

## **Module - 6**

# **CONSUMER BEHAVIOR**

**Sangeeta Sahney**  
**Assistant Professor,**  
**Vinod Gupta School of Management**  
**Indian Institute of Technology**  
**Kharagpur, India**  
**Email. [sahney@vgsom.iitkgp.ernet.in](mailto:sahney@vgsom.iitkgp.ernet.in)**

**LESSON – 29**  
**ATTITUDE CHANGE,**  
**CONSUMER ATTITUDE AND IMPLICATIONS FOR**

**Instructional Objectives:**

After completion of this lesson, the student shall know about:

**6.5.7 Attitude Change: The ELM Model, The Theory of Cognitive Dissonance, Attribution Theory**

**6.5.7 Consumer Attitude and Implications for Marketers**

**6.5.6 ATTITUDE CHANGE AND UNDERLYING THEORIES:**

While discussing on ways and means to change consumer attitudes, mention should also be made the underlying theories, viz, the Elaboration likelihood Model, the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance and, the Attribution Theory. These theories have already been discussed earlier. Let us discuss them in the context of attitude change.

The Elaboration likelihood Model, speaks of attitude formation and change in context of a consumer's exposure towards an advertisement, and the level of involvement. The other two theories, i.e., the Cognitive Dissonance Theory and the Attribution Theory address and explain differently as to why acts of behavior (purchase) might precede attitude formation.

**a) The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM):**

As per the ELM Model, a change in consumer attitudes may be brought about through two routes to persuasion, viz., the central route and the peripheral route.

In cases of high involvement, attitude change towards a product and/or brand would occur when the consumer would search for information related to the offering. The consumer would also have a high need of cognition, and would put in effort to gather and comprehend information about the object in question. This would result in learning and also lead to attitude change that would occur via the central route to persuasion. Thus, in

cases of higher involvement, the consumer lays focus on “central” product related information; comprehension is deeper; extent of elaboration is higher and all this impacts attitude towards the brand. On the other hand in cases of low involvement, attitude change towards a product and/or brand would occur via the peripheral route to persuasion. There would be a lower involvement with the product and/or brand message, with a focus on the “peripheral” or the non-product related information (beautiful ads, attractive models, discounts, free samples, etc); comprehension is shallow; extent of elaboration is low all this impacts attitude towards the advertisement rather than the brand.

To conclude, when actual and potential consumers put in effort to gather, comprehend and evaluate information about the product and/or brand, they exhibit higher levels of motivation and ability. In such cases, learning and attitude change would occur via the central route.

#### **b) Theory of Cognitive Dissonance:**

Behavior can precede or follow attitude formation and change. While attitudes are generally formed, before an act of behavior (purchase) or before an action is taken, they can also be formed after an act of purchase. Behavior (act of purchase) may precede attitude formation.

Consumers experience a sense of uncertainty, uneasiness and discomfort when it comes to making purchase decisions which pertain generally to high involving purchases. Such a feeling arises particularly when the consumer has contradictory and conflicting thoughts about a product and/or brand offering, and he has to make a compromise. This state of uneasiness and discomfort is referred to as cognitive dissonance. It can occur while and after a purchase is made. When it occurs after the act of purchase, it is known as post-purchase cognitive dissonance. Such feelings of dissonance are reduced when a consumer changes his attitude to conform with the act of purchase or behavior. So we can see that in cases of post-purchase cognitive dissonance, attitude change happens as a result of an act of behavior, i.e. purchase. The uneasiness or the dissonance that the consumer experiences compel him to change his attitude towards the attitude object (product and/or brand), so that the attitude (positive/favorable) and the behavior (act of

purchase) are in congruence with each other. What happens in the process is that the dissonance that the consumer experiences, induces him to reduce the indifferent or the unfavorable attitude, and make way for a favorable attitude towards the purchase. Thus attitude formation and/or change occur after a purchase has been made. The marketer also has a role to play in reduction of cognitive dissonance.

### **c) Attribution Theory:**

Another theory that explains how behavior (act of purchase) may precede attitude formation is the attribution theory. The theory explains how people tend to ascribe causality to events on the basis of their own behavior or the behavior of others. In other words, they attribute blame or credit arising out of an act of behavior (unsuccessful or successful) to others or to their own self.

Attitude formation and change happens because of consumer's judgment of their own behavior (self-perception) and their experiences. The issues that need discussion are i) self-perception theory; and ii) internal and external attributions.

**i) Self-perception theory:** According to the self-perception theory, a person attributes causality to events on the basis of his behavior; thus, a consumer would attribute behavior (an act of purchase) to his/her own beliefs, inferences and judgments. Attitudes would develop out of the inferences and judgments that consumers draw about their own behavior (act of purchase).

**ii) Internal and external attribution:** It is a tendency on the part of human beings to take credit for a successful or positive outcome (internal attribution), and blame others for an unsuccessful or negative outcome (external attribution). In other words, they attribute credit to themselves and blame to others. This could be applied to consumers also. They take credit for a right decision and act of behavior (to purchase/not to purchase) on to themselves; this phenomenon of accepting credit personally is called internal attribution. They also have a tendency to blame others for a wrong decision and act of behavior; this phenomenon of attributing failure to others is called external attribution.

In assessing the reasons for whether a product meets or does not meet customer expectations, they could attribute the product's performance (success or failure) to the product/brand itself or to their own selves or to others or to a mix of these. This has

implications for a marketer who should make sure that he provides to the consumers the right kind of products in terms of attributes, benefits and usage, so that consumers would attribute the success to the marketer. However, this is a rare as consumers like to attribute success with the product offering to themselves by stating that they made the right decision by purchasing the brand.

Consumers also gather additional information and supporting evidence to confirm (or disconfirm) their prior opinions, inferences and judgements about the product and service offering. Thus attitudes about the product and/or brand offering as well as the behavior (act of purchase/not purchase) occur after the product has been bought. We see that attitude formation and change occurs after the act of behavior; i.e. behavior precedes attitude formation and change.

### **6.5.8 CONSUMER ATTITUDES AND IMPLICATIONS FOR MARKETERS:**

Consumer attitude has implications for a marketer. An individual with a positive attitude towards a product/service offering is more likely to make a purchase; this makes the study of consumer attitudes highly important for a marketer. Marketer should understand the dynamics of attitude formation and change.

- a) Consumer attitudes are reflective of consistent favorable or unfavorable feelings that a consumer or a prospect forms as a result of an evaluation about an object; the object being, a product/service offering, brand, price, store and dealer, salesperson, advertisement, promotion etc. They are directed towards an object (product/service offering, price, store, dealer, promotion, advertisement etc.) about which a consumer has feelings and beliefs.
- b) They cannot be observed; they can only be inferred from what people say or what they do and how they behave.
- c) Consumer attitudes are formed on the basis of experiences as well as information received from personal (WOM, family, friends, peers etc.) as well as impersonal

(marketer's sources) sources of information that are retained in one's memory.

Marketer should be careful while providing relevant information.

- d) Attitude formation as a process is impacted by needs and motivation, perception as well as learning. They are formed as a result of learning that occurs because of
  - i) self experiences with the product/service offering and the mix;
  - ii) interaction with other people, be it family, friends, peers and colleagues;
  - iii) information obtained from the marketer through promotion particularly advertisements as well as dealers and salespeople.
- e) Consumers form positive attitudes towards product/service offerings because
  - i) they provide a utility;
  - ii) help defend their ego, self-image and self-concept;
  - iii) expresses a person's values and lifestyle, personality and self image;
  - iv) reaffirm their knowledge base, to finally help them simplify purchase decision making.
- f) A consumer may exhibit a behavior that may be inconsistent with their attitude. For example, a consumer may have a neutral feeling or may be indifferent with a brand, but he would go in for a purchase as he gets a good bargain (a concession or a discount etc). Attitudes are situation specific.
- g) Marketers should understand the formation of attitudes, as well as their change, so as to be able to predict acts of behavior, and influence them.
- h) While attitudes are stable and do not change frequently, they can be changed if something is done to change them. Marketers should understand the dynamics of attitude formation and change, and make attempts to transform neutral or unfavorable attitudes into favorable ones.

- i) Consumer's attitudes towards a product/service offering or a brand, is a function of the presence or absence of certain attributes, and the corresponding evaluation. Consumers would tend to have favorable attitudes toward such offerings and/or brands that they have sufficient amount of attributes that are deemed important and evaluated as positive.
  
- j) A consumer may have positive feelings towards an attitude object, but he may have a negative attitude regarding his intention for buying such a product/service offering. Thus, a positive attitude towards the offering may not necessarily end up as an act of purchase.
  
- k) The behavior of a consumer is based on his intention to act, which is moderated by the attitude towards behavior and other subjective norms. Intention precedes actual behavior; beliefs and attitudes as well as subjective norms precede intention.
  
- l) Consumer's attempts at purchase and consumption, get impeded by personal and environmental impediments, thus preventing the action (act of purchase) from occurring.
  
- m) Consumers form judgments and feelings as a result of exposure to an advertisement. Not only does a consumer form attitudes towards the advertisement, he or she also forms an opinion towards the brand. Thus marketers need to be careful while formulating ads especially for innovative products and services and for new brands.
  
- n) Attitudes can be measured by observation, qualitative studies (focus group, depth interviews, psychological tests) and quantitative techniques (or rating scales).

o) Attitudes are formed as a result of the learning process.

-Classical conditioning: Consumers also have a positive attitude towards successful brands. The successful brand name is the unconditioned stimulus that, through repetition and positive reinforcement, results in an favorable attitude (the unconditioned response). Also, by using successful celebrities as brand endorsers, companies try to form a positive association between the celebrity, and the "neutral" new product.

-Instrumental Conditioning: Consumers tend to form attitudes based on the reinforcement that they receive. If the acts of purchase and consumption are followed by a rewarding experience in terms of consumer satisfaction, they develop a positive attitude towards the product or service offering and/or the brand. Else they are indifferent or may even develop a negative attitude towards the brand.

- Cognitive Learning Theory: Attitudes are also formed on the basis of information that a person collects about a product or service offering and/or a brand, from his environment. Marketers should be careful in providing knowledge about their product and service offerings, either in print, audio-visual media or even through their salespersons and dealers. However, they should focus on a few relevant features rather than providing excessive information; too much of cluttering leads to perceptual blocking.

p) Once formed, attitudes are enduring and consistent. However, they can be changed through learning. Bringing about change requires immense effort on the part of the marketer, who needs to provide information via media as well as use reference group appeals and opinion leaders so as to influence modification of attitudes.

q) Attitudes can be changed/ modified. Some strategies to bring about a change in attitudes or to influence attitudes are i) bringing about a change in the product itself, and/ or the package; ii) identifying evaluative criteria for the consumer; iii) modifying or changing the criteria for evaluation; iv) associating the product/



brand with an existing favorable attitude; changing the basic motivational function and making new needs prominent; changing consumer opinion and beliefs about competitor brands.

- r) Behavior can precede or follow attitude formation and change. While attitudes are generally formed, before an act of behavior (purchase) or before an action is taken, they can also be formed after an act of purchase.

## REFERENCES FOR FURTHER READING:

1. Assael, H. (1992), Consumer Behavior & Marketing Action, 4th. Ed., PWS Kent, Boston, MA.
2. Loudon, D.L. and Bitta A.J. Della, Consumer Behavior, Fourth Edition, 2002, Tata McGraw-Hill, New Delhi.
3. Kotler P., and Keller K.L. , Marketing Management, Thirteenth edition, 2009, Pearson.
4. Peter, P.J. and Olson, J.C., Consumer Behavior and Marketing Strategy, Seventh Edition, 2005, McGraw-Hill Higher Education.
5. Schiffman, L.G. and Kanuk, L.L., Consumer Behavior, Eight Edition, 2004, Prentice Hall, India.
6. Vaughn, Richard (1980), "How Advertising Works: A Planning Model," Journal of Advertising, 20(5), 27-33.
7. Vaughn, Richard (1986), "How Advertising Works: A Planning Model Revisited, " Journal of Advertising Research, 26(1), 57-66.
8. Wells W.D. and Prensky, D., Consumer Behavior, 1996, John Wiley & sons, Inc.

## **FAQS (FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS):**

**Ques 1** Write a short note on the ELM model and attitude formation/change.

**Ans 1** The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM):

The Elaboration likelihood Model, speaks of attitude formation and change in context of a consumer's exposure towards an advertisement, and the level of involvement. As per the ELM Model, a change in consumer attitudes may be brought about through two routes to persuasion, viz., the central route and the peripheral route.

In cases of high involvement, attitude change towards a product and/or brand would occur when the consumer would search for information related to the offering. The consumer would also have a high need of cognition, and would put in effort to gather and comprehend information about the object in question. This would result in learning and also lead to attitude change that would occur via the central route to persuasion. Thus, in cases of higher involvement, the consumer lays focus on "central" product related information; comprehension is deeper; extent of elaboration is higher and all this impacts attitude towards the brand. On the other hand in cases of low involvement, attitude change towards a product and/or brand would occur via the peripheral route to persuasion. There would be a lower involvement with the product and/or brand message, with a focus on the "peripheral" or the non-product related information (beautiful ads, attractive models, discounts, free samples, etc); comprehension is shallow; extent of elaboration is low all this impacts attitude towards the advertisement rather than the brand.

To conclude, when actual and potential consumers put in effort to gather, comprehend and evaluate information about the product and/or brand, they exhibit higher levels of motivation and ability. In such cases, learning and attitude change would occur via the central route

**Ques 2 Can attitude formation take place after an act of behavior?**

**Explain with reference to the Theory of Cognitive Dissonance.**

**Ans 2** While attitudes are generally formed, before an act of behavior (purchase) or before an action is taken, they can also be formed after an act of purchase. Behavior (act of purchase) may precede attitude formation.

Consumers experience a sense of uncertainty, uneasiness and discomfort when it comes to making purchase decisions which pertain generally to high involving purchases. Such a feeling arises particularly when the consumer has contradictory and conflicting thoughts about a product and/or brand offering, and he has to make a compromise. This state of uneasiness and discomfort is referred to as cognitive dissonance. It can occur while and after a purchase is made. When it occurs after the act of purchase, it is known as post-purchase cognitive dissonance. Such feelings of dissonance are reduced when a consumer changes his attitude to conform with the act of purchase or behavior. So we can see that in cases of post-purchase cognitive dissonance, attitude change happens as a result of an act of behavior, i.e. purchase. The uneasiness or the dissonance that the consumer experiences compel him to change his attitude towards the attitude object (product and/or brand), so that the attitude (positive/favorable) and the behavior (act of purchase) are in congruence with each other. What happens in the process is that the dissonance that the consumer experiences, induces him to reduce the indifferent or the unfavorable attitude, and make way for a favorable attitude towards the purchase. Thus attitude formation and/or change occur after a purchase has been made. The marketer also has a role to play in reduction of cognitive dissonance.

## SELF EVALUATION TESTS/QUIZZES:

### Section A True/false:

1. The Attribution Theory explains as to why acts of behavior (purchase) might precede attitude formation.
2. Attitude formation as a process is impacted by needs and motivation, perception as well as learning.
3. A consumer may have positive feelings towards an attitude object, but he may have a negative attitude regarding his intention for buying such a product/service offering.
4. Behavior can precede or follow attitude formation and change.

## KEY

### Section A True/false:

1. True
  2. True
  3. True
  4. True
-