

THE CONSUMER BEHAVIOR STUDIES PRINCIPLES FROM AN ETHICAL PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract:

This paper summarizes the examining of some issues that may be faced in conducting the marketing consumer behavior studies, and that can strongly lead to marketing deception and bad marketing practices that may include harms to consumers.

The purpose of this study is mainly to discuss different issues of the marketing studies of consumer behavior by showing some points that shape this kind of marketing studies so that these will be discussed through a scientific and ethical approach.

The subject was discussed through showing some issues related to the behavioral study design and how those issues can affect negatively the study results that will be transformed to sensitive marketing decisions.

The results revealed that the consumer behavior is a sensitive and complex subject that needs too much effort to be understood, and it is not easy ethically nor scientifically to influence it with whatever the marketing stimulus. The research theoretically proves that marketing with its general principles of gain maximization cannot mostly deal scientifically and healthily with the consumer behavior matters. Thus, academicians and practitioners should adopt an ethical perspective while designing the research and dealing with different alternatives in a way that benefit the company and consumers as well.

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1- Introduction:

The marketing considers the consumer as the corner stone, and it is mostly involved in any marketing decision. Therefore, a whole field in marketing has been devoted to study the consumer called consumer behavior, which has been using all the scientific tools from other disciplines so that it can have a deep understanding purchasing behavior, and getting through solutions to different marketing problems.

The study of consumer behavior aims to reach results that should be the start point of several marketing decisions and practices, among which have been facing an ethical and scientific criticism. And the reason is mainly related to consumer studies.

This study aims to highlight some ethical and scientific issues involving behavioral studies in marketing and that may be a main reason for results which are interpreted in harmful marketing practices.

To achieve the goal of the study six sections will be discussed through a scientific and ethical perspective. The first section discussed the way the gains driven goals pilot the study to bad results, while, in the second section the materialistic aspect of the gain was examined in order to highlight the different situations that aspect may bring about, after that, the third section implied a study of the negative side of emphasizing the stimulus as influencing inputs rather than evaluating its negative performance. Then, the fourth section devoted to show how more important to understand the behavior than influencing it. And the fifth section illustrated the various ethical dilemmas which should be faced when design emotional stimulus. Finally, the sixth section investigated the evaluation of the marketing performance through quantitative behavioral studies.

2- Gain driven behavioral studies

According to a point of view based on the economic theory Friedman assuming that business owners should not adhere to social responsibilities principles, but they must adopt liberal economy principles, as he stated that their function is to maximize profits (Friedman, 1962: p 133). Therefore, marketing as an economic activity

may be mainly profit-oriented profits, and through this approach behavioral studies consider consumers as a source of financial resources within an environment characterized by serious financial considerations; essentially as cost reduction and profits maximization. In addition to the budget which must be allocated to conducting an actual scientific study, thus, Based utterly on the pervious considerations the study will lead to make explications and examining through less a deep understanding accomplished in a short time and low costs, moreover this kind of study is wholly directed to explain, discuss and collect or discarding and mixing more likely the unmatchable variables in a way that serve the precedent considerations. While the research must be safeguarded against internal or external pressure that limits the exploration of well-defined problems (The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, 2016: p10).

Another observation can be concluded from a gain driven study that might be a real source of several scientific mistakes as regards to theoretical conceptions and the study implementation, where scientific misconduct can occur (Salathe, 2008: p19).

In conclusion, a purely gain driven study may mislead the researcher to accomplish financial goals in searching the easiest methods considered more effective from a financial perspective. However the gain approach cannot be a unique instruction for a healthy moral evaluation at any stage or issue of the study. So, scientific values and risks are a question of normative evaluation of values (Helsinki, 2009: p14).

3- The materialistic aspect of the gain driven behavioral study

Adam Smith stated in his book "wealth of nations" that the exchange is a source of the added value; which can be achieved by adopting the marketing social responsibility (Simeon Scott, 2007: p3). As the marketing is defined from a social perspective as a social-economic mechanism (Philip Kotler, 2002: p40). For that reason a perspective that focuses uniquely on gains might lead to false examination of the behavior in a subjective way resulting fake vision in defining sensitive elements, such as: perception, motives, and feelings. Additionally, it may refer to a case where marketing takes no responsibility in considering all

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kinds of behaviors as opportunities as long as benefits are generated throughout.

In addition, the materialism generated of the gain perspective may put moral values out of the sight, where we find that consumers use the ethical behavior as an important factor in taking the purchasing decision (Vinai, et Al, 2002: pp 5-6), also, a number of studies revealed that the customers reward the ethical company (Bang, et Al, 2013: p 320), for instance, by whether paying higher prices or by doing the company more favors, as getting a free advertiser for the advantage of the company. Moreover It is noted that making persistent flow of profits necessitates the retention of customers who are the source of profits. So if customers are damaged then a profit decline would be resulted throughout. On the other hand, ethical conducts realize a long term increase in profitability (Thomas, 1999: pp 60-61).

Building larger links between material and immaterial stuffs may carry harms for consumers, for instance, making up feeling of love by committing to one reputed brand might be wrong if the consumer forms a strong feeling searching for getting beloved through the brand that people misleadingly are pleased about. Obviously materialism is positively close to various psychological illnesses (Srikant, 2013: p15). In addition, it should nevertheless be noted that making efforts to improve ethical decisions are better aimed at understanding our psychological tendencies (Bazerman, et Al, 2004: p 1150).

The gain driven study may likely make the researcher egoist, searching merely for material interests, and caring less about society well being. Though, the study may end once the research gain-driven-goals are achieved without searching for the best results affecting the society as a whole. In addition, the materialistic or the purely economic paradigm considers consumers as a source of money, then, they are encouraged to spend more, regardless of consumption quality that is strongly relevant to be seen within a social perspective, as in the field of psychology, professional and scientific responsibilities to society are important. Hence, it is about contributing to the knowledge about human behavior and to improve the condition of individuals, groups, communities and society (Rangi et Stoffel, 2015: p5).

4- More care about Marketing stimulus (as inputs) rather than their results.

Active selling is realized through previously acquired information about consumers, (Anna Makarewicz, 2013: p 103). In addition, searching for Influencing the consumer behavior is a main approach that should be a determinant of the nature of results more likely to be far from scientific acceptance. So to avoid arriving at conclusions that appear intuitively correct we need a systematic approach to the study of behavior. So, scientists are in need to use scientific methods to describe, predict, explain, and understand behavior (Kathleen et Al, 1989-1998: p2).

By looking at various paradigms explicating the consumer behavior we find that marketing is mainly based on influencing the behavior and adaptation of marketing activities according to consumers' needs. As most studies of the consumer behavior emphasizes the motives and the way they can be used, while the consumer does not often behave consciously. hence, marketing does not aim the ample understanding of consumer behavior rather than exploring the motives for getting adapted to them through different activities, consequently new bad or good behaviors appear depending on the needs type or the marketing techniques. Additionally, Needs may mainly be identified into positive or negative categories, which imply that marketing is ethically responsible to examine whether the need to trigger is harmful or not, and to which extent it should be triggered in a unique biased perspective focused on what is favorable for the business. On the other hand, the researcher must consider all possible consequences of the research and balance the risks with proportionate benefits (Fouka et Mantzourou, 2011: p5).

In addition, the marketing stimulus should not only measured based on their effect in generating profits, as the responsible marketer should not finish the study as long as the big negative sides of the marketing incentives effects have still not determined, namely a study after influencing the behavior should be conducted so that the corrective actions in terms of harmful incentives aspect are taken. Furthermore, consumer may be exploited and mislead by powerful marketing incentives based on results of a behavioral study at a low level of accuracy and integrity in explicating the behavior by processing enough scientific data. As a detailed study of the behavior as a complex subject

takes longer and requires costly updated data in a fast changing business environment where the company must possess a strategic plan.

And focusing only on creating the marketing stimulus may generate stimulus with powerful and more intense impact regardless to how much this stimulus serves the human behavior equally as it makes profits for the company. In fact, it is evident that marketing stimulus are getting more and more powerful with using high sophisticated technology of communication holding the ability to manipulate people and make them behaving unconsciously. As it is likely impermissible to assume the purchasing behavior is merely affected within a circle determined by the exchange process, and not an effect that may appear in all the other acts out of the commercial dealing. Therefore, this view may be seen as affected by egoism and not based on social and human considerations, because science is in fact, a part of the society and draws considerable material resources from it (Salathé, 2008: p9).

5- Understanding the behavior before influencing it.

Marketing aims to satisfy human needs and wants by first understanding them, then through conducting the necessary studies in spite of consumer behavior characteristics, its complexity and dynamism, which reach higher costs in having an actual understanding, as with regards to influencing factors, such as; competition and probably unjustified study costs, as well as the changing circumstances, all this may reduce the reliability level of behavioral studies conducted in neglecting the ethical norms, as the assumption of scientific integrity in carrying out the processes of science is basic to trust among scientists (Bolton, 2002: p1).

Marketing plays a significant role in modifying the behavior, so marketing must be responsible for any harm can be caused by the different designed marketing programs influencing the consumer behavior. If the consumer does not know his needs and is affected by powerful stimulus, then the marketing must be responsible for those modifications. And it must be wholly responsible as well for favorable stimulus benefiting the company and the customer fairly. As it is evident in the marketing and psychology field that the behavior is the end result of a set of complex interrelated factors, whether internal or external, that is why the scientific explication of the consumer behavior is difficult to

be realized in a responsible way. At this point scientific, ethical and legal norms and values regulate the responsibility of research (The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, 2016: p11).

Another question can be raised in observing that the questionnaire is so more broadly used in collecting data about consumers as regards to their behavior by assumption of sufficient rationality consumers possess, however marketers state that nearly no consumer knows his needs. Therefore, it would not be fair to consider data at a low level of accuracy as foundations of a behavioral study. The unique way to understand and explicate the behavior is by examining its various aspects without isolation, as focusing on some of the factors triggering the human behavior by ignoring other causes.

6- The strong and continuous influence on emotion

Within a competitive market, consumers receive unlimited series of marketing stimulus aiming to shape the purchasing behavior. And the competitively powerful company is the one having a stronger influence on their potential and actual consumers. In this regard, the emotion is strongly affected as most consumers are behaviorally directed through it. This may appear when designing an advertising campaign, where the motivation must be determined whether it is rational or emotional (Makarewicz, 2013: p 105).

Psychologically speaking, the consumer behavior is the result of interaction between a set of internal or external factors, and each has its role on how much and how it contributes to making the behavior in a certain way, for instance, perception may alter physiology (Kerstin Ferres Saint-Aubin, p2), and watching on many marketing communication campaigns, we can observe that they mainly provide consumers with new concepts and enhancing the existing ones that may be as inputs into the consumer's black box. Therefore, impacting psychological components should be accomplished favorably, without causing any harm with negative stimulus. The psychologist William James wrote that an impression may be so exciting emotionally as almost to leave a scar upon the cerebral tissues (Tobias Broscha et Al, 2013:p4). Exaggerating in influencing the customer's emotion may harm him, namely the intense and unbalanced emotions incite psychological and physical disorders affecting the thinking process. In addition, intense

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emotions as love, if it could not be achieved, then it would be as disabled motives causing a persistent deprivation that appears in the individual's conduct. Unfair and unexamined marketing programs incite the most consumers through affect, as long as they are found more ready to get affected by this kind of programs.

As emotional stimuli may draw attention more rapidly, and emotional stimuli are represented by more robust neural signatures than neutral ones (Tobias Broscha et Al, 2013:p3), that is why efforts are devoted to design buying environments to produce specific emotional effects in the buyer that enhance his purchase probability (Kotler, 1973: p 48), and symbolize different marketing offerings by making strong links with feelings, especially, at highly competitive market where the company is found against a significant shortage of updated information relevant to so dynamic factors which are more and more uncontrollable.

As it is noted at a wide range of studies that the unconscious motives are an essential issue of behavioral studies, in fact, most people behave unconsciously, and in marketing the matter of doing the first purchase is significantly related to unconscious motives. Therefore, focusing on motivating consumers through an unconscious way may lead the study to be not socially driven.

And inciting continuously the unconscious motives can be a way to make people far from using their logic and justifying their rational conducts, in addition, it may destabilize the human behavior by focusing only on one component with neglecting the converse ones. **Jameton** declares that in research three more important elements are the competency of the researcher, the careful design, and worthwhile expected outcomes (Georgia Fouka, Marianna Mantzorou, 2011: p7).

Therefore, starting to search for the target consumer with whatever the quality of stimulus differs comparing with being guided with norms so that finding stimulus well justified scientifically and ethically, As the norms of science have a value in themselves as guidelines and regulatory principles (The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, 2016: p29).

As pushing groups and individuals to interact within a materialistic circle by encouraging them intensely to purchase and acquire more tangible goods regardless the benefits generated, and making this conduct as a goal in itself, all that likely needs to be revised within an

ethically responsible approach, since terminal materialism is harmful for an individual (SRIKANT, 2013: p10).

7- Behavioral studies for measuring the marketing performance

Adherence to ethics might be considered as one standard in measuring the quality of a brand or a product (Eunju, et Al, 2013: pp 1710-1711). As the ethics affect greatly the consumer in perceiving the product's quality level (Robert, et Al, 2006: pp 15-16). In a survey study conducted in America, in 1999 showed that 50% of American people punish unethical companies (Pinar, et Al, 2012: p479). The company's ability in keeping its promises makes the consumer trust (Robert, et Al, 2006: p 15); it reduces the consumer's doubt before purchasing, which will be followed by higher loyalty after purchasing (Jean, et Al, 2006: p 373). Therefore building a fully trustful relationship with customers is a major goal of any company searching to gain long term competitive advantage, in addition, the trust refers totally to fairness that might be a starting point to any marketing activity, especially the study of customer's behavior which is the core of all the marketing decisions.

Measuring in marketing is a way to assess the offerings' performance according to consumers post-purchasing feeling. So, according to this approach the marketer is the responsible to influence the future marketing decisions, although consumers in marketing are considered as irrational as it is stated in the past economic theories. And it is apparent that most studies aiming to measure the marketing performance are quantitative, as conducting a study to identify the purchasing quantity and the consumer purchases frequency, thus, positive results will indicate a good performance. A raised question in this context is to how much the researcher is responsible for making consumers' feelings a main determinant of the performance success. Thus, a good research is conducted by first retraining your brain to think like a researcher (Bhattacharjee, 2012: p 9).

Scientists themselves may raise moral or ethical issues, understanding the potential for harm related to the research process or outcome (Bolton, 2002: p1). For instance, there is a wide range of solutions to the examined research problem, thus, moral standards and values must be involved throughout the process of problem

determination, in order to avoid any unethical conduct. Hence, deceptive research practices have potentially negative implications for the field (Craig et Al, 2009: p 10).

And discussing the perceived quality in measuring the satisfaction cannot be always the fact, since the perception does not reflect the reality, and it is not the mirror of reality. In addition, all marketing decisions are based on assumptions and knowledge of consumer behavior (Stankevich, 2017: p 7). Therefore, it is noticed that the responsibilities of science extend beyond all the positively established standards (Salathé, 2008: p18). So the researcher must take the responsibility in conducting the behavioral study that will be a platform for crucial marketing decisions including multidimensional effects to consumers at all levels.

Additionally, Frequent purchasing is not enough to have insights in reality, because we make consumers responsible to judge, although the researcher who is responsible to know deeply the value involving offerings. Hence, Persons entering science must learn what the appropriate behavior is and what is not (Bolton, 2002: p2). And a widely held view within and beyond the research community is that the user rather than the scientist is responsible for how research findings are used (Stephanie J. Bird J, 2014: p2). As in most consumer research studies, if the relationship between dependent and independent variables is not statistically significant, as a result the independent variables will be not considered in explicating dependent variables (Kollat et Al, 1970, p 329). The norm of scientific integrity applies in full to all types of research and in every stage of the research process (The Norwegian National Research Ethics Committees, 2016: p29).

Making that measurement by the consumer behavior based on quantitative standards, while knowing the real satisfaction must be measured by the truly realized benefits for the consumer, because the satisfaction based on perceived values is just a feeling linked to other factor that have probably been affected by marketing stimuli. Furthermore the qualitative research requires an in-depth study without resorting to standardized, predetermined categories of analysis (Yilmaz, 2013: p 313).

8- Conclusion :

The marketing studies the consumer in order to solve the marketing problems by inciting purchasing behavior. For this purpose there are many approaches and techniques to study the behavior.

So, an objective study costs too much and is more likely unachievable with the business circumstances and the fierce competition, so the study will be directed to search on how to influence the behavior within an economic perspective, as it leads to do not use in depth tools to assess the reliability of influence and being responsible of it.

Many issues may be raised within the consumer behavior field and must be discussed through a scientific and ethical perspective, among them; the responsibility of the researcher about the outcomes of the study that will be used to influence a sensitive subject, that is the human behavior. The researcher must be directed by scientific and ethical guidelines, although to search just for how to design the marketing stimulus or to adapt offerings in response to consumer needs and wants, all that will generate harmful results for the consumer.

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