUYING BEHAVIOUR- SOCIOLOGICAL MODEL: A CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

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ABSTRACT:

Consumer buying behaviour has traditionally been viewed through the lenses of psychology and economics, but consumption decisions are equally driven by sociological forces in society. This conceptual review explores consumer buying behaviour through the sociological model, that is, how social structures, group influences, cultural norms, and social stratification drive purchasing decisions. Drawing on established theories in sociology and previous conceptual and empirical studies, the paper synthesises key constructs such as culture, social class, reference groups, family, roles, and status in understanding patterns within consumer behaviour. This review emphasizes that buyers are not atomized decision makers but, rather, consumer choices are socially constructed through interacting collective values, expectations, and interactions. This paper enriches the structured understanding of social influences on consumption in consumer behaviour literature with the insertion of a sociological perspective, thus laying a foundation for subsequent empirical research and managerial application to marketing strategy, segmentation, and consumer engagement.

KEYWORDS: Consumer Buying Behaviour, Sociological Model, Social Influence, Culture, Social Class, Conceptual Review

INTRODUCTION:

Consumer buying behaviour is at the heart of the theory and practice of marketing, accounting for how consumers select, buy, use, and dispose of goods and services.

While early models of consumer behaviour stress rational choice and individual psychology, there is growing awareness now that consumption is usually situated in social contexts. All consumers live their lives in societies that have shared values and norms, and social structures such as family, class, and institutions that play a significant role in shaping the tastes of and purchasing decisions by individuals.

The sociological model of consumer buying behaviours treats consumer behaviour as a non-individual but a social act, based upon certain cultural expectations, group affiliations, and roles played by people within certain groups based upon social classes according to status. The impact of family, reference groups, in addition to class and status in shaping attitudes toward brands, products, and consumption behaviours becomes crucial in this model. For example, people in groups face conformity to be accepted in society or to establish identity, in other words, to buy based on membership rather than self-interest.

But in the era of globalization, social media, and fast-changing cultural trends, the sociological factors influential upon consumer behaviour are faced with significant, ever-changing pressures. Virtual communities, influencers, and digital reference groups further

extend traditional social structures and intensify social pressure and symbolic consumption. Understanding consumer behaviour without giving due regard to sociological dimensions provides an incomplete and fragmented view.

Given the aforesaid context, a conceptual review of the sociological model of consumer buying behaviour becomes highly relevant and timely. The present study attempts to synthesize the available theoretical viewpoints and contributions from scholarship for systematically reviewing the sociological determinants of consumer behaviour. The study will seek to clarify the important sociological constructs, highlight their inter-relationships, and establish a coherent conceptual framework for future research and managerial decision-making.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Consumer Buying Behaviour: A Sociological Perspective- Consumer buying behaviour indicates the process that people or groups undertake while deciding on the consumption of products or services. Approaches towards consumer buying behaviour that are sociological in nature believe that this process is socially defined, where the activation of societal processes defines consumer buying behaviour. In this regard, approaches towards consumer buying behaviour tend to ignore the psychological aspect, which deals with cognitive processes, rather relying on the sociological forces that define consumer behaviour. **The Role of Culture in Consumer Behaviour:** According to sociological theory, culture is considered a strong sociological factor that drives consumer behaviour. Culture can be defined as values, norms, traditions, and habits shared among consumers, influencing their perception of product consumption. Marketing research depicts how consumers imbibe these values from socialization, which further defines their brand perception and decision-making behaviours based on their consumption patterns. Subcultures with diverse religious, ethnic, and geographical backgrounds further strengthen consumer behaviour through their variety of likes and dislikes, symbolically attached to consumption patterns.

Social class and consumption patterns- Social class is a hierarchical division of people within society according to income, education, occupation, and social prestige. Many studies confirm the strong impact of social class on lifestyle, brand preference, and spending behaviour. The behaviour of consumption differs across various classes: 'upper' classes spend on symbolic or superior products as status signals, while lower or middle classes stress functional value and price sensitivity. Sociological models remind us that 'consumption is a social differentiator since class becomes more relevant in social status and positioning through consumption'.

Reference Groups and Social Influence- Reference groups are those groups that the individual uses as a guide or benchmark for attitudes, values, and behaviour. They may comprise family, friends, peers, colleagues, or aspirational groups. According to sociological literature, reference groups influence consumer behaviour in two ways: through normative influence and informational influence. While the former coerces a person into conformity with the expectations of the group, the latter forms one's beliefs through knowledge and opinions shared within the group. Due to the emergence of digital platforms, especially the role of influencers and online communities, has also come into prominence as reference groups, with an amplification of social influence in purchase decisions.

The Family as a Consumption Unit- Family is one of the most powerful sociological group entities that has a great influence on consumer behaviour. All members of a family have various roles to play in a purchase made by a consumer. Many scholars have established that families and their stages of life have significant effects on consumption.

Sociological theories specifically acknowledge that consumer behaviour can often represent a family rather than a consumer due to shared values and needs associated with families.

Roles, Status, and Symbolic Consumption- A person has different roles in society that are linked to specific expectations and performances. Status refers to the position that a given individual in society occupies within the social structure. It can be conveyed through consumption. Sociological studies on consumption entwine the idea of symbolic consumption, whereby products are utilised to represent identity, status, and affiliation within society. Fashion products are normally consumed to demonstrate the embodiment of a given status.

METHODOLOGY-

This study will undertake a conceptual research design approach in exploring consumer buying behaviour in relation to the sociological approach. As this research aims at developing and integrating theories and not necessarily at measuring them empirically, the conceptual review methodology will prove appropriate in this instance. This will allow for the incorporation of various sociological approaches in understanding the effect of societal forces on consumer purchasing behaviour.

The paper relies completely on secondary data and has been collected from peer-reviewed literature in the form of articles and books from the domains of consumer behaviour and sociology. The literature has been selected depending upon the topic of sociological determinants of consumer behaviour and has been referred from the angles of culture, social class, and other sociological parameters such as families, roles, and status.

A systematic screening of the literature was conducted to identify those studies that explicitly address social influences on consumption behaviour. Conceptual and empirical works explaining consumption as a socially embedded process, rather than an isolated individual decision, had priority. Studies that were limited to purely psychological or economic explanations were excluded unless they contributed meaningfully to sociological understanding.

An interpretive and integrative analysis technique has been used to synthesize the selected literature. Instead of summarizing individual studies, the core of the analysis rests on finding recurring sociological constructs, theoretical linkages, and patterns of influence running through the literature. These are then organized in order to describe how they help explain consumer buyer behaviour.

This integration enabled the formulation of a conceptual framework that presents the relationships between sociological factors and consumer purchase behaviours. The research methodology is thus conducive to the integration of theories, as it can pave the way for future research work for ascertaining these proposed relationships among consumers from different cultures.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK -

Consumer Buying Behaviour has emerged over the years as one of the popular fields of research in Marketing and Management Studies; early research work was largely rooted in the realms of economics and individual psychology. However, over the years, researchers have increasingly acknowledged the fact that consumption is not a phenomenon that takes place in a vacuum but is instead embedded in sociological constructs. The sociological approach to understanding consumer buying behaviour arose from this recognition.

The Sociological Perspective- Consumer behaviour can be attributed to the shared value systems, norms, and beliefs embedded within the culture. Culture is the framework within which the meaning as well as the habit of consumption is established. It influences perceived need satisfaction and desirable attractiveness, guiding individuals towards making acceptable decisions in the community they reside in. The changes occurring in societies are further influenced by changes in the culture, establishing the importance of an ever-changing aspect of consumer behaviour.

Apart from cultural factors, social class is another major determinant of buying behaviour. Every social class has certain propensities to consume, which are dependent on income, education, occupation, and prestige in society. Quite often, consumption is used to portray the social standing of a person, and products and brands become the symbols that reflect status and lifestyle. Sociologists have unravelled the fact that people undertake purchasing behaviour not only because they satisfy some functional needs but also because they permit people to identify and communicate their self-concept and social identity.

Another important sociological factor influencing consumer behaviour is reference groups. These groups are often looked up to by people in forming their opinions and in making purchase decisions because they identify with such groups or have aspirations to join them. These groups exert certain kinds of pressures in order to induce conformity to their norms in consumer behaviour, indirectly by word-of-mouth communications in social behaviour. The recent trend in this aspect is in the use of "social networks."

The family is one of the fundamental social institutions that influences consumer purchasing behaviour. Family members are known to influence each other either as a result of decision-making, roles within the family, or common family consumption needs.

Sociological research underscores how family purchasing decisions are made as the result of a process called "decision-making negotiations."

Roles and status can then elaborate further on the role of positioning in consumption. People have various roles in society, and these roles have various behaviour-related expectations. Through consumption, people achieve those roles. This shows that commodities can be chosen not only for their functionality but for the purpose of representing status or success, among other things.

On the whole, the sociological model of consumer behaviour offers a comprehensive framework for analysing consumer buying behaviour in terms of the significance of social forces in shaping consumption behaviour. The sociological model reminds us that consumer behaviour is a socially mediated phenomenon that is shaped by factors of culture, society, and structure. The sociological approach adds significant depth to conventional theories of consumer behaviour in terms of understanding the consumption phenomenon in a broader social context.

DISCUSSION:

The current conceptual study continues to emphasize the fact that the behaviour patterns of consumers cannot be explained in an individualistic or rational way. The sociological model gives a wider and more realistic account, relating to the social patterns that impact the life of the consumer. It brings to light the forces that collectively affect what the consumers buy, why, and in what manner the products are evaluated.

One of the greatest lessons that has been learned from this research is the foundational nature of culture in shaping consumer behaviour. According to the values and norms of a given culture, people interpret their own needs, preferences, and consumption norms in a largely

subconscious way. It is for this reason that consumer behaviour is informed by meanings and behaviours that have been learned in the community rather than individual decisions that are often personal in nature.

The topic also underlines the importance of class in shaping consumption practices. Consumer behaviour is considered to be more than just a utility function, as it also symbolically expresses class identity. Factors such as income, education, and occupations cause people to have divergent purchase preferences, thereby solidifying the theory of markets being class-stratified. The implications of this observation are contrary to adopting homogeneous marketing strategies in consumer behaviour.

Reference groups and family appear as very significant interpersonal factors in influencing consumer decision-making. By interacting with others in society, these groups influence norms towards which the decisions are made. The evolution of digital communities and social media raises the significance of these factors even further, indicating that sociological factors impacting markets have become more apparent in the current situation.

The discussion also underlines the importance of roles and status in relation to symbolic consumption. It has been recognized that people tend to purchase goods that relate to their status and roles in life as a means of self-expression and seeking recognition and approval from others, related to their purchasing behaviours. This also supports the assumption that purchasing behaviour has symbolic and functional characteristics.

In conclusion, this debate supports the significance of the sociological model provided in relation to consumer buying behaviour as a complete model of consumer behaviour analysis. The combined effects of all aspects in this model will give rise to more in-depth explanations of consumer behaviour, as it will be able to fill in the shortcomings left unaddressed by traditional consumer behaviour based purely on human behaviour.

CONCLUSION & FUTURE FRAMEWORK -

The study analysed consumer purchasing habits through sociological models, highlighting how societal influences shape their spending decisions. The evaluation suggests that consumer actions extend beyond personal decisions and logical assessments due to their deep ties within societal frameworks and interpersonal connections. Utilizing diverse sociological frameworks within this study enables scholars to gain a profound understanding of consumer actions and respond effectively to them.

Implications derived from these results accurately capture how factors such as cultural influences, socioeconomic status, peer networks, familial ties, and occupational positions significantly influence purchasing decisions collectively. Consequently, consumption is viewed as an aspect of society by consumers. Sociology enriches traditional theories about purchasing habits. Sociology acknowledges how societal factors influence purchasing choices.

Viewed analytically, this study's findings have advanced knowledge in consumer behaviour theory through the development of an analytical model incorporating social science elements. A theoretical model delineates how societal influences mild purchasing decisions, thus justifying integrating sociological insights within marketing academic discourse. For marketing strategists, this study highlights the importance of incorporating sociocultural insights into their approach to multiculturalism, inequality, and affiliation dynamics.

Although significant in its impact, this research retains an inherent theoretical framework alongside certain constraints. Subsequent research endeavours ought to endeavour through empirical means to examine the proposed theoretical construct across diverse cultural contexts and business environments, thereby validating any hypothesized connections.

outlined within this study's analysis. Research employing quantitative methods through questionnaires or structural equations examines how specific sociological components relate to consumer behaviour within the context discussed here, while qualitative approaches delve into what consumers actually mean when they consume goods.

Further research might explore how expanding digital platforms influence purchasing habits in an increasingly interconnected world. Online forums and advocacy networks might introduce an entirely new dimension into sociological studies examining consumer behaviours. Cross-sectional research might investigate how sociology influences purchasing habits and how those impacts evolve in response to shifting social dynamics and financial conditions.

This research validates the importance of using the sociological framework when examining how consumers make purchasing decisions, while also suggesting that more scholarly efforts should focus on integrating societal influences into theories about human consumption patterns. It will facilitate future advancements beyond merely applying it globally, where market dynamics are heavily influenced by societal considerations.

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